

IELTS Academic Writing Task 2

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IELTS Academic Writing Task 2

In the second part of the IELTS Academic Writing Test, you have to write 250 words. You should spend 40 minutes on this task. Writing Task 2 is worth more than Task 1, so you need to do it well.

For IELTS Writing Task 2, you have to write an essay discussing a topic. You will be given an opinion/ argument, different points of view or a problem to discuss.

Most students prepare phrases for introducing and linking ideas. However, not many students prepare good ideas and opinions for IELTS topics.

We'll work on these areas:

- How to structure a good Task 2 essay.
- Preparation of ideas, opinions and good vocabulary for each IELTS topic.
- How to build and link sentences to create coherent paragraphs.
- Common mistakes in grammar and word usage.

Some hard work on these areas can make a big difference to your writing score

IELTS Writing Task 2: topic vocabulary + linking

Today my students wrote a 'band 7' paragraph about the benefits of zoos. It was easy: they took my 'band 7' vocabulary ideas from [this lesson \(click here\)](#) and wrote their own sentences with good linking.

Here's the simple structure that my students used:

1. Simple topic sentence.
2. "The main benefit is that..."
3. "Another advantage of zoos is that..."
4. "From a personal point of view,..."

Finally, we wrote a good paragraph together:

Zoos have several benefits. The main benefit is that zoos play an important role in wildlife conservation. They help to protect endangered species, such as pandas or rhinos, and allow scientists to study animal behaviour. Another advantage of zoos is that they employ large numbers of people, therefore providing job opportunities and income for the local area. Also, the money that zoos make can be used for conservation projects. From a personal point of view, zoos are interesting, educational and fun. They are entertaining for families, and teach children to appreciate wildlife and nature.

IELTS Writing Task 2: health topic (obesity)

Childhood obesity is becoming a serious problem in many countries. Explain the main causes and effects of this problem, and suggest some possible solutions.

Here are some vocabulary ideas for this topic. (My students: this is your homework!)

Causes
eat junk food e.g. hamburgers, chips, McDonald's / drink sugary soft drinks
lack of exercise / physical activity contributes to the obesity problem
play computer games / chat on the Internet, rather than playing outside or doing sport
Effects
these problems lead to obesity / children are overweight, unhealthy, unfit
a higher risk of diseases e.g. diabetes, heart disease, cancer
put a strain on hospitals / they will be a burden on hospitals in the future
Solutions
it is the parents'/schools'/government's responsibility to...
give children healthy food / control what they eat / ensure that they have a healthy diet / limit junk food advertising
restrict the time they spend playing computer games / encourage them to take regular exercise

IELTS Writing Task 2: higher education

My students have been working on last Saturday's exam question:

Some people believe that studying at university or college is the best route to a successful career, while others believe that it is better to get a job straight after school.

Discuss both views and give your opinion.

We did some brainstorming and some internet research to get ideas, then we planned the essay. We did the introduction, first sentence of each paragraph and conclusion together. Here is the simple structure that my students are using to write the essay:

Introduction

When they finish school, teenagers face the dilemma of whether to get a job or

continue their education. While there are some benefits to getting a job straight after school, I would argue that it is better to go to college or university.

Paragraph 1: benefits of getting a job

The option to start work straight after school is attractive for several reasons.

(IDEAS: start earning money, become independent, gain experience, learn skills, get promotions, settle down earlier, afford a house, have a family)

Paragraph 2: benefits of higher education (my opinion)

On the other hand, I believe that it is more beneficial for students to continue their studies.

(IDEAS: some jobs require academic qualifications, better job opportunities, higher salaries, the job market is very competitive, gain knowledge, become a useful member of society)

Conclusion

For the reasons mentioned above, it seems to me that students are more likely to be successful in their lives if they continue their studies beyond school level.

IELTS Writing Task 2: sample essay (higher education)

Last week I gave you a simple structure and some ideas for the task 2 question below. Here's my example of a good essay (higher than band 7).

Some people believe that studying at university or college is the best route to a successful career, while others believe that it is better to get a job straight after school.

Discuss both views and give your opinion.

When they finish school, teenagers face the dilemma of whether to get a job or continue their education. While there are some benefits to getting a job straight after school, I would argue that it is better to go to college or university.

The option to start work straight after school is attractive for several reasons. Many young people want to start earning money as soon as possible. In this way, they can become independent, and they will be able to afford their own house or start a family. In terms of their career, young people who decide to find work, rather than continue their studies, may progress more quickly. They will have the chance to gain real experience and learn practical skills related to their chosen profession. This may lead to promotions and a successful career.

On the other hand, I believe that it is more beneficial for students to continue their studies. Firstly, academic qualifications are required in many professions. For example, it is impossible to become a doctor, teacher or lawyer without having the relevant degree. As a result, university graduates have access to more and better job opportunities, and they tend to earn higher salaries than those with fewer qualifications. Secondly, the job market is becoming increasingly competitive, and sometimes there are hundreds of applicants for one position in a company. Young people who do not have qualifications from a university or college will not be able to compete.

For the reasons mentioned above, it seems to me that students are more likely to be successful in their careers if they continue their studies beyond school level.

(271 words)

IELTS Writing Task 2: 'gun control' topic

Today I'm going to write a paragraph about gun control. I'll start with some vocabulary ideas, then I'll make them into full sentences.

Ideas: why should the ownership of guns be limited/controlled?

1. Topic sentence to introduce the idea of gun control
2. risk of accidents, danger to children
3. more violent crimes, criminals will use guns, police will need guns
4. higher suicide rates
5. guns create violent societies

Here's my paragraph using the ideas above. I've divided the paragraph into separate sentences so that you can see what I have done more clearly.

1. In many countries, gun ownership is strictly controlled.
2. Supporters of this policy point out the risk of accidents with guns, especially when children can gain access to them.
3. They also argue that the number of violent crimes increases when guns are available, and that police are forced to use guns to combat armed criminals.
4. Furthermore, suicide rates have been shown to rise in places where guns are legal.
5. All in all, gun control advocates believe that guns create violent societies with high murder rates.

Of course, in the IELTS exam you would probably have to explain the opposite view: the arguments in favour of gun ownership.

IELTS Writing Task 2: 'happiness' topic

Ibis wrote to me asking about the following question (from Cambridge IELTS 4).

Happiness is considered very important in life.

Why is it difficult to define?

What factors are important in achieving happiness?

My students are working on this question at the moment. Here is the essay structure they are using, plus some ideas that we had for each paragraph:

1. Introduction - topic + simple answer

2. Paragraph - explain why happiness is difficult to define

Some ideas: Explain that happiness means different things to different people; the same situation can make one person happy but another person sad/bored etc. Give examples of what makes different people happy (money, success, family, friends, hobbies). Give an example from your experience e.g. a hobby that makes you happy but that your friend hates.

3. Paragraph - give your opinions about how to achieve happiness

Some ideas: Try to organise your ideas logically - you could begin with humans' basic needs (in order to be happy we need to be healthy and have somewhere to live, food to eat etc.) then talk about the importance of family and friends. You could then write about career, money, success, status etc. - maybe you could explain that these things mean nothing if we do not have family and friends to share our experiences with. Give an example from your own life - what will make you happier than you are now?

4. Conclusion - repeat/summarise the main ideas

IELTS Writing Task 2: conclusions

Several people have asked me about conclusions for IELTS Writing Task 2. The main body paragraphs are much more important, so don't worry too much about the conclusion; make it short, simple and fast.

Here are some example conclusion phrases for different types of question:

1. Opinion

For the reasons mentioned above, I believe that... (+ repeat your opinion).

2. Discussion (+ Opinion)

In conclusion, there are convincing arguments both for and against... (topic), but I believe that... (if the question asks for your opinion).

3. Advantages and Disadvantages

In conclusion, I would argue that the benefits of... (topic) outweigh the drawbacks.

4. Problem and Solution

In conclusion, it is clear that there are various reasons for... (topic), and steps need to be taken to tackle this problem.

IELTS Writing Task 2: how to answer any type of question

Several students have asked me for advice about answering different types of question: How do you answer an agree/disagree question, or a cause/effect question, or a 'both views + opinion' question?

Today I want to show you what happens in my brain when I see any IELTS Writing Task 2 question. If you follow my thinking steps, it might help you too.

Here are my thinking steps:

1. I read the question very carefully, maybe three times. I ask myself "What's the topic? What is the question asking me to write about?"
2. I underline the key things that must be included in the essay. I always answer every part of the question.
3. Now I think about my 4 paragraph structure. I can write any type of essay in 4 paragraphs; I just need to decide what to put in each paragraph.
4. If I need to give my opinion, I think "What is the easiest opinion to explain? What good vocabulary could I use?"
5. Then I write down some vocabulary ideas that are related to the topic (not phrases that I've memorised for any essay).
6. I try to write 2 sentences for the introduction: I introduce the topic, then give a simple answer (including my opinion if the question asks for it).
7. I write short topic sentences to start each paragraph, then develop my ideas by explaining and supporting with examples.
8. I look at the question from time to time in order to check that I'm answering every part of it.
9. I know that I write about 10 words per line; I can quickly check the approximate number of words that I've written.
10. If I need more words (to reach 250), I expand one of my examples in the main body paragraphs. If necessary, I draw an arrow to show where I want to add the extra words.

IELTS Writing Task 2: 'global warming' topic

Many students seem to be worried about the global warming topic. How would you describe or explain the problem or causes of global warming?

Here is a paragraph explaining the problem (causes) of global warming:

Perhaps the biggest issue in relation to the environment is global warming. Gases such as carbon dioxide trap heat from the sun within the earth's atmosphere, and this causes global temperatures to rise. This process is known as the greenhouse effect, and human activity is a major factor in the rise of the greenhouse gases which cause it. For example, factories and vehicles produce emissions and exhaust fumes. As many developing countries are becoming industrialised, emissions from factories are expected to increase. Furthermore, the number of cars on our streets is growing all the

time, and cheap air travel is making flying accessible to more and more people. Consequently, the amount of greenhouse gases released into the atmosphere shows no signs of decreasing.

You can learn a lot from this paragraph if you analyse it:

1. How many sentences are there? What does each sentence do? (e.g. The first sentence introduces the topic)
2. Can you find some "band 7 vocabulary"?
3. Look at how the ideas are linked. Can you see that the word "this" is an important linking word?

Have a look at [the first paragraph in this lesson](#) for some solutions to the global warming problem

IELTS Writing Task 2: 'sports salaries' topic

Here are some ideas for a discussion essay about the following question:

***Some people believe that the salaries paid to professional sportspeople are too high, while others argue that sports salaries are fair.
Discuss both views and give your opinion.***

View 1: sports salaries are too high

- Sports professionals earn too much money.
- They do not provide a vital service.
- Football players earn enormous salaries by simply kicking a ball.
- We could all live happily without professional football.
- We should value professionals such as nurses and teachers more highly.

View 2: sports salaries are fair

- It is fair that the best sportspeople earn a lot of money.
- Sport is a multi-million-pound industry.
- There is a large audience of sports fans who are willing to pay.
- Televised games or events attract many viewers.
- Being a top sportsperson requires hours of practice.

PS. I'm trying to write a book with ideas for all the IELTS Writing topics. I'll let you know when it's finished.

IELTS Advice: the "Firstly, Secondly, Finally" structure

I've had some great responses about the video lesson, but some students were surprised that you can get a band 9 using "Firstly, Secondly, Finally".

Is the phrase "First and foremost" better than "Firstly"?

The answer is NO.

Using simple organising language like "Firstly, Secondly" makes you focus on the REAL CONTENT of what you are writing - topic vocabulary, collocations, examples. This is what the examiner wants to see.

Spend your time preparing ideas, opinions and examples for IELTS topics, not learning alternative ways to write "Firstly".

IELTS Writing: organisational phrases

Do not use the following phrases instead of "Firstly" when you are organising ideas in an essay:

- At first
- Initially
- In the beginning
- At the beginning
- In the first place

These phrases do exist in English, but they are not the same as "Firstly".

In the same way, **do not use** these phrases instead of "Finally":

- At last
- At the end
- In the end
- In the last place

As I said yesterday, you don't need to learn different ways to say "Firstly" or "Finally". The examiner is not looking for 'difficult' organisational phrases. Spend your time learning good 'topic vocabulary' instead.

IELTS Writing Task 2: advertising

'Advertising' has been the topic of IELTS writing task 2 several times this year. It's a popular topic, so you need some ideas and opinions about it.

Here are some opinions about advertising, taken from my [ebook](#).

- Advertising should be _____.
- Advertising _____ children should be controlled or even banned.
- Unhealthy foods should not be marketed _____ attracts children.
- Products that can be a risk to health should _____ warnings.
- However, advertising is necessary in free _____ economies.
- It creates _____ products.
- Governments should only _____ false information or products that are harmful.

Fill the gaps with these words/phrases:

market, in a way that, regulated, display, censor, demand for, aimed at

PS. 'Advertising' is uncountable (you can't say "an advertising" or "advertisings"). 'Advertising' is the name of the industry, activity or profession (like 'marketing'). 'An advertisement' (or 'advertisements') is what you see on TV, in the street, in newspapers etc.

IELTS Writing Task 2: 'vegetarianism' topic

Today I asked my students about the vegetarianism topic. They found it quite difficult to give both sides of the argument. It's important to be able to discuss both sides of an issue, even if there are points that you don't agree with.

Here is a summary of the arguments in favour of a vegetarian diet, according to the speaker in yesterday's video:

- A vegetarian diet is healthier.
- Eating a hamburger a day can increase your risk of dying by a third.
- Raising animals in factory farm conditions is cruel.
- Meat production causes more emissions than transportation.
- Beef production uses 100 times the amount of water that vegetable production requires.
- A vegetarian diet is cheaper.

So, basically he is saying that a vegetarian diet is healthier, kinder to animals, better for the environment and cheaper.

Now you need to think about the opposite argument. Feel free to discuss your ideas in the "comments" area.

PS. I've written about this topic in my ebook.

IELTS Writing Task 2: problem and solution

Today I looked at the following IELTS question with my students:

Behaviour in schools is getting worse. Explain the causes and effects of this problem, and suggest some possible solutions.

I asked the students to make short sentences using the following ideas:

Causes of bad behaviour in schools:

1. bad behaviour / a lack of discipline
2. large classes / difficult
3. disruptive students / family background
4. lenient / spoil

Possible solutions:

1. clear rules
2. punish disruptive students
3. parents / support / school rules
4. take responsibility / children's behaviour

Try making full sentences with these ideas (e.g. Bad behaviour is due to a lack of discipline). If you have my ebook, you'll find these sentences in the 'education' chapter.

PS. If you are on my [email list](#), I sent you some extra materials earlier today.

IELTS Writing Task 2: 'opinion' essays

For 'opinion' essays, should you give both sides of the argument or just one side? The answer is that you can do either.

A) Essay structure for one side of the argument:

1. Introduction: topic + your opinion (either agree or disagree)
2. First idea to support your opinion
3. Second idea to support your opinion
4. Conclusion: repeat your opinion

B) Essay structure for giving both sides:

1. Introduction: topic + mention the opposite opinion + your opinion
2. Opposite opinion (you can accept some of the opposite arguments)
3. Your opinion
4. Conclusion: explain that you understand the opposite opinion, but overall you believe that...

It's very important to get the introduction right. This shows the examiner whether you are going to give one side of the argument or both sides.

Have a look at [this lesson](#) to see how I introduce both sides (essay structure B) using the word "while".

IELTS Writing Task 2: public/private healthcare

A recent IELTS Writing Task 2 question was about the advantages and disadvantages of private healthcare. Here are some ideas from my [ebook](#):

State Health Systems: Advantages

- Good healthcare should be available to everyone for free.
- State healthcare is paid by the government using money from taxes.
- Everyone has access to the same quality of care and treatment.
- Private healthcare is unfair because only wealthy people can afford it.
- The National Health Service in the UK provides free healthcare for every resident. (use this as an example)

Private Healthcare: Advantages

- State hospitals are often very large and difficult to run.
- Private hospitals have shorter waiting lists for operations and appointments.
- Patients can benefit from faster treatment.
- Many people prefer to pay for more a personal service.
- Patients have their own room and more comfortable facilities.

Note:

You can use the advantages of state healthcare when discussing the disadvantages of private healthcare.

IELTS Writing: problem / solution (life expectancy)

In the developed world, average life expectancy is increasing. What problems will this cause for individuals and society? Suggest some measures that could be taken to reduce the impact of aging populations.

Some advice:

1. Write 4 paragraphs: introduction, problems, solutions, conclusion.
2. Don't worry about separating ideas about individuals and ideas about society. Just mention something about both in your paragraphs.
3. Below are some ideas.

Problems caused:

an increase in the number of retired people (who will receive a pension); a smaller proportion of young adults; smaller working populations; a greater tax burden on working adults; demand for healthcare will rise; young adults will have to look after elderly relatives

Possible solutions:

people may have to retire later; the state pension age will rise; medical advances and health programmes might allow elderly people to stay healthy and work for longer; people should be encouraged to have more children; governments should encourage immigration (in order to increase the number of younger adults)

PS. Yesterday I sent a "problem / solution" essay template to everyone on my email list. You are on the list if you have bought the [ebook](#) .

IELTS Writing Task 2: 'nuclear power' topic

Following on from yesterday's listening lesson, here is a paragraph explaining some of the benefits of nuclear power:

There are several benefits to building more nuclear power stations. Firstly, nuclear power is a sustainable energy source, meaning that it can be used to produce electricity without wasting limited natural resources like coal, oil or gas. Secondly, nuclear power stations are cleaner than fossil fuel power stations, and could help to reduce carbon emissions that cause global warming. With improvements in nuclear technology, the risks of accidents are being reduced. As a result, many countries are now considering nuclear power as a solution to high oil and gas prices, increasing demand for electricity, and worries about pollution and climate change.

Read, analyse and use the paragraph:

- How many sentences are there, and what does each sentence do?
- Note the main ideas and collocations (e.g. sustainable energy source).
- Try to rewrite the paragraph using only your notes.

PS. I'll send a 'disadvantages' paragraph about this topic to people on my email list (people who have bought the [ebook](#)).

IELTS Writing Task 2: 'children' topic

What problems do children face in today's world? What should we do to address or solve these problems?

Here are some ideas from my [ebook](#) to get you thinking about this topic:

- The lack of closeness in families can have a negative effect on children.
- Many parents have no idea how their children spend their time.
- Friends, television and the Internet have become the main influences on children's behaviour.
- Teenagers are influenced by peer pressure.
- Juvenile delinquency is on the increase.
- Parents should be more involved with their children's upbringing.
- Young people need positive role models.

Can you think of any more problems that children face, or suggest other solutions? Is it the responsibility of parents, schools or governments to tackle these problems?

IELTS Writing Task 2: 'immigration' topic

What are the benefits and drawbacks of immigration or multi-cultural societies?

Here is a paragraph giving some of the economic benefits of immigration:

From an economic perspective, immigration can be extremely positive. Many immigrants have skills that are needed in the country they move to. For example, countries sometimes lack key workers like doctors and nurses, and immigration is therefore encouraged. Immigrants who find work contribute to the economy of their new country with the skills they bring and the taxes they pay. At the same time, many immigrants send money to help family members in their home country, therefore helping to boost that economy too.

Can you think of any social benefits of immigration? Are there any economic or social disadvantages?

PS. I'll send a few extra paragraphs about this topic to people on my email list (people who have bought the [ebook](#)).

IELTS Writing Task 2: using examples

Sometimes, the best way to think of ideas for an essay is to start with an example. One good example can give you enough ideas for a full paragraph.

Look at the following question:

Should governments make decisions about people's lifestyle, or should people make their own decisions?

This question seems difficult, but if you take "smoking" as an example of a lifestyle choice, it becomes a lot easier. Here's my paragraph:

In some cases, governments can help people to make better lifestyle choices. In the UK, for example, smoking is now banned in all workplaces, and it is even prohibited for people to smoke in restaurants, bars and pubs. As a result, many people who used to smoke socially have now given up. At the same time, the government has ensured that cigarette prices keep going up, and there have been several campaigns to highlight the health risks of smoking. These measures have also helped to reduce the number of smokers in this country.

PS. There is a useful chapter about 'government and society' in my [ebook](#).

IELTS Writing Task 2: 'genetic engineering' topic

Would you be able to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of genetic engineering? Here are some ideas from my [ebook](#):

- Genetic engineering is the practice of manipulating the genes of an organism.
- It is used to produce crops that are more resistant to insects and diseases.
- Some genetically modified crops grow more quickly.
- Some drugs and vaccines are produced by genetic engineering.
- It may become possible to change a person's genetic characteristics.
- Scientists may use genetic engineering to cure diseases.
- Inherited illnesses would no longer exist.
- Genes could be changed before a baby is born.
- It could also be possible to clone human organs.
- We could have replacement body parts.
- Humans could live longer, healthier lives.

As you can see, I've only listed the advantages. Can you think of any disadvantages?

PS. I've sent some paragraphs about this topic to people on my [email list](#).

IELTS Writing Task 2: 'parents and children' topic

Many people believe that parents are not as close to their children as they used to be. Suggest some reasons why this could be true.

Here is an example paragraph about the above topic:

Parents and their children seem to be less close nowadays. Perhaps the main reason for this is that both parents often work full-time and therefore spend less time with their children. Whereas women traditionally stayed at home to cook, clean and look after children, many mothers now choose to work or are forced to do so. This means that children may be left alone, or with nannies or babysitters. Busy parents have less contact with their children and less energy to enjoy family activities. Many families no longer eat meals together, and children are given the freedom to go out with friends, watch television or chat on the Internet for hours.

Please note:

A full IELTS question would also ask you to suggest how families could become closer.

IELTS Writing Task 2: how to write an introduction

For IELTS Writing Task 2, keep your introduction short and simple. Don't waste time writing a long introduction; the main body paragraphs are more important.

A good IELTS Writing introduction needs only 2 things:

1. A sentence that introduces the topic
2. A sentence that gives a short, general answer to the question

Here is an example of an IELTS Task 2 question:

As computers are being used more and more in education, there will soon be no role for the teacher in the classroom. To what extent do you agree or disagree?

Here is my introduction:

It is true that computers have become an essential tool for teachers and students in all areas of education. However, while computers are extremely useful, I do not agree with the idea that they could soon replace teachers completely.

1. In the first sentence I introduce the topic of computers in education.
2. In the second sentence I answer the question and make my opinion clear.
Don't wait until the conclusion to give your opinion.

Remember, do a simple introduction, then you can focus on the main paragraphs.

IELTS Writing Task 2: main body paragraphs

After you introduction (see last week's lesson) you need to write 2 or 3 main body paragraphs. This is the most important part of your essay.

If you have been following this blog for a while, or if you have bought my ebook, you may have seen today's paragraph before. However, I'm reusing it for 2 reasons:

1. It's a great example of how to write an "advantages" paragraph using a "firstly, secondly, finally" structure.
2. There are some excellent comments from students below this lesson. If you read them carefully, you will learn a lot.

Main body "advantages" paragraph (band 9):

There are several advantages to using computers in education. Firstly, students learn new skills which will be extremely useful for their future jobs. For example, they learn to write reports or other documents using a word processor, and they can practise doing spoken presentations using PowerPoint slides. Secondly, technology is a powerful tool to engage students. The use of websites or online videos can make lessons much more interesting, and many students are more motivated to do homework or research using online resources. Finally, if each student has a computer to work on, they can study at their own pace.

IELTS Writing Task 2: full essay

Usually I suggest writing 4 paragraphs for task 2. However, sometimes it might be better to write 5 paragraphs. The following essay question has three parts, so I've written three main body paragraphs (5 paragraphs in total).

Explain some of the ways in which humans are damaging the environment. What can governments do to address these problems? What can individual people do?

Humans are responsible for a variety of environmental problems, but we can also take steps to reduce the damage that we are causing to the planet. This essay will discuss

environmental problems and the measures that governments and individuals can take to address these problems.

Two of the biggest threats to the environment are air pollution and waste. Gas emissions from factories and exhaust fumes from vehicles lead to global warming, which may have a devastating effect on the planet in the future. As the human population increases, we are also producing ever greater quantities of waste, which contaminates the earth and pollutes rivers and oceans.

Governments could certainly make more effort to reduce air pollution. They could introduce laws to limit emissions from factories or to force companies to use renewable energy from solar, wind or water power. They could also impose 'green taxes' on drivers and airline companies. In this way, people would be encouraged to use public transport and to take fewer flights abroad, therefore reducing emissions.

Individuals should also take responsibility for the impact they have on the environment. They can take public transport rather than driving, choose products with less packaging, and recycle as much as possible. Most supermarkets now provide reusable bags for shoppers as well as 'banks' for recycling glass, plastic and paper in their car parks. By reusing and recycling, we can help to reduce waste.

In conclusion, both national governments and individuals must play their part in looking after the environment.

Note:

This essay is exactly 250 words long. I've tried to make it as simple as possible, but it's still good enough to get a band 9.

IELTS Writing Task 2: studying abroad

More and more students are choosing to study at colleges and universities in a foreign country. Do the benefits of studying abroad outweigh the drawbacks?

Here are some ideas from my [ebook](#):

Benefits of studying abroad:

- Many students travel abroad to study at a prestigious university.
- The best universities employ lecturers who are experts in their fields.
- Qualifications gained abroad can open doors to better job opportunities.
- Living in a foreign country can broaden students' horizons.
- Overseas students are exposed to different cultures and customs.
- They can immerse themselves in a language.

Drawbacks of studying abroad:

- Living away from home can be challenging.
- Students have problems with paperwork such as visa applications.
- The language barrier can cause difficulties.
- Students have to find accommodation and pay bills.

- Many students feel homesick and miss their families.
- Some students experience culture shock.

Which of the words or phrases above do you think would be considered band 7 or higher?

"Band 7 Vocabulary"

When I say "band 7 vocabulary", I'm really talking about vocabulary that could help you to get a band 7 **or higher**. Examiners are looking for "less common" words and phrases, correct and relevant collocations, and maybe some idiomatic language.

I've written the following paragraph using some of the ideas from the lesson below. I've underlined the band 7 (or higher) vocabulary.

Advantages of studying abroad:

Many students choose to study abroad because there are greater opportunities in a particular foreign country. Foreign universities may offer better facilities or courses. They may also be more prestigious than universities in the student's own country and have teachers who are experts in their fields. Therefore, by studying abroad, students can expand their knowledge and gain qualifications that open the door to better job opportunities. A period of study abroad can also broaden students' horizons. In the new country, they will have to live and work with other students of various nationalities. Thus, overseas students are exposed to different cultures, customs and points of view.

(106 words)

PS. I'll send some extra paragraphs on this topic to everyone on my [email list](#).

IELTS Writing Task 2: crime topic

Here is a "problem/solution" question, with some ideas for an essay below:

Many criminals re-offend after they have been punished. Why do some people continue to commit crimes after they have been punished, and what measures can be taken to tackle this problem?

Causes of crime and re-offending:

- The main causes of crime are poverty, unemployment and lack of education.
- People who commit crimes often have no other way of making a living.
- The prison system can make the situation worse.
- Offenders mix with other criminals who can be a negative influence.
- A criminal record makes finding a job more difficult.
- Many prisoners re-offend when they are released.

Possible measures to reduce crime and re-offending:

- Prisons should provide education or vocational training.
- Rehabilitation programmes prepare prisoners for release into society.
- Community service is another way to reform offenders.
- It makes offenders useful in their local communities.
- They might be required to talk to school groups or clean public areas.
- Offenders also need help when looking for accommodation and work.

There are more ideas about topics like police, prisons, capital punishment and community service in my [ebook](#).

IELTS Writing Task 2: 'zoo' topic

Some people believe that it is wrong to keep animals in zoos, while others think that zoos are both entertaining and ecologically important. Discuss both views.

Here are some (band 7 or higher) vocabulary ideas. I've organised the vocabulary according to different perspectives.

Positives of keeping animals in zoos:

1. **Environmental perspective:** Zoos play an important role in wildlife conservation. They help to protect endangered species. They allow scientists to study animal behaviour.
2. **Economic perspective:** Zoos employ large numbers of people. They provide job opportunities and income for the local area. The money raised can be used for conservation projects.
3. **Personal perspective:** Zoos are interesting, educational and fun. They make a great day out for families. Children learn to appreciate wildlife and nature.

Negatives of zoos:

1. **Environmental perspective:** Zoos are artificial environments. Animals lose their instinct to hunt for food. It would be better to save endangered species by protecting their natural habitats.
2. **Moral perspective:** Keeping animals in cages is unethical. We have no right to use animals for entertainment. Zoos exhibit animals with the aim of making a profit.

Thinking about topics from different perspectives is a useful technique. It helps you to generate a variety of interesting ideas. I used this technique when thinking of ideas for my ebook, and I encourage my students to use it when planning their essays.

IELTS Writing Task 2: education / practical skills

Several students have asked me to help them with this IELTS question:

Some people think that school children need to learn practical skills such as car maintenance or bank account management along with the academic subjects at school. To what extent do you agree or disagree?

Here are some suggestions (this is NOT an essay):

1. Introduce the topic then give your opinion

I would write that it is true that children learn academic subjects at school, but not many practical skills. However, I would then disagree that schools should teach skills like bank account management and car maintenance.

2. First supporting paragraph

I would write a paragraph about the importance of academic subjects like maths, science, languages etc. We live in a knowledge-based economy where independent thinking and problem solving are the most important skills. With timetables already full, schools do not have time to teach children anything else.

3. Second supporting paragraph

I would argue that bank account management is a 'life skill' that anyone can learn by simply opening a bank account. Most adults have no problem managing their finances without being taught accounting lessons at school. Other skills like car maintenance are not really necessary. Most people take their cars to a qualified mechanic.

4. Conclusion

Repeat the idea that schools are already doing a good job teaching the traditional academic subjects. If they start to teach practical skills, the study of important academic subjects will suffer.

IELTS Writing Task 2: globalisation

Here is an essay question on the topic of globalisation:

It has been said that the world is becoming a global village in which there are no boundaries to trade and communication. Do the benefits of globalisation outweigh the drawbacks?

Yesterday's video contained some useful ideas, but here are some more ideas from my ebook:

Positives of globalisation:

- Business is becoming increasingly international.
- A global economy means free trade between countries.

- This can strengthen political relationships.
- Globalisation can also create opportunities for employment.
- It encourages investment in less developed countries.
- It could reduce poverty in the developing world.

Negatives of globalisation:

- Globalisation can also lead to unemployment and exploitation.
- Companies move to countries where labour is cheap.
- This creates redundancies, or job losses.
- Some companies exploit their employees in developing countries.
- Salaries are low and working conditions are often poor.
- Global trade also creates excessive waste and pollution.

Note:

The American English spelling is 'globalization'. You can use either spelling in the IELTS test.

IELTS Advice: using "I"

Here is a question that a lot of students ask:

Is it acceptable to use "I" or "my" in IELTS writing?

As an ex-examiner, my advice is that you **should** use phrases like "I believe" or "in my opinion" when the question asks for **your opinion** e.g To what extent do **you** agree or disagree?

Some teachers tell students not to use "I" in academic essays, but this advice is really for university academic writing, not IELTS.

IELTS Writing Task 2: advertising topic

Advertising is a very common topic in both the IELTS writing and speaking tests. Here are some ideas from my [ebook](#) that you could learn.

Positives of advertising:

- Companies need to tell customers about their products and services.
- Advertisements inform us about the choices we have.
- The advertising industry employs many people.
- Advertisements are often funny, artistic or thought-provoking.

Negatives of advertising:

- Advertisers aim to convince us that buying things leads to happiness.
- We are persuaded to follow the latest trends and fashions.
- Children can be easily influenced by advertisements.
- They put pressure on their parents by pestering or nagging.

Opinions:

- Advertising should be regulated by governments.
- Advertisements that target children should be banned.
- Packaging for junk food should display clear health warnings.
- Overall, advertising is necessary but it needs to be controlled.

IELTS Writing Task 2: tourism

Do the benefits of tourism outweigh the drawbacks?

Here are some ideas. I've organised the vocabulary according to different perspectives (different ways of looking at this issue).

Positives of tourism:

1. **Personal perspective:** Tourism is a popular leisure activity. Tourists can relax, have fun, 'recharge their batteries', experience different customs and cultures (sight-seeing, sunbathing, visiting monuments, tasting new cuisine). Travel opens our minds. It can broaden our horizons.
2. **Economic perspective:** The tourism industry is vital for some countries. People rely on tourism for their income. Tourism attracts investment from governments and companies. It creates employment due to demand for goods and services (hotels, entertainment etc.). It helps to improve the standard of living.

Negatives of tourism:

1. **Environmental perspective:** Tourism can have a negative impact on the environment. Excessive building (roads, hotels etc.) destroys natural habitats and spoils the landscape. Tourism creates pollution and waste. It puts pressure on local resources such as food, water and energy.
2. **Economic perspective:** Tourism may cause a rise in the cost of living. Prices of goods and services go up. Tourists buy second homes. All of this affects local people.
3. **Cultural perspective:** Local traditions may be lost. Traditional jobs and skills die out (e.g. farming, fishing). Local people are forced to work in the tourist industry.

Thinking about topics from different perspectives can help you to generate better ideas. This technique isn't perfect for every topic, but it can be really useful.

IELTS Writing Task 2: what is happiness?

Many students find the following question difficult (Cambridge IELTS 4, page 55):

Happiness is considered very important in life.

Why is it difficult to define?

What factors are important in achieving happiness?

Here are some ideas from my ebook.

- Happiness means different things to different people.
- It can be described as a feeling of pleasure or enjoyment.
- People enjoy spending time with family and friends.
- Hobbies, sports and games can be a source of fun and enjoyment.
- Some people see money as a source of happiness.
- Other people define happiness as something deeper.
- They need to feel that they are doing something useful with their lives.
- Some people get a sense of achievement from their work.
- Others find happiness in bringing up their children.

Try expanding on these ideas to write a full essay. Remember to use examples from your experience; this is the best way to develop an idea.

IELTS Writing Task 2: global language argument

The speaker in yesterday's video gave the positives of English as a global second language. Here is a paragraph with arguments against this view.

Negatives of English as a global language:

The expansion of English has also been criticised. Some people worry that if one language, like English, becomes dominant, other languages may disappear. Languages spoken by small communities could become extinct as people learn English in order to find work. This would obviously have a negative effect on local cultures, customs and traditions because the new dominant language would bring its own culture with it. For example, the expansion of English has happened alongside the increasing popularity of American culture. The American film, music and fashion industries are as dominant as global American companies and products, such as Microsoft or the iPod. Some people call this 'cultural imperialism', meaning that one culture has power over others.

Try to analyse this paragraph

Is there a topic sentence? What reasons and examples are given? What linking expressions are used? What 'band 7 vocabulary' is used? Can you find some conditional sentences?

Write the main ideas for the 'global language' topic (positives and negatives) in your notebook.

IELTS Writing Task 2: technology

Here is a question that a student asked me about:

Some people believe that the range of technology available to individuals today is increasing the gap between rich people and poor people, while others say that technology has the opposite effect. Discuss both views and give your opinion.

I'd write a 4-paragraph essay:

1. Introduction: introduce the topic and give your view
2. One view
3. The other view (that you agree with)
4. Conclusion: repeat your view

Some ideas:

Technology could increase the gap between rich and poor. Rich people have smartphones, laptops, wireless broadband Internet etc. People in developed countries can now work from home or from anywhere in the world. They can do their shopping online and have things delivered to their homes. Technology improves their quality of life.

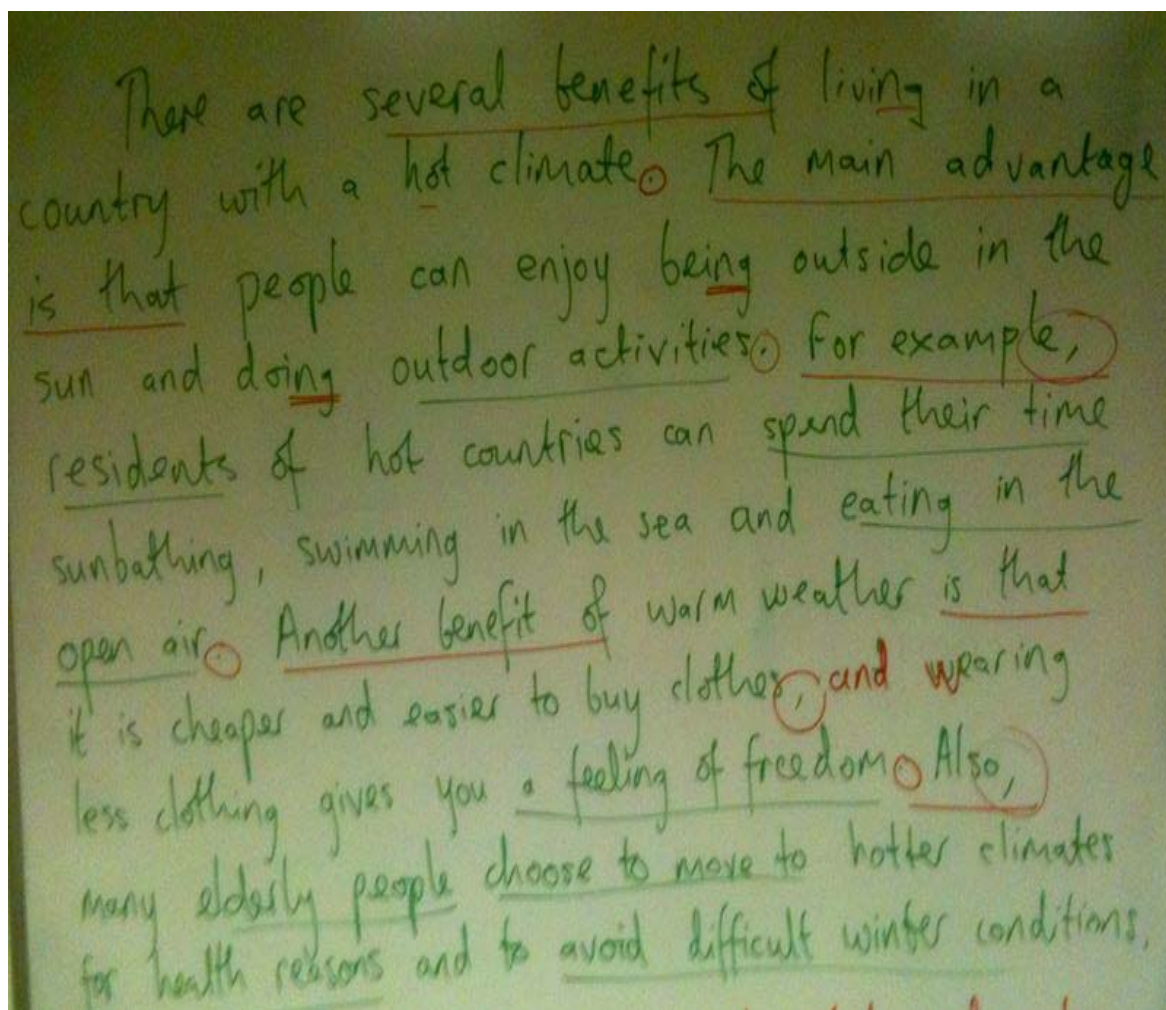
On the other hand, many people in poorer countries, who did not have normal telephones, now have mobile phones. Also, the Internet is spreading to all parts of the world. In the past, only people in developed countries had access to world-class libraries, but now the Internet gives everyone access to the same information. This will lead to greater equality.

Students' Questions: 'climate' topic

A student asked me for some ideas about this question:

***Some people prefer to live in hot climates, whereas others love the lifestyle in countries with cold climates.
Discuss both views and explain which climate you prefer.***

I looked at this question with one of my classes. We decided to write 2 main body paragraphs: one about the benefits of hot climates, and one about the benefits of cold climates.



The photo above shows the paragraph that we wrote about the benefits of hot climates. I hope you can read my writing! Click on the photo to make it bigger.

[IELTS Writing Task 2: city problems](#)

More and more people are migrating to cities in search of a better life, but city life can be extremely difficult. Explain some of the difficulties of living in a city. How can governments make urban life better for everyone?

Here are some band 7 vocabulary ideas from my [ebook](#) for describing city problems:

- Life in cities has its drawbacks.
- The cost of living is higher than in rural areas.
- Housing is usually much more expensive.
- Homelessness and poverty are common in cities.
- There is a gap between the rich and poor.
- Life in cities can be extremely stressful.
- There are problems like traffic congestion and crime.
- Cities lack a sense of community.
- People do not even know their neighbours.
- Cities are sometimes described as “concrete jungles”.

Can you suggest any solutions to these problems? Watch yesterday's video for some ideas.

IELTS Writing Task 2: governments

A lot of IELTS Writing questions ask you to give opinions about what governments should do in relation to an issue. Governments can have an influence on almost everything: environment, crime, television, advertising, work etc.

As part of your IELTS preparation, you should think about what governments can do in relation to IELTS topics. Here are some ideas from my ebook:

- Governments provide public services like healthcare and education.
- They introduce new laws.
- They raise money by taxing working people.
- They can spend money on campaigns to educate people.
- They can raise people's awareness of issues.
- They can create new jobs.
- They can provide resources for schools, hospitals etc.
- They can support people who are living in poverty or unable to work.

So, if the question asks you to suggest what governments should do to reduce obesity, you could write this:

"In my opinion, governments should spend money on campaigns to educate people about the importance of regular exercise and a healthy diet. Perhaps they should also introduce new laws to ban the advertising of junk food to children."

Think about some other IELTS topics. What do you think governments should do?

IELTS writing Task 2: health topic

Despite huge improvements in healthcare, the overall standard of physical health in many developed countries is now falling. What could be the reason for this trend, and what can be done to reverse it?

Here is a paragraph about causes of poor health:

Lifestyle is a major cause of poor health in developed countries. Most people now travel by car rather than walking, and machines now perform many traditional manual jobs. As a result, people tend to work in offices where little physical activity is required. At home, people are also less active; most adults relax by watching television, while children play video games rather than doing outdoor sports. Technology has therefore made our lives more comfortable but perhaps less healthy.

Can you suggest any solutions to these lifestyle problems?

PS. There are more ideas for this topic in my [ebook](#).

IELTS Writing Task 2: government spending

As yesterday's listening exercise was about space programmes, let's look at the following writing question:

The money spent by governments on space programmes would be better spent on vital public services such as schools and hospitals. To what extent do you agree or disagree?

Planning your answer:

1. First you need to decide what your opinion is. Will you agree, disagree, or try to present a balanced opinion? Which would be easier?
2. Then you need to decide how to organise the essay. How many paragraphs will you write, and what will each paragraph be about?
3. Finally, you need to plan some ideas (good vocabulary) to support your opinion.

Feel free to discuss your ideas in the "comments" area below. I'm afraid I can't check essays, but I'll be happy to make general comments about your ideas.

IELTS Writing Task 2: money and consumerism

Here are some vocabulary ideas for the topic of money and consumerism. You could use these ideas to write an essay:

Many people say that we now live in 'consumer societies' where money and possessions are given too much importance. Others believe that consumer culture has played a vital role in improving our lives. Discuss both views and give your opinion.

General ideas:

a consumer society, materialistic, earn money, make money, make a profit, success, material possessions, connect wealth with happiness, status symbols, the power of advertising.

Positives of consumerism:

employment, income, salaries, products that we need, reduce poverty, better standard of living, quality of life, creativity and innovation, trade between countries.

Negatives:

create waste, use natural resources, damage to the environment, throw-away culture, people become greedy, selfish, money does not make us happy, loss of traditional values.

IELTS Grammar: cause and effect

Here are some useful phrases for describing causes and effects (for IELTS Writing Task 2 and maybe Speaking Part 3). I'll use the topic of 'global warming' to show how the phrases work.

1. Cause - Effect

Pollution causes global warming.

Pollution leads to global warming.

Pollution results in global warming.

Pollution is the main cause of global warming.

Factories pollute the atmosphere. As a result, global warming is occurring.

2. Effect - Cause

Global warming is caused by pollution.

Global warming is the result of pollution.

Global warming is due to pollution.

Global warming occurs as a result of pollution.

Notice the different uses of 'result' (results in, is the result of, as a result). Students make a lot of mistakes with these phrases.

IELTS Writing Task 2: fixed punishments

Some people believe that there should be fixed punishments for each type of crime. Others, however, argue that the circumstances of an individual crime, and the motivation for committing it, should always be taken into account when deciding on the punishment. Discuss both these views and give your own opinion.

Here is my suggested essay outline:

1. Introduction: topic + response

People have different views about whether punishments for crimes should be fixed. Although there are some advantages of fixed punishments, I believe that it is better to judge each crime individually.

2. Benefits of fixed punishments

There are some good arguments for having one set punishment for each crime. IDEAS: easy, fair justice system; everyone is aware of the punishment for each crime; fixed punishments could deter criminals.

3. Benefits of not having fixed punishments

However, I would argue that the circumstances of a crime and the criminal's motivation should have an influence on the punishment.

IDEAS: judge can decide the best response; a more humane system; example: stealing to feed a family compared to stealing for profit.

4. Conclusion: repeat your response

In conclusion, despite the advantages of fixed punishments, it seems to me that each crime should be judged taking both the circumstances and motivation into account.

IELTS Writing Task 2: 'online shopping' topic

This was a recent IELTS exam question:

Online shopping is increasing dramatically. How could this trend affect our environment and the kinds of jobs required?

My advice is to plan your essay with a 4-paragraph structure:

1. Introduction: topic + response (2 sentences are enough)

Introduce the topic of 'online shopping becoming more popular'. Then write that it will have a significant impact on the environment and on jobs.

2. Paragraph about the environment

Write about simple ideas e.g. people will drive less, so there will be less pollution, less destruction from the building of new roads, but perhaps more packaging.

3. Paragraph about jobs

Simple ideas e.g. many shop workers will lose their jobs, unemployment may rise, but there will be more skilled jobs in IT (computer programmers, web designers).

4. Conclusion: repeat your response

Overall opinion: online shopping may have a negative effect on employment, but it might be a good thing for the environment.

IELTS Writing Task 2: using the ebook

A few people have asked me how to use the ebook. One way is to practise writing paragraphs using the ebook ideas.

Some ideas from the ebook about the benefits of mobile phones:

- The mobile phone is the most popular gadget in today's world.
- We can stay in touch with family, friends and colleagues wherever we are.
- Users can send text messages, surf the Internet, take photos and listen to music.
- Mobiles have also become fashion accessories.
- Mobile phones have revolutionised the way we communicate.

By linking these ideas (and adding a few things) I can write a paragraph:

The mobile phone has become the most popular gadget in today's world. The reason for this is that it is portable and versatile. Mobile phones are now carried at all times by most people, allowing us to stay in touch with family, friends and colleagues wherever we are. Furthermore, they now have many more functions than a standard telephone; mobile phone users can send text messages, surf the Internet, take photos and listen to music, as well as making calls. Mobiles have become fashion accessories, and they have revolutionised the way we communicate.

(93 words)

IELTS Writing: to what extent do you agree?

A good way to answer this question is:

To a certain extent I agree that... However, I also think that...

By saying that you agree to a certain extent (not completely), you can now talk about both sides of the argument.

Example question:

People visiting other countries should adapt to the customs and behaviours expected there. They should not expect the host country to welcome different customs and behaviours. To what extent do you agree or disagree?

My introduction:

To a certain extent I agree that visitors to other countries should respect the culture of the host country. However, I also think that host countries should accept visitors' cultural differences.

After this introduction, you can write one paragraph about each view.

IELTS Writing Task 2: 'marriages' topic

Marriages are bigger and more expensive nowadays than in the past. Why is this the case? Is it a positive or negative development?

To plan an essay for this topic, consider the following questions:

1. Would you call this an 'opinion' essay or a 'discussion' essay?
2. For a 4-paragraph essay, what would each paragraph be about?
3. What 2 things do you need to do in the introduction?
4. Do you have any ideas to explain why weddings are bigger/expensive?
5. Should you choose 'positive' or 'negative', or can you discuss both?

Feel free to answer these questions in the comments area. I'll give you my answers tomorrow, and I'll try to write a full essay for next week.

Note:

Please don't send me full essays. I can't check them or give you a score.

IELTS Writing Task 2: 'road safety' topic

Road safety could be the topic of a "problem/solution" essay:

Despite improvements in vehicle technology, there are still large numbers of road accidents. Explain some of the causes of these accidents, and suggest some measures that could be taken to address the problem.

Here are some ideas from my [ebook](#):

Causes:

- Driving while tired or drunk is extremely dangerous.
- Mobile phones can be a dangerous distraction for drivers.
- They draw the driver's attention away from the road.

Solutions:

- The use of phones while driving has been banned in many countries.
- Punishments are becoming stricter.
- Television campaigns are used to remind people to drive safely.
- Speed cameras have become more common.

You could also add the causes mentioned in yesterday's lesson.

IELTS Writing Task 2: 'academic ability' topic

Some people think schools should group pupils according to their academic ability, but others believe pupils with different abilities should be educated together. Discuss both views and give your opinion.

Here are some "band 7" (or higher) ideas from my [ebook](#):

For grouping by ability:

- Teachers can work at the right speed for their students.
- Teachers can plan more suitable lessons.
- High-level groups may progress faster.
- Lower level groups can benefit from a slower pace.

Against grouping by ability:

- Grouping by ability may have a negative impact on students.
- Children do not want to be seen as less intelligent than others.
- Being in a lower level group could damage their self esteem.
- Mixed ability classes encourage children of all abilities to cooperate.

IELTS Writing Task 2: introductions

Here are some example introductions for 3 different types of essay. My technique is to write 2 sentences:

1. A sentence to introduce the topic
2. A sentence giving a general response to the question or instruction

Problem & Solution Essay:

It is true that children's behaviour seems to be getting worse. There are various reasons for this, and both schools and parents need to work together to improve the situation.

Discussion (& Opinion) Essay:

People have different views about how children should be taught. While there are some good arguments in favour of teaching children to be competitive, I believe that it is better to encourage co-operation.

Opinion (Agree / Disagree) Essay:

In recent years it has become more common for women to return to work after having a child. However, I do not agree that this has been the cause of problems for young people.

My advice:

Keep your introduction short. Main body paragraphs are more important.

IELTS Advice: essay introductions

On Wednesday I wrote a lesson about introductions for IELTS writing task 2. Since then, several students have asked me this question:

"Will my introduction get a good score?"

Answer: your introduction *alone* will not get you a high score, even if it is perfect. The introduction is necessary, but the main body paragraphs decide your score.

Write a short, clear introduction. Then spend most of your time on the main body of the essay.

IELTS Writing Task 2: 'robots' topic

A student sent me this question:

Some people believe that robots will play an important role in future societies, while others argue that robots might have negative effects on society. Discuss both views and give your opinion.

Today my students planned an essay for this topic. The photo below shows the ideas they had in the lesson:

Positive effects of robots:

- Do manual jobs quickly eg. factory, packing
- Cheap labour, more productive, no breaks (jobs that are boring, difficult for people)
- Create free/extra time for people to spend doing what they want → make life easier
improve our quality of life

Negatives:

- become dependent on robots - we will lose skills eg. cooking. Less human interaction. Lazy → health problems
- unemployment will rise - people will be replaced by machines eg. self-service checkouts in supermarkets eg. factory robots = fewer workers.
lead to bigger problems eg. poverty, crime etc....

IELTS Writing Task 2: how to use your 40 minutes

You have 40 minutes for task 2, so try organising your time in the following way:

First 10 minutes

Read the question and make sure you understand what it is asking you to do. Write a plan for a 4-paragraph essay (introduction, 2 main paragraphs, conclusion) and spend most of the 10 minutes thinking of ideas for the 2 main paragraphs.

5 minutes

Write your introduction: 2 sentences are enough ([examples](#))

20 minutes

Spend 10 minutes on each of your main body paragraphs. These are the most important part of your essay, and the key to a high score.

Last 5 minutes

Write a quick conclusion ([examples](#)) then check your work.

Please note:

These are suggestions, not rules.

Students are often surprised by my 10-minute planning time. In my experience, a good plan helps you to write your essay much faster than you think.

IELTS Writing Task 2: 'women and work' topic

Dana sent me the following question:

Women should have an equal role alongside men in both police and armed forces. To what extent do you agree or disagree?

Here is my plan for a 4-paragraph essay:

1. Introduction: topic + response

- Introduce the topic e.g. "Increasing numbers of women are choosing to..."
- Respond to the question e.g. "I completely agree that women should be able..."

2. First reason why I agree: equal opportunities

Explain why women should have the same right as men to choose their profession. People should be chosen for jobs according to their skills, qualifications, character etc.

3. Second reason why I agree: women's capabilities

I would disagree with the view that women are less able than men to do certain jobs. Also, I would argue that policewomen, for example, may be better at controlling a situation by communicating more effectively. Police and military work requires more than just physical strength. Teamwork, leadership and communication can be much more important.

4. Conclusion: one sentence

Repeat your response in a different way.

IELTS Writing Task 2: 'minority languages' essay

Today, I'd like to share a 'band 9' sample essay for the question below.

Several languages are in danger of extinction because they are spoken by very small numbers of people. Some people say that governments should spend public money on saving these languages, while others believe that would be a waste of money.

Discuss both these views and give your opinion.

It is true that some minority languages may disappear in the near future. Although it can be argued that governments could save money by allowing this to happen, I believe that these languages should be protected and preserved.

There are several reasons why saving minority languages could be seen as a waste of money. Firstly, if a language is only spoken by a small number of people, expensive education programmes will be needed to make sure that more people learn it, and the state will have to pay for facilities, teachers and marketing. This money might be better spent on other public services. Secondly, it would be much cheaper and more efficient for countries to have just one language. Governments could cut all kinds of costs related to communicating with each minority group.

Despite the above arguments, I believe that governments should try to preserve languages that are less widely spoken. A language is much more than simply a means of communication; it has a vital connection with the cultural identity of the people who speak it. If a language disappears, a whole way of life will disappear with it, and we will lose the rich cultural diversity that makes societies more interesting. By spending money to protect minority languages, governments can also preserve traditions, customs and behaviours that are part of a country's history.

In conclusion, it may save money in the short term if we allow minority languages to disappear, but in the long term this would have an extremely negative impact on our cultural heritage.

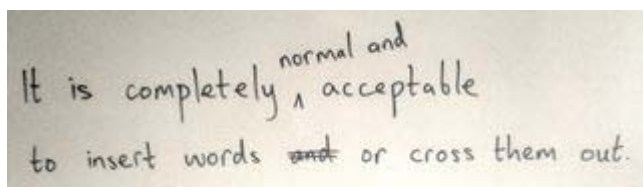
(258 words)

IELTS Writing Advice: correcting yourself

Takuya wrote to me about an interesting cultural difference:

"In Japan, students are told to correct their work using an eraser. They are not allowed to insert words or cross words out."

This is not true in the IELTS exam. You don't need to waste time using an eraser. Your writing needs to be clear, but not perfect.



IELTS Writing Task 2: the 'two-part' question

Usually the question tells you to "discuss both views" or it asks whether you "agree or disagree". However, sometimes the question looks different:

Competitiveness is considered to be a positive quality among people.

How does competitiveness affect individuals?

Is competitiveness a positive or negative quality?

Notice that the question above gives you the topic (competitiveness) and then two questions. I call this a "two-part" question.

For this kind of question, just write 4 paragraphs (see below), and make sure you write an equal amount for paragraphs 2 and 3.

1. Introduction: topic + general response
2. Answer the first question
3. Answer the second question
4. Conclusion: repeat your response

IELTS Writing Task 2: 'dependence' question

The following question was used in several countries last Saturday. I've listed some ideas below.

Some people think that in the modern world we have become more dependent on each other, while others think that people are now more independent.

Discuss both views and give your own opinion.

First view: we have become more dependent

- Life is more difficult and expensive, and we are less self-sufficient
- Young people rely on their parents for longer

- Unemployed people receive state benefits
- Our jobs are much more specialised, and we need to work in teams

Second view: we are more independent

- We rely on machines more than we depend on each other
- The Internet allows us to solve problems without needing help
- Families are more dispersed, and therefore provide less support
- Education gives us the freedom to make our own choices

By linking these points together and supporting them with examples, you could easily write two good paragraphs.

IELTS Writing Task 2: strong or balanced opinion

The following question asks for your opinion. You can either have a strong opinion or a more balanced opinion, but make it clear in your introduction.

Governments should not have to provide care or financial support for elderly people because it is the responsibility of each person to prepare for retirement and support him or herself.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with this opinion?

Introduction (strong opinion):

People have different views about whether or not governments should help senior citizens. I completely disagree with the idea that elderly people should receive no support from the state.

Introduction (more balanced opinion):

People have different views about whether or not governments should help senior citizens. Although I accept that we all have a responsibility to save money for retirement, I disagree with the idea that elderly people should receive no support from the state.

Note:

After the first introduction, try to write 2 paragraphs that both explain why you disagree. The second introduction allows you to discuss both sides (which might be easier).

IELTS Writing Task 2: how to write introductions

Here is a review of my advice for task 2 introductions:

- Make the introduction short and do it quickly. The main body paragraphs are more important.
- Two sentences are enough: 1) introduce the topic. 2) give a basic answer to the question.

Example question:

All high school students should be encouraged to take part in community service programmes.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?

My introduction:

Some people believe that high school students would benefit from doing unpaid work in their local communities. I completely agree that community service programmes for teenagers are a good idea.

IELTS Writing Task 2: 'job satisfaction' topic

As most people spend a major part of their adult life at work, job satisfaction is an important element of individual well-being.

What factors contribute to job satisfaction?

How realistic is the expectation of job satisfaction for all workers?

The following paragraph answers the second part of the question (How realistic..)

It is difficult to imagine a world in which everyone is truly satisfied with their job. Most people work in order to earn a salary, and they would probably not choose to spend eight or more hours each day doing their jobs if they did not need the money. The need to earn money to pay mortgages, bills and everyday living costs is of much greater concern than job satisfaction. In fact, I would argue that the majority of people dislike their jobs and are unhappy about their salaries, working hours, workloads, or their bosses.

(95 words)

Note:

What "band 7 vocabulary" can you find in the paragraph above?

IELTS Writing Task 2: 'gender and university' essay

Here's my full essay using last week's plan:

Universities should accept equal numbers of male and female students in every subject. To what extent do you agree or disagree?

In my opinion, men and women should have the same educational opportunities. However, I do not agree with the idea of accepting equal proportions of each gender in every university subject.

Having the same number of men and women on all degree courses is simply unrealistic. Student numbers on any course depend on the applications that the institution receives. If a university decided to fill courses with equal numbers of males and females, it would need enough applicants of each gender. In reality, many courses are more popular with one gender than the other, and it would not be practical to aim for equal proportions. For example, nursing courses tend to attract more female applicants, and it would be difficult to fill these courses if fifty per cent of the places needed to go to males.

Apart from the practical concerns expressed above, I also believe that it would be unfair to base admission to university courses on gender. Universities should continue to select the best candidates for each course according to their qualifications. In this way, both men and women have the same opportunities, and applicants know that they will be successful if they work hard to achieve good grades at school. If a female student is the best candidate for a place on a course, it would be wrong to reject her in favour of a male student with lower grades or fewer qualifications.

In conclusion, the selection of university students should be based on merit, and it would be both impractical and unfair to change to a selection procedure based on gender.

(265 words, band 9)

IELTS Writing Task 2: 'helping poor countries' topic

This was the IELTS writing task 2 question on 28th May:

***The money given to help poor countries does not solve the problem of poverty, so rich countries should give other types of help instead.
To what extent do you agree or disagree?***

My students and I planned a 4-paragraph essay:

1. Introduction: introduce the topic of helping poor countries, and agree that giving money is not the best way to help.
2. Paragraph explaining why giving money is a bad idea.
3. Paragraph explaining why other types of help are better.
4. Conclusion: repeat the argument (investing is better than giving).

We discussed some ideas and wrote paragraph 2 together:

In my opinion, it is a bad idea to simply give financial aid to governments of poor countries. If rich countries do this, there is a risk that the money will not go to the people who need it most. Governments may misuse the money they are given because they do not have the resources or the know-how to tackle the causes of poverty. In some cases, corrupt politicians have become rich while their citizens continue to suffer. For these reasons, it is important for developed countries to find ways to invest in developing nations, instead of just donating money.

IELTS Writing Task 2: use related words

Look again at last week's question:

Some people think that museums should be enjoyable places to entertain people, while others believe that the purpose of museums is to educate. Discuss both views and give your own opinion.

Let's forget about the whole question. Just try to list some words that are related to the 3 main ideas.

Museums:

- exhibition, exhibit (verb, like 'show'), an exhibit (noun, 'item'), artifact, object, collection, history, science, art, culture, visitors, members of the public, public viewing...

Entertain:

- entertainment, entertaining, enjoy, enjoyment, enjoyable, have fun, interesting, fascinating, spectacular, impressive, leisure time, free time, a day out, tourist attraction...

Educate:

- education, educational, teach, learn, explain, understand, know, gain/expand/pass on/transmit knowledge, skills, experience, open your mind, broaden your horizons...

Making lists of related words is a good way to generate ideas. You might not have time to do this in the exam, but it's a useful study technique.

IELTS Writing Task 2: 'gender and university' topic

A few people have asked me about this question from Cambridge IELTS 5:

Universities should accept equal numbers of male and female students in every subject. To what extent do you agree or disagree?

I did a lesson about this question with my students. Here are our ideas:

1. Introduction: We decided to completely disagree with the question statement. You don't need to explain both sides of the argument. Just give your opinion in the introduction, then support it in the main body paragraphs.
2. Paragraph 2: One reason why we decided to disagree is that it would not be practical or realistic to have exactly the same number of males and females on every course. Some courses have mainly male applicants, while others are more popular with females.
3. Paragraph 3: Another reason we disagreed is that it would not be fair to base admission to courses on gender. Universities should select candidates based on their qualifications, skills, experience etc.
4. Conclusion: Repeat the idea that selecting according to gender is not the best way to ensure equal opportunities for men and women at university.

I'll put a full example essay on the site next week. You are welcome to share your own ideas, but I'm afraid I can't give feedback, scores or corrections.

IELTS Writing Task 2: 'gender and university' essay

Here's my full essay using last week's plan:

Universities should accept equal numbers of male and female students in every subject. To what extent do you agree or disagree?

In my opinion, men and women should have the same educational opportunities. However, I do not agree with the idea of accepting equal proportions of each gender in every university subject.

Having the same number of men and women on all degree courses is simply unrealistic. Student numbers on any course depend on the applications that the institution receives. If a university decided to fill courses with equal numbers of males and females, it would need enough applicants of each gender. In reality, many courses are more popular with one gender than the other, and it would not be practical to aim for equal proportions. For example, nursing courses tend to attract more female applicants, and it would be difficult to fill these courses if fifty per cent of the places needed to go to males.

Apart from the practical concerns expressed above, I also believe that it would be unfair to base admission to university courses on gender. Universities should continue to select the best candidates for each course according to their qualifications. In this

way, both men and women have the same opportunities, and applicants know that they will be successful if they work hard to achieve good grades at school. If a female student is the best candidate for a place on a course, it would be wrong to reject her in favour of a male student with lower grades or fewer qualifications.

In conclusion, the selection of university students should be based on merit, and it would be both impractical and unfair to change to a selection procedure based on gender.

(265 words, band 9)

IELTS Writing Task 2: how to answer any question

Today I want to show you what happens in my brain when I see any IELTS Writing Task 2 question.

Here are my thinking steps:

1. I read the question very carefully, maybe three times. I ask myself "What's the topic? What is the question asking me to write about?"
2. I underline the key things that must be included in the essay. I always answer every part of the question.
3. Now I think about my 4 paragraph structure. I can write any type of essay in 4 paragraphs; I just need to decide what to put in each paragraph.
4. If I need to give my opinion, I think "What is the easiest opinion to explain? What good vocabulary could I use?"
5. Then I write down some vocabulary ideas that are related to the topic.
6. I try to write 2 sentences for the introduction: I introduce the topic, then give a simple answer (including my opinion if the question asks for it).
7. I write short 'topic sentences' to start each paragraph, then develop my ideas by explaining and supporting with examples.
8. I look at the question from time to time in order to check that I'm answering every part of it.
9. I know that I write about 10 words per line; I can quickly check the approximate number of words that I've written.
10. If I need more words (to reach 250), I expand one of my examples in the main body paragraphs. If necessary, I draw an arrow to show where I want to add the extra words.

IELTS Writing Task 2: the '2 part' question

The following question confuses many students because it doesn't seem to be one of the 3 normal types (opinion, discussion, problem/solution).

Happiness is considered very important in life.

Why is it difficult to define?

What factors are important in achieving happiness?

I call this a "2 part" question, and it's easier than you think. Just answer the first question in paragraph 2, and the second question in paragraph 3:

1. Introduction - topic + simple answer to both questions

2. Paragraph - explain why happiness is difficult to define

Some ideas: Explain that happiness means different things to different people; the same situation can make one person happy but another person sad/bored etc. Give examples of what makes different people happy (money, success, family, friends, hobbies). Give an example from your experience e.g. a hobby that makes you happy but that your friend hates.

3. Paragraph - give your opinions about how to achieve happiness

Some ideas: Try to organise your ideas logically - you could begin with humans' basic needs (in order to be happy we need to be healthy and have somewhere to live, food to eat etc.) then talk about the importance of family and friends. You could then write about career, money, success, status etc. - maybe you could explain that these things mean nothing if we do not have family and friends to share our experiences with. Give an example from your own life - what will make you happier than you are now?

4. Conclusion - repeat/summarise the main ideas

IELTS Writing Task 2: 'technology' topic

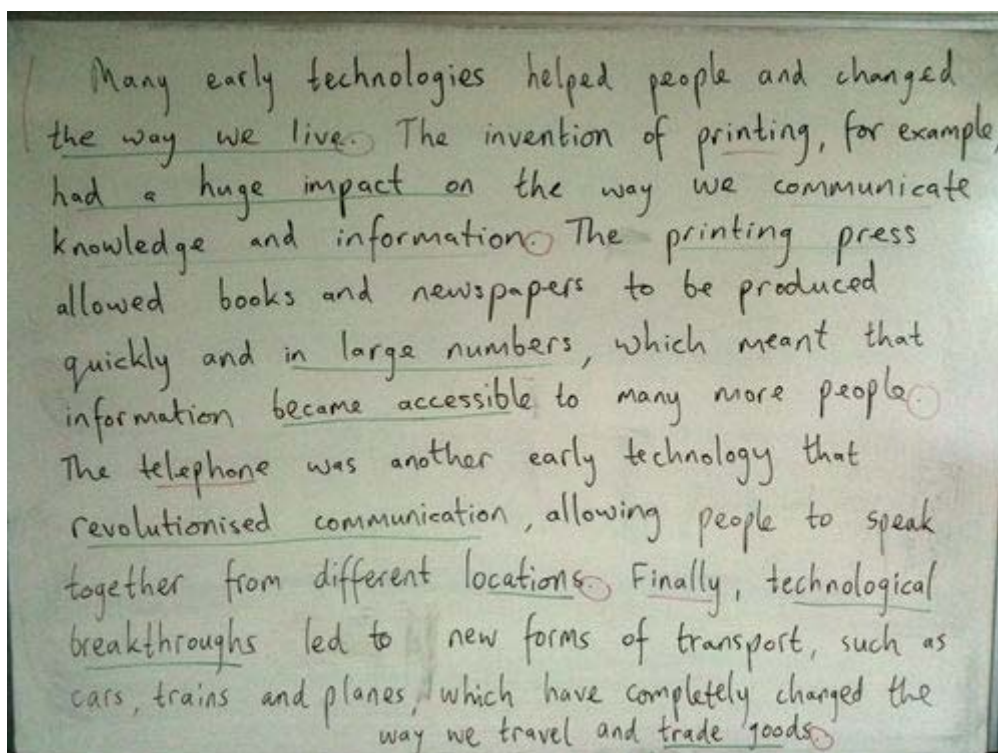
This was a recent IELTS exam question:

***Early technological developments helped ordinary people and changed their lives more than recent developments.
To what extent do you agree or disagree?***

Here's the plan that I wrote with my students:

1. Introduction: we disagree because we think that early and recent technologies have had an ***equally*** significant impact on our lives.
2. Paragraph about how early technologies helped people.
3. Paragraph about how recent technologies help people.
4. Conclusion: repeat the significance of both.

Here's a picture of what we wrote for paragraph 2:



IELTS Writing Task 2: recent question

This was the IELTS writing task 2 question two weeks ago in the UK:

It is right that university graduates should earn more money than less well educated people, but they should pay the full cost of their education.

To what extent do you agree or disagree?

My students and I planned a 4-paragraph essay:

- 1) Introduction: introduce the topic and respond to both parts of the question. We decided to agree that graduates deserve good salaries, but we disagree with the idea that they should pay the full cost of their degree courses.
- 2) Paragraph explaining why graduates should earn good salaries: they have invested time and effort into gaining their qualifications; they have knowledge, skills and training required for important jobs; they are an asset to society.
- 3) Paragraph explaining why graduates should not have to pay the full cost of education: this will be too expensive and will deter many young people from going to university; students will have huge debts; graduates contribute by paying taxes when they work.
- 4) Conclusion: repeat the two main ideas.

IELTS Writing Task 2: globalisation of culture

This was a recent exam question:

Differences between countries become less evident each year. Nowadays, all over the world people share the same fashions, advertising, brands, eating habits and TV channels.

Do the disadvantages of this trend outweigh the advantages?

Here's my outline for a 4-paragraph essay:

Introduction

It is true that many aspects of culture are becoming increasingly similar throughout the world. Although this trend has some benefits, I would argue that there are more drawbacks.

First sentence of paragraph 2

On the one hand, the globalisation of fashion, brands, eating habits and other areas of culture has some benefits. (Explain the benefits)

First sentence of paragraph 3

On the other hand, I believe that the disadvantages of cultural globalisation are even more significant. (Explain the disadvantages)

Conclusion

In conclusion, it seems to me that the drawbacks of globalisation, in terms of cultural habits such as the clothes we wear or the foods we eat, do outweigh the benefits.

IELTS Writing Task 2: advertising

'Advertising' has been the topic of IELTS writing task 2 several times this year. It's a popular topic, so you need some ideas and opinions about it.

Here are some opinions about advertising, taken from my [ebook](#).

- Advertising should be _____.
- Advertising _____ children should be controlled or even banned.
- Unhealthy foods should not be marketed _____ attracts children.
- Products that can be a risk to health should _____ warnings.
- However, advertising is necessary in free _____ economies.
- It creates _____ products.
- Governments should only _____ false information or products that are harmful.

Fill the gaps with these words/phrases:

market, in a way that, regulated, display, censor, demand for, aimed at

Note:

'Advertising' is uncountable (you can't say "an advertising" or "advertisings").

'Advertising' is the name of the industry, activity or profession (like 'marketing'). 'An

advertisement' (or 'advertisements') is what you see on TV, in the street, in newspapers etc.

IELTS Writing Task 2: method

I've noticed that the more essay practice I do with my students, the more *defined* my writing method becomes.

For example, I now know that my 250-word essays usually contain 13 to 15 sentences: 2 for the introduction, 5 to 6 for each main paragraph and 1 sentence for the conclusion. It takes me 10 minutes to write a good plan, 5 minutes to write an introduction, I have 2 main ways of writing main paragraphs etc. etc.

The question is: Do you have a clearly defined method? Do you repeatedly practise writing essays in the same way?

If you don't have a method, it's just "hit and hope".

IELTS Writing Task 2: different introductions

*Some people think the main purpose of schools is to turn children into good citizens and workers, rather than to benefit them as individuals.
To what extent do you agree or disagree?*

Here are 3 different introductions. Notice that the opinion is clear in each one.

Agree:

People have different views about what the main purpose of schools should be. Personally, I agree that a school's role is to prepare children to be productive members of society.

Disagree:

Many people argue that the main role of schools is to prepare children for their future jobs. However, I believe that the purpose of education should be to help children to grow as individuals.

Balanced view:

To a certain extent I agree that the role of schools is to prepare children to be productive members of society. However, I also believe that the education process has a positive impact on us as individuals.

IELTS Writing Task 2: one view or both views?

This is the most common question that students ask me:

*For "agree or disagree" questions, do I have to discuss both sides,
or should I just support one side of the argument?*

The answer is: it's your decision. If you completely agree, you don't need to mention the opposite view - just support your side of the argument. If you partly agree, you should write something about both sides.

Look at [last week's lesson](#). After the first two introductions, I would not give the other point of view, but after the last introduction I would mention both sides.

IELTS Writing Task 2: problem and solution

Behaviour in schools is getting worse. Explain the causes and effects of this problem, and suggest some possible solutions.

Here are some ideas for two main body paragraphs:

Causes of bad behaviour in schools:

1. bad behaviour / lack of discipline
2. large classes / difficult to teach
3. disruptive students / family background
4. parents / lenient / spoil

Possible solutions:

1. schools / clear rules
2. teachers / punish disruptive students
3. parents / support / school rules
4. parents / take responsibility / children's behaviour

A good way to practise your writing is to try making full sentences with these ideas e.g. *One reason for bad behaviour is the lack of discipline in many schools.*

PS. If you have my ebook, you'll find this topic in the 'education' chapter.

IELTS Writing Task 2: have a strong opinion

If the question asks whether you agree or disagree, it's often easier to have a strong opinion (completely agree or completely disagree) rather than trying to be "in the middle". Here's an example question:

***Families who do not send their children to public schools should not be required to pay taxes that support universal education.
To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?***

I don't think there is a "middle answer" to this question: either you think that the parents should not pay tax (agree), or you think they should pay tax (disagree).

When you have a strong opinion, you don't need to mention the opposite view. Here's my plan for a 4-paragraph essay:

1. Introduction: 1 sentence to introduce the topic, 1 sentence to make your opinion clear (e.g. I completely disagree...)
2. Main paragraph: support your opinion with a reason
3. Main paragraph: support your opinion with another reason
4. Conclusion: repeat/summarise your opinion

IELTS Writing Task 2: balanced opinion

Last week I said that it's often easier to have a strong opinion and only support one side of the argument. Today I'm going to contradict myself! Let's look at a 'balanced opinion' essay.

In the last century, the first man to walk on the moon said it was "a giant leap for mankind". However, some people think it has made little difference to our daily lives.

To what extent do you agree or disagree?

For this question, I would write that "I partly agree" or that "I agree to some extent". Then I would write one main paragraph about each side of the argument:

1. Introduction: I partly agree. Make it clear that you have a balanced opinion.
2. One side: In practical terms, sending a man to the moon has not changed most people's lives. We have not benefited in terms of our standard of living, health etc. In fact, governments have wasted a lot of money that could have been spent on public services.
3. Other side: On the other hand, putting a man on the moon was a huge achievement that still inspires and interests people today. It showed us that we can achieve anything we put our minds to.
4. Conclusion: The fact that man has walked on the moon might not have had a direct effect on our daily lives, but it was an inspiring achievement.

IELTS Writing Task 2: do the advantages outweigh...?

Some IELTS writing task 2 questions ask: "Do the advantages outweigh the disadvantages?" or "Do the benefits outweigh the drawbacks?"

My advice for these questions is to write a paragraph about each side, and make it clear in the introduction and conclusion which side outweighs the other (i.e. your opinion about whether there are more advantages or disadvantages).

This was a recent exam question:

In some countries, governments are encouraging industries and businesses to move to regional areas outside the big cities.

Do the advantages of this trend outweigh the disadvantages?

Here are some ideas:

1. Introduce the topic by paraphrasing the statement, then give a clear opinion about whether there are more advantages or disadvantages.

2. Advantages - e.g. costs are lower in regional areas; there is more space; provide jobs to boost deprived areas; avoid further overcrowding in cities.
3. Disadvantages - e.g. greater availability of skilled workers in big cities; better transport and infrastructure; companies based in regional areas are further from their clients, providers and other contacts.
4. Conclude by summarising your opinion in a different way.

IELTS Writing Task 2: when to give your opinion

Do the following questions ask for your opinion or not?

1. To what extent do you agree or disagree?
2. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages.
3. Discuss both views and give your opinion.
4. Do the advantages outweigh the disadvantages?
5. Is this a positive or negative development?
6. What are the benefits and drawbacks?

Tip:

Only two of the above questions don't ask for your opinion. If the question doesn't ask for your opinion, don't give it. For the other four questions, you should make your opinion clear in the introduction and conclusion.

Answers:

- Numbers 2 and 6 are discussion questions. Discuss both sides of the issue, but don't give your opinion about which side you agree with.
- Numbers 1 and 5 are opinion questions. Give your opinion and support it. You don't need to mention the other side of the argument.
- Numbers 3 and 4 can be called discussion + opinion questions. Discuss both sides and make your opinion clear too.

IELTS Writing: 5 sentence paragraphs

When writing main body paragraphs for IELTS writing task 2, try to aim for five sentences. For example:

1. Topic sentence (e.g. There are several reasons why I believe...)
2. First reason
3. Example
4. Second reason
5. Third reason

Another example:

1. Topic sentence (e.g. Many people believe that...)
2. Explain why
3. Explain in more detail
4. Example
5. Explain why they disagree with the opposite view

Before you start writing it's a good idea to make some notes. Try to organise your notes according to this 5-sentence paragraph structure.

IELTS Writing Task 2: example paragraph

Here's a 5-sentence paragraph using the second plan from [last week's lesson](#):

Many people believe that sports professionals earn too much money. They argue that sport is a form of entertainment rather than a vital public service. We could easily live without sportspeople, yet other professionals who contribute much more to society are undervalued and underpaid. For example, football players can earn enormous salaries by simply kicking a ball, while doctors, nurses and teachers earn a fraction of the money despite being essential for our health and prosperity. From this perspective, sports stars do not deserve the salaries they currently earn.

As you can see, the paragraph explains the view that sportspeople earn too much money. This came from a [discuss both views](#) question.

IELTS Writing Task 2: higher education

Some people believe that studying at university or college is the best route to a successful career, while others believe that it is better to get a job straight after school.

Discuss both views and give your opinion.

Here's my full introduction and conclusion, as well as some ideas for the main body paragraphs:

Introduction

When they finish school, teenagers face the dilemma of whether to get a job or continue their education. While there are some benefits to getting a job straight after school, I would argue that it is better to go to college or university.

Paragraph 1: benefits of getting a job

The option to start work straight after school is attractive for several reasons. (IDEAS: start earning money, become independent, gain experience, learn skills, get promotions, settle down earlier, afford a house, have a family)

Paragraph 2: benefits of higher education (my opinion)

On the other hand, I believe that it is more beneficial for students to continue their studies.

(IDEAS: some jobs require academic qualifications, better job opportunities, higher salaries, the job market is very competitive, gain knowledge, become a useful member of society)

Conclusion

For the reasons mentioned above, it seems to me that students are more likely to be successful in their lives if they continue their studies beyond school level.

IELTS Writing Task 2: difficult questions

I student sent me this question, and I agree that it's difficult:

In recent years, there has been growing interest in the relationship between equality and personal achievement. Some people believe that individuals can achieve more in egalitarian societies. Others believe that high levels of personal achievement are possible only if individuals are free to succeed or fail according to their individual merits.

What is your view of the relationship between equality and personal success?

Faced with this question, here are 3 tips:

1. **Have a strong opinion** (e.g. I completely agree that people can achieve more in egalitarian societies.) You can ignore the other view.
2. **Focus on the last line of the question** (What is your view of...?). This line sums up the whole question very clearly. Just answer this question.
3. **Use examples** as the basis of your argument e.g. free university education ensures equality of opportunity, and therefore allows individuals to achieve more.

If you try writing an essay for this question, you can compare your essay with my answer next Wednesday. I'm afraid I can't check essays or give scores.

Note: 'egalitarian' refers to the principle that people are equal, and deserve equal rights and opportunities.

IELTS Writing Task 2: 'equality' topic

Here's my full (band 9) essay for last week's question.

In recent years, there has been growing interest in the relationship between equality and personal achievement. Some people believe that individuals can achieve more in egalitarian societies. Others believe that high levels of personal achievement are possible only if individuals are free to succeed or fail according to their individual merits.

What is your view of the relationship between equality and personal success?

In my opinion, an egalitarian society is one in which everyone has the same rights and the same opportunities. I completely agree that people can achieve more in this kind of society.

Education is an important factor with regard to personal success in life. I believe that all children should have access to free schooling, and higher education should be either free or affordable for all those who chose to pursue a university degree. In a society without free schooling or affordable higher education, only children and young adults from wealthier families would have access to the best learning opportunities, and they would therefore be better prepared for the job market. This kind of inequality would ensure the success of some but harm the prospects of others.

I would argue that equal rights and opportunities are not in conflict with people's freedom to succeed or fail. In other words, equality does not mean that people lose their motivation to succeed, or that they are not allowed to fail. On the contrary, I believe that most people would feel more motivated to work hard and reach their potential if they thought that they lived in a fair society. Those who did not make the same effort would know that they had wasted their opportunity. Inequality, on the other hand, would be more likely to demotivate people because they would know that the odds of success were stacked in favour of those from privileged backgrounds.

In conclusion, it seems to me that there is a positive relationship between equality and personal success.

(260 words)

Note:

I'm not sure that this was a 'real' IELTS question (maybe the student who sent it to me remembered it wrongly) because it is a bit confusing: it seems strange to me to imply that "egalitarian/equality" is the opposite of "free to succeed or fail". Anyway, I hope you still find the essay useful.

IELTS Writing Task 2: plan your main paragraphs

Before you start writing your task 2 essay, you need a plan:

1. First, think about how you could write 2 main body paragraphs. What would be the main idea/topic of each one?
2. Then make some notes for the first main paragraph. Your notes could follow this formula: Idea, Explain, Example.
3. Do the same thing for the second main paragraph.

Here's an example question with a few ideas below:

People nowadays work hard to buy more things. This has made our lives generally more comfortable, but many traditional values and customs have been lost and this is a pity.

To what extent do you agree or disagree?

1. I can see two clear ideas in this question: 1) buying things has made our lives more comfortable. 2) traditional values and customs have been lost. I agree with both of these points, so I'll write one paragraph explaining why I agree with the first point, and another paragraph explaining the second point.
2. Idea: buying things has made life more comfortable. Explain/Examples: we buy appliances like microwave ovens and dishwashers; we use computers to shop online; more people own a car.
3. Idea: traditional values and customs have been lost. Explain/Examples: people buy microwave meals rather than cooking traditional dishes; traditional local shops disappear and are replaced with online shopping; people are more independent, but lack a sense of community.

IELTS Advice: argument or discussion?

Many people ask me about the difference between an argument essay and a discussion essay. Here's an easy way to think about the difference:

- When you argue, you are trying to persuade the other person to agree with your point of view. You might even get angry!
- When you discuss, you consider different points of view, and nobody gets angry.

The question should make it very clear what it wants you to do. If it asks you to "discuss", you should write about advantages and disadvantages or two different views.

If the question asks whether you "agree or disagree", it's asking for *your* view. For this type of question, give your opinion in the introduction and support it in the rest of the essay. Try to persuade the reader to agree with you.

IELTS Writing Task 2: discussion without opinion

Most discussion essays also ask for your opinion. Sometimes, however, the question doesn't ask for your opinion. It might just ask you to discuss two different views, or compare the advantages and disadvantages.

Remember: if the question doesn't ask for your opinion, don't give it.

Compare the 2 essays attached below. They are almost the same, but in the first essay I give my opinion clearly in several places, while in the second essay I've removed my opinions completely.

[Click here to download essays](#)

IELTS Writing Task 2: conclusions

Several people have asked me about conclusions for IELTS Writing Task 2. The main body paragraphs are much more important, so don't worry too much about the conclusion; make it short, simple and fast.

Here are some example conclusion phrases for different types of question:

1. Opinion

For the reasons mentioned above, I believe that... (+ repeat your opinion).

2. Discussion (+ Opinion)

In conclusion, there are convincing arguments both for and against... (topic), but I believe that... (if the question asks for your opinion).

3. Advantages and Disadvantages

In conclusion, I would argue that the benefits of... (topic) outweigh the drawbacks.

4. Problem and Solution

In conclusion, it is clear that there are various reasons for... (topic), and steps need to be taken to tackle this problem

IELTS Writing Task 2: who should we help?

We cannot help everyone in the world that needs help, so we should only be concerned with our own communities and countries.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Let's plan an essay for this question.

1. Introduction - I don't think there is a "middle" opinion for this question. You either agree that we should **only** be worried about our own communities and countries, or you think that we should **also** help those outside our own countries. The best response might be to **disagree** - then you can say that we should try to help everyone.
2. Paragraph 2 - I agree that it is important to help our neighbours and fellow citizens. (Explain this idea)
3. Paragraph 3 - At the same time, I believe that we have an obligation to help those who live beyond our national borders. (Explain)
4. Conclusion - Repeat the idea that we can help people both at home and abroad.

IELTS Writing Task 2: 'help' essay

Last week I wrote a plan for the question below. Now you can read my full essay.

We cannot help everyone in the world that needs help, so we should only be concerned with our own communities and countries.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Some people believe that we should not help people in other countries as long as there are problems in our own society. I disagree with this view because I believe that we should try to help as many people as possible.

On the one hand, I accept that it is important to help our neighbours and fellow citizens. In most communities there are people who are impoverished or disadvantaged in some way. It is possible to find homeless people, for example, in even the wealthiest of cities, and for those who are concerned about this problem, there are usually opportunities to volunteer time or give money to support these people. In the UK, people can help in a variety of ways, from donating clothing to serving free food in a soup kitchen. As the problems are on our doorstep, and there are obvious ways to help, I can understand why some people feel that we should prioritise local charity.

At the same time, I believe that we have an obligation to help those who live beyond our national borders. In some countries the problems that people face are much more

serious than those in our own communities, and it is often even easier to help. For example, when children are dying from curable diseases in African countries, governments and individuals in richer countries can save lives simply by paying for vaccines that already exist. A small donation to an international charity might have a much greater impact than helping in our local area.

In conclusion, it is true that we cannot help everyone, but in my opinion national boundaries should not stop us from helping those who are in need.

(280 words, band 9)

IELTS Writing Task 2: 'global warming' topic

If the question asks you to explain a problem related to the environment, you could write about global warming.

Here is a paragraph explaining the problem (causes) of global warming:

Perhaps the most serious problem facing the environment is global warming. Gases such as carbon dioxide trap heat from the sun within the earth's atmosphere, and this causes global temperatures to rise. This process is known as the greenhouse effect, and human activity is a major factor in the rise of the greenhouse gases which cause it. For example, factories and vehicles produce emissions and exhaust fumes. As many developing countries are becoming industrialised, emissions from factories are expected to increase. Furthermore, the number of cars on our streets is growing all the time, and cheap air travel is making flying accessible to more and more people. Consequently, the amount of greenhouse gases released into the atmosphere shows no signs of decreasing.

You can learn a lot from this paragraph if you analyse it:

1. How many sentences are there? What does each sentence do? (e.g. The first sentence introduces the topic)
2. Can you find some "band 7 vocabulary"?
3. Look at how the ideas are linked. Can you see that the word "this" is an important linking word?

IELTS Writing Task 2: short introductions

It's a good idea to practise writing short, fast introductions. If you can write the introduction quickly, you will have more time to focus on the main paragraphs - these are the key to a high score.

Here's a question that someone asked me about:

In many cities, security measures, such as the use of video cameras in public places, are being increased in order to reduce crime, but some people believe that these measures restrict our individual freedom.

Do the benefits of increased security outweigh the drawbacks?

Here's my short, fast introduction:

It is true that the security in many cities has been tightened in recent years. Although I agree that some security measures can feel restrictive, I believe that there are more benefits than drawbacks.

Note:

- In reality, it might not be true that security has been increased in most cities, but I think we have to accept this in order to answer the question.
- The question gives us an example of increased security (video cameras), so we can definitely use that example in a paragraph about the drawbacks.
- Notice that my introduction paraphrases the question. I've used some of the words from the question, but there are some nice changes too (e.g. tightened, feel restrictive).

IELTS Writing Task 2: 'nuclear power' topic

Following on from yesterday's listening lesson, here is a paragraph explaining some of the benefits of nuclear power:

There are several benefits to building more nuclear power stations. Firstly, nuclear power is a relatively sustainable energy source, meaning that it can be used to produce electricity without wasting limited natural resources like coal, oil or gas. Secondly, nuclear power stations are cleaner than fossil fuel power stations, and could help to reduce carbon emissions that cause global warming. With improvements in nuclear technology, the risks of accidents are being reduced. As a result, many countries are now considering nuclear power as a solution to high oil and gas prices, increasing demand for electricity, and worries about pollution and climate change.

Read, analyse and use the paragraph:

- How many sentences are there, and what does each sentence do?
- Note the main ideas and collocations (e.g. sustainable energy source).
- Try to rewrite the paragraph using only your notes.

PS. If you have my [ebook](#), you will find some ideas for the 'negatives of nuclear power' in the environment chapter on page 19.

IELTS Writing Task 2: using the word "I"

Here is a question that a lot of students ask:

Is it acceptable to use "I" or "my" in IELTS writing?

As an ex-examiner, my advice is that you **should** use phrases like "I believe" or "in my opinion" when the question asks for **your opinion** e.g To what extent do **you** agree or disagree?

Some teachers tell students not to use "I" in academic essays, but this advice is really for university academic writing, not IELTS

IELTS Writing Task 2: rules for introductions

Many people decide on a career path early in their lives and keep to it. This, they argue, leads to a more satisfying working life.

To what extent do you agree with this view?

What other things can people do in order to have a satisfying working life?

In today's lesson I just want to look at how to write an introduction for this type of question. My simple rules for task 2 introductions are:

1. Write 2 sentences: introduce the topic, then give a general answer.
2. Mention everything that the question mentions.
3. Don't save any surprises for the conclusion; give your opinion in the introduction if the question asks for it.

Here's an example introduction:

It is true that some people know from an early age what career they want to pursue, and they are happy to spend the rest of their lives in the same profession. While I accept that this may suit many people, I believe that others enjoy changing careers or seeking job satisfaction in different ways.

I'll look at the main paragraphs next week.

IELTS Writing Task 2: main body paragraphs

Here are my 2 main body paragraphs for [last week's question](#). I tried to use an "Idea, Explain, Example" structure for the first paragraph, and a "Firstly, Secondly, Finally" structure for the second.

Main body paragraphs:

On the one hand, having a defined career path can certainly lead to a satisfying working life. Many people decide as young children what they want to do as adults, and it gives them a great sense of satisfaction to work towards their goals and gradually achieve them. For example, many children dream of becoming doctors, but to realise this ambition they need to gain the relevant qualifications and undertake years of training. In my experience, very few people who have qualified as doctors choose to change career because they find their work so rewarding, and because they have invested so much time and effort to reach their goal.

On the other hand, people find happiness in their working lives in different ways. Firstly, not everyone dreams of doing a particular job, and it can be equally rewarding to try a variety of professions; starting out on a completely new career path can be a reinvigorating experience. Secondly, some people see their jobs as simply a means of earning money, and they are happy if their salary is high enough to allow them to enjoy life outside work. Finally, job satisfaction is often the result of working conditions, rather than the career itself. For example, a positive working atmosphere, enthusiastic colleagues, and an inspirational boss can make working life much more satisfying, regardless of the profession

IELTS Writing Task 2: full essay

Today I'm attaching the full essay ([click here](#)) that we've been working on for the last 2 weeks. Here are some points to notice:

- There is a clear 4-paragraph structure, and the essay is easy to read because the ideas are developed in a logical way.
- The introduction is short, but it covers everything that the question asks you about.
- The main paragraphs make up around 70% of the essay. These paragraphs are the key to a high score.
- The conclusion is very short, and simply summarises what I had already written. Never put any new ideas in the conclusion.
- I focus on expressing my ideas well, using a range of relevant words and phrases. I'm not thinking about 'complex grammar' or linking phrases.

Note:

I went a bit "over the top" with this essay. It's 310 words long, and more than good enough for band 9. You might not be able to write like this, but hopefully you can learn something from it.

(*go over the top*: to do something that is more than what is considered normal or suitable)

IELTS Writing Task 2: 'media' topic

Several people have asked me about the following question from Cambridge IELTS book 4.

Compare the advantages and disadvantages of three of the following as media for communicating information. State which you consider to be the most effective.

- **comics**
- **books**
- **radio**
- **television**
- **film**
- **theatre**

Usually I recommend writing 4 paragraphs, but for this question I think I would write 5 paragraphs:

1. Introduction: state which 3 media you are going to write about (e.g. books, radio, TV), and say which you think is most effective (e.g. television).
2. Advantages and disadvantages of books.
3. Advantages and disadvantages of radio.
4. Advantages and disadvantages of TV (mention again that you consider this the most effective).
5. Conclusion: summarise and repeat your opinion.

Maybe you can share your ideas about the advantages and disadvantages of these 3 media, and I'll use them to write an essay for next week's lesson.

IELTS Writing Task 2: books, radio, TV

Here are my 'main body' paragraphs for last week's question. Notice that it's possible to put advantages and disadvantages together in the same paragraph. Also, you need to be careful not to write too much!

Advantages / disadvantages of books:

The main advantage of books is that they are usually considered to be reliable sources of information. People tend to refer to books when they want to research a subject in depth, and for this reason they continue to play an important role in education. On the other hand, books quickly go out of date, and therefore they are not the best medium for communicating news stories.

Advantages / disadvantages of radio:

Radio is a much more effective medium than books for the communication of up-to-date information. We can listen to news broadcasts about events as they happen, and a key benefit of radio is that we can listen to it while doing other activities, such as driving or working. The main drawback of radio, when compared to books or television, is that there is no visual element; we cannot see what the broadcaster is describing.

Advantages / disadvantages of TV, and my opinion:

In my opinion, television is the most effective of these three media because it brings us closer to reality than a book or radio programme ever can. For example, we can watch events as they take place on the other side of the world, or we can see the body language of a politician who is being interviewed. The disadvantages of television are that programmes tend to be short and interrupted by advertisements, meaning that information is presented in limited depth.

IELTS Writing Task 2: introductions and conclusions

Many students waste time writing long introductions and conclusions. These two paragraphs should be short and simple; a long, complex introduction or conclusion will not give you a high score.

Just make your introductions and conclusions quick and concise, and spend your time writing really good main body paragraphs.

Here's my introduction and conclusion for the topic of my last two writing lessons:

Introduction

There are various benefits and drawbacks of books, radio and television as ways to convey information. In my view, television is definitely the most effective of these three media.

Conclusion

In conclusion, although books, radio and television each have their advantages and disadvantages, it seems to me that the impact of television is greater.

IELTS Writing Task 2: 'art and science' topic

A student sent me this recent exam question:

These days people pay more attention to artists (writers, painters and so on) and give less importance to science and technology.

To what extent do you agree or disagree?

This seems to me to be a perfect question for a "balanced opinion" answer (i.e. both art and science are given equal importance). However, notice that you need to ***disagree*** with the question statement in order to give this balanced response.

Here's my recommended 4-paragraph essay plan:

1. **Introduction**: we could accept that artists are popular nowadays, but disagree that science and technology are treated as less important.
2. **Main paragraph** about the popularity of artists. I'd use examples as the basis for this paragraph. If you don't know any writers or painters, you can talk about actors and musicians.
3. **Main paragraph** about the importance of science and technology. I'd write about the popularity of mobile phones, computers and tablets. Maybe I'd use Steve Jobs or Bill Gates as examples of people who are famous for the technologies they created.
4. **Conclusion**: paraphrase the argument that you presented in the introduction.

IELTS Writing Task 2: 'technology' essay

Several people have asked me about this question from Cambridge IELTS 8. I wrote the essay below with the help of some of my students. A few simple linking features are highlighted.

Nowadays the way many people interact with each other has changed because of technology.

In what ways has technology affected the types of relationships that people make? Has this been a positive or negative development?

It is true that new technologies have had an influence on communication between people. Technology has affected relationships in various ways, and in my opinion there are both positive and negative effects.

Technology has had an impact on relationships in business, education and social life. **Firstly**, telephones and the Internet allow business people in different countries to interact without ever meeting each other. **Secondly**, services like Skype create new possibilities for relationships between students and teachers. For example, a student can now take video lessons with a teacher in a different city or country. **Finally**, many people use social networks, like Facebook, to make new friends and find people who share common interests, and they interact through their computers rather than face to face.

On the one hand, these developments can be extremely positive. Cooperation between people in different countries was much more difficult when communication was limited to written letters or telegrams. Nowadays, interactions by email, phone or video are almost as good as face-to-face meetings, and many of us benefit from these interactions, either in work or social contexts. **On the other hand**, the availability of

new communication technologies can also have the result of isolating people and discouraging real interaction. For example, many young people choose to make friends online rather than mixing with their peers in the real world, and these 'virtual' relationships are a poor substitute for real friendships.

In conclusion, technology has certainly revolutionised communication between people, but not all of the outcomes of this revolution have been positive.

(257 words, band 9)

IELTS Writing Task 2: firstly, secondly, finally

A few people have asked me whether using "firstly, secondly, finally" to organise a paragraph is too *easy*.

My answer is that using easy organising language like "firstly, secondly, finally" allows you to focus on the **real content** of what you are writing - topic vocabulary, collocations, examples. This is what the examiner wants to see. You can get a band 9 using "firstly, secondly, finally" if the ideas between these linking words are good.

Some simple alternatives to "firstly, secondly, finally" could be:

- The main reason why I believe... is... / Another argument is... / Also,...
- One problem is that... / Furthermore,... / Another drawback is that...
- From a business perspective,... / In terms of education,... / From a social point of view,... (this could work for the paragraph in [last week's lesson](#))

IELTS Writing Task 2: agree, disagree, or both?

For 'agree or disagree' essays, do you think you should give both sides of the argument or just one side? The answer is that you can do either.

A) Essay structure for one side of the argument:

1. Introduction: topic + your opinion (either agree or disagree)
2. First idea to support your opinion
3. Second idea to support your opinion
4. Conclusion: repeat your opinion

B) Essay structure for giving both sides:

1. Introduction: topic + say that you 'partly agree'
2. On the one hand,...
3. On the other hand,...
4. Conclusion: repeat that you accept elements of both arguments

Remember: it's very important to get the introduction right. This tells the examiner whether you are going to give one side of the argument or both sides.

IELTS Writing Task 2: topic sentences

A good way to start a paragraph is with a short, simple sentence that introduces the main idea of the paragraph. Teachers often call this a ‘topic sentence’.

I normally write my topic sentences by thinking about how many points I want to mention in the paragraph:

1. If I only have one point or idea, I usually state it straight away:

In my opinion, junk food is the main cause of childhood obesity.
(then explain this opinion and give examples in the rest of the paragraph)

2. If I have two or three points or ideas, I don’t usually mention them directly in the topic sentence:

There are two main causes (or ‘several causes’) of childhood obesity.
(then explain using “firstly, secondly...” or something similar)

Have a look through the essays that you’ve written in the past, and compare them with some of mine. Did you begin your main paragraphs with good topic sentences?

IELTS Writing Task 2: four question types

Here are 4 questions that illustrate the different types of task 2 question. Can you name each type? Can you explain the big difference between the first and the second type?

1. Some people think that the only purpose of working hard is to earn money. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this opinion?
2. Some people believe that punishment is the only purpose of prisons, while others believe that prisons exist for various reasons. Discuss both views and give your opinion.
3. The number of plants and animals is declining. Explain this problem and suggest some solutions.
4. Many people around the world are choosing to move to live in cities. What problems do people experience in big cities? Should governments encourage people to move to smaller towns?

I’ll explain the differences in detail next Wednesday, but feel free to discuss your ideas in the "comments" area below.

IELTS Writing Task 2: question types

Here are the four types of question from [last week's lesson](#):

1. Opinion
2. Discussion + opinion
3. Problem + solution
4. 2-part question

Important points to remember:

1. An 'opinion' question asks for your view, not the views of other people, and you don't have to give both sides of the argument. Just make your opinion clear in the introduction, then explain it in the rest of the essay.
2. A 'discussion' question requires you to write about both sides of the argument, and you should write a similar amount for each view. If the question also asks for your opinion, you don't need an extra paragraph. Just make it clear in the introduction and conclusion which of the two views you agree with.
3. Type 3 is easy. Simply write a paragraph explaining the problem(s) and a paragraph explaining the solution(s). Some questions ask about 'causes' or 'effects': these would be part of the 'problem' paragraph.
4. For type 4, just answer the two questions. Write one paragraph about each.

IELTS Writing Task 2: examples give you ideas

If you can't think of any good ideas for an essay, try thinking about some examples first. Plan your essay around the examples. Take this question:

***Some people believe that hobbies need to be difficult to be enjoyable.
To what extent do you agree or disagree?***

Use examples to give you ideas:

- Make a list of some hobbies: either your own hobbies, or some typical hobbies that you can easily write about. Label each hobby 'easy' or 'difficult'.
- Look at your list. Is there a balance between easy and difficult hobbies, or is your list one-sided? The answer to this question will give you your overall opinion.
- Finally, write down a few reasons why each hobby is easy or difficult. Is there a connection between the difficulty of the hobby and the enjoyment you get from it?

IELTS Writing Task 2: 'hobbies' essay plan

Did you try planning some ideas for last week's essay question?

***Some people believe that hobbies need to be difficult to be enjoyable.
To what extent do you agree or disagree?***

When I wrote my list of hobbies, I realised that some were easy and others were difficult. As a result, I'd say that "I partly agree" with the statement.

Here's my 4-paragraph essay plan:

1. Introduction - write 2 sentences: introduce the topic, and give an overall answer.
2. Main paragraph - about difficult hobbies. My examples: swimming, football, chess. Most sports and games are difficult, but the challenge makes them more enjoyable, especially when you can see that you are improving.
3. Main paragraph - about easy hobbies. My examples: photography, reading, cinema. In my opinion, you do not need to be an expert to enjoy taking photos, reading books, or watching films. I find these activities both easy and enjoyable.
4. Conclusion - repeat / summarise your answer in one sentence.

IELTS Writing Task 2: 'hobbies' essay

I wrote the following essay with some of my students. We tried to keep it clear, concise and well-organised, but it's still good enough for a band 9.

***Some people believe that hobbies need to be difficult to be enjoyable.
To what extent do you agree or disagree?***

Some hobbies are relatively easy, while others present more of a challenge. Personally, I believe that both types of hobby can be fun, and I therefore disagree with the statement that hobbies need to be difficult in order to be enjoyable.

On the one hand, many people enjoy easy hobbies. One example of an activity that is easy for most people is swimming. This hobby requires very little equipment, it is simple to learn, and it is inexpensive. I remember learning to swim at my local swimming pool when I was a child, and it never felt like a demanding or challenging experience. Another hobby that I find easy and fun is photography. In my opinion, anyone can take interesting pictures without knowing too much about the technicalities of operating a camera. Despite being straightforward, taking photos is a satisfying activity.

On the other hand, difficult hobbies can sometimes be more exciting. If an activity is more challenging, we might feel a greater sense of satisfaction when we manage to do it successfully. For example, film editing is a hobby that requires a high level of knowledge and expertise. In my case, it took me around two years before I became competent at this activity, but now I enjoy it much more than I did when I started. I believe that many hobbies give us more pleasure when we reach a higher level of performance because the results are better and the feeling of achievement is greater.

In conclusion, simple hobbies can be fun and relaxing, but difficult hobbies can be equally pleasurable for different reasons.

Note:

Notice that we used examples as the basis of both main paragraphs.

IELTS Writing Task 2: 'university' topic

The book I mentioned in Monday's lesson (What are Universities for?) reminded me of this question from Cambridge IELTS 7:

Some people think that universities should provide graduates with the knowledge and skills needed in the workplace. Others think that the true function of a university should be to give access to knowledge for its own sake, regardless of whether the course is useful to an employer.

What, in your opinion, should be the function of a university?

Here are some ideas:

- It would probably be easiest to argue that universities should fulfil both roles (providing vocational skills **and** knowledge for its own sake).
- We could use examples to help us generate ideas: try to make a list of some vocational degree courses (that provide training for a specific job), and a list of courses that do not lead to a particular job.
- Write one main paragraph explaining the benefits (to the student and to society in general) of the two types of course.

IELTS Writing Task 2: 'prisons' topic

In today's lesson I'll try to explain what makes a good paragraph. We'll analyse a paragraph that I wrote with some of my students.

Paragraph about the purpose of prisons:

On the one hand, criminals do need to be punished in some way. A person who commits a crime must learn that unlawful actions have consequences. Prison sentences punish offenders because they lose their freedom, and are separated from family and friends. In this way, prison acts as a deterrent to make people think carefully before breaking the law. Last year in the UK, many people were given a prison sentence for rioting, and hopefully this punishment will deter them from similar behaviour in future.

Analysis:

- The paragraph contains 5 sentences, with a total of 85 words. This is the kind of length I suggest aiming for.
- The first sentence is short and simple. We often call this type of sentence a 'topic sentence' because it introduces the topic of the paragraph.
- Sentences 2, 3 and 4 develop the main idea in a logical, step-by-step way: crime has consequences - loss of freedom is the punishment - this stops people from breaking the law.
- Sentence 5 contains a real example.
- Remember that good vocabulary is the key to a high score. I've underlined the best words and phrases in the paragraph.

IELTS Writing Task 2: both sides or one side?

Can you see the difference between the two questions below?

- A) Explain the positives and negatives of this development.
- B) Is this a positive or negative development?

and these two questions:

- A) What are the advantages and disadvantages?
- B) Do the advantages outweigh the disadvantages?

and these two questions:

- A) Discuss both views and give your opinion.
- B) To what extent do you agree or disagree?

Answer:

The difference is that for all of the (A) questions you must explain both sides of the argument, whereas the (B) questions can be answered by giving both sides or by supporting only one side, depending on the view that you express in your introduction.

This is still the most common confusion that students ask me about. Make sure you understand the difference between the questions above; if you're still unsure, look through all of my task 2 lessons to see further advice and examples.

IELTS Writing Task 2: the importance of planning

When the question topic is difficult, planning becomes even more important. If you start writing your essay straight away, without preparing some ideas first, you will probably get stuck and start to panic!

Take this recent exam question:

The range and quality of food that we can buy has changed because of technological and scientific advances. Some people regard this change as an improvement, while others believe that it is harmful.

Discuss both views and give your own opinion.

I think you'll agree that this is a tricky question. My advice would be to spend about 10 minutes planning. Follow these steps before you start writing:

1. Take a couple of minutes to read and understand the question.
2. Decide what each of your 4 paragraphs should contain.
3. Spend around 6 minutes noting down ideas for the two points of view.

[Click here](#) to download an essay plan template that I use with my students

IELTS Writing Task 2: 'food technology' topic

Here are some ideas for last week's topic. The ideas are adapted from the 'genetic engineering' chapter in my [ebook](#).

The range and quality of food that we can buy has changed because of technological and scientific advances. Some people regard this change as an improvement, while others believe that it is harmful.

Discuss both views and give your own opinion.

Positives of advances in food technology:

- Farmers can produce crops that grow bigger and faster.
- Genetically modified crops may be more resistant to disease or insects.
- This could be important for food production in developing countries.
- Faster growing cereals, fruit and vegetables will mean more profit.
- Foods can be modified to look perfect and last longer.
- They may be more attractive to customers.

Negatives of advances in food technology:

- Many people distrust foods that have been modified or processed.
- They prefer organic foods which are produced without chemicals.
- Farming without fertilisers or pesticides is more environmentally friendly.
- There may be risks involved in the genetic engineering of foods.
- Genetically modified crops might change whole ecosystems.
- Food chains could be broken if crops are resistant to predators.

IELTS Writing Task 2: introduction without opinion

My normal advice for task 2 introductions is this: write two sentences - one to introduce the essay topic, and one to give a basic answer to the question. But what should you put in the second sentence (basic answer) if the question doesn't ask for your opinion?

Here are two example questions:

1. Many people believe that an effective public transport system is a key component of a modern city. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of public transport.
2. Crime rates tend to be higher in cities than in smaller towns. Explain some possible reasons for this problem, and suggest some solutions.

Here are two sample introductions:

1. Officials in many cities are keen to develop efficient public transport systems. While public transport has many benefits, there are also some drawbacks which are worth considering.
2. Cities generally experience higher levels of criminality than towns or villages. There are various reasons for this, but measures could be taken to tackle the problem.

Hopefully you can see that it's quite easy to write an introduction for these types of question. The approach is the same (topic + basic answer) whether the question asks for your opinion or not

IELTS Writing Task 2: fully respond to the question

One of the things that the examiner will check carefully is whether or not you have fully responded to the question. Here's a question that a student sent me:

Some people think that all teenagers should be required to do unpaid work in their free time to help the local community. They believe this would benefit both the individual teenager and society as a whole.

Do you agree or disagree?

The student who sent me this question wrote about the advantages and disadvantages of unpaid work for teenagers, but completely forgot to mention the benefits and/or drawbacks for society as a whole.

If you don't fully answer the question, it's extremely difficult to get a band 7.

IELTS Writing Task 2: completely disagree

When you completely agree or completely disagree with the question statement, you don't need to write about the other side of the argument. Just state your opinion and give reasons. Today I'll show you how to write a 'disagree' essay for this question:

Some people think that all teenagers should be required to do unpaid work in their free time to help the local community. They believe this would benefit both the individual teenager and society as a whole.

Do you agree or disagree?

Here's my 4-paragraph plan:

1. Introduction: introduce the topic of unpaid work for teenagers, and make it clear that you completely disagree with the idea of requiring (forcing) young people to do this.
2. First reason: explain why this idea would not benefit teenagers e.g. they are already busy with school work, they should be allowed to enjoy being young, they have many years of work ahead of them when they finish their studies.
3. Second reason: explain why this idea would not benefit society e.g. forcing young people to work goes against the values of a free society, the current system of volunteering is better, this idea would be impossible to enforce.
4. Conclusion: repeat your opinion that requiring teenagers to work benefits neither the teenagers nor society as a whole.

IELTS Writing Task 2: 'unpaid work' essay

Some people think that all teenagers should be required to do unpaid work in their free time to help the local community. They believe this would benefit both the individual teenager and society as a whole.

Do you agree or disagree?

Many young people work on a volunteer basis, and this can only be beneficial for both the individual and society as a whole. However, I do not agree that we should therefore force all teenagers to do unpaid work.

Most young people are already under enough pressure with their studies, without being given the added responsibility of working in their spare time. School is just as demanding as a full-time job, and teachers expect their students to do homework and exam revision on top of attending lessons every day. When young people do have some free time, we should encourage them to enjoy it with their friends or to spend it doing sports and other leisure activities. They have many years of work ahead of them when they finish their studies.

At the same time, I do not believe that society has anything to gain from obliging young people to do unpaid work. In fact, I would argue that it goes against the values of a free and fair society to force a group of people to do something against their will. Doing this can only lead to resentment amongst young people, who would feel that they were being used, and parents, who would not want to be told how to raise their children. Currently, nobody is forced to volunteer, and this is surely the best system.

In conclusion, teenagers may choose to work for free and help others, but in my opinion we should not make this compulsory.

(250 words, band 9)

IELTS Writing Task 2: before you start writing

Before you start writing your task 2 essay, you need to do two things:

1. Plan your overall essay structure (ideally 4 paragraphs)
2. Spend some time thinking of ideas for the main body paragraphs

Here are two recent exam questions that you could try writing a plan for:

The main reason people go to work is to earn money.

To what extent do you agree or disagree?

Many people prefer to rent a house rather than buying one. Describe the advantages and disadvantages of renting.

IELTS Writing Task 2: from ideas to paragraph

I always tell my students to plan ideas for their main body paragraphs. Let's look at how to put some ideas together to make a paragraph. Here's the question:

***The main reason people go to work is to earn money.
To what extent do you agree or disagree?***

Ideas for one main paragraph:

- agree that money is the main reason people work
- people look at salary first, they rarely take a salary cut
- need to live, pay bills, food etc.
- look after our families, save for the future
- otherwise, most people would probably choose not to work

Full paragraph using the ideas above:

I agree that the majority of people work in order to earn money. Before taking any other factors into account, it is normal to first consider the salary that a particular post offers, and it is rare to hear of a person who happily takes a cut in pay when beginning a new job. We all need money to pay for our basic necessities, such as accommodation, bills and food. Many adults also have families who depend on the wages they earn, and at the same time they are conscious of the need to save for the future. If we no longer needed money, I doubt most of us would choose to continue in our jobs.

(116 words)

IELTS Writing Task 2: idea and paragraph

My students and I followed the advice in [last week's lesson](#) to write a paragraph for the topic below.

The number of plants and animals is declining. Describe the problem and suggest some solutions.

Ideas for describing the problem:

- over-farming, land needed for crops and animals
- cutting down trees destroys natural habitats, animals become extinct
- industrial waste in rivers, sea
- chemicals kill fish and plants, interrupt natural cycles / food chain

It seemed that we had 2 main ideas, so we wrote a 2-idea paragraph:

There are two main reasons why plants and animals are disappearing. Firstly, in many parts of the world trees are being cut down to make way for farmland on which to grow crops and keep animals. The result of this is that natural habitats are being destroyed, and in some cases whole species of animals are becoming extinct. Secondly, human activity is also responsible for the destruction of aquatic life as domestic and industrial waste is pumped into rivers and seas. This chemical waste

kills plants and fish, interrupting natural cycles and having a devastating effect on food chains.

(99 words)

IELTS Writing Task 2: problem & solution introduction

My advice for task 2 introductions is to write them very quickly. Just write 2 sentences: one to introduce the topic, and one to give a basic answer. Let's look at how to do this for a "problem and solution" question:

The number of plants and animals is declining. Describe some reasons for this problem and suggest some solutions.

Here's my introduction:

It is undeniable that wildlife habitats are being destroyed and whole species of plants and animals are disappearing. There are several causes of this alarming trend, but measures could certainly be taken to tackle the problem.

Note:

In the second sentence you don't need to give any causes or solutions; save your ideas for the main paragraphs.

IELTS Writing Task 2: 'discussion' introduction

Last week we looked at a 'problem and solution' introduction. Today I'll use the same technique (2 sentences: topic + basic answer) to write a 'discussion and opinion' introduction.

Here's a question (from Cambridge IELTS 6):

Successful sports professionals can earn a great deal more money than people in other important professions. Some people think this is fully justified while others think it is unfair.

Discuss both these views and give your own opinion.

Here's my 2-sentence introduction:

It is true that sports stars often earn huge salaries. While there are some good reasons why this is the case, I personally believe that it is wrong for these people to be paid more than other professionals.

IELTS Writing Task 2: advantages and disadvantages

Albert sent me this recent exam question:

In many countries nowadays, young single people no longer stay with their parents until they are married, but leave to study or work somewhere else.

Do you think this trend has more advantages or disadvantages?

Here are some tips to help with this kind of question:

1. Notice that the question includes the words "do you think". This tells you that you need to give your own opinion, as well as discussing both the advantages and disadvantages. Put your opinion in the introduction and conclusion, and don't be afraid to use the word "I" (e.g. I believe) to make it clear what **you** think.
2. You won't be able to write a good essay if you don't plan your ideas first. Spend 2-3 minutes noting down ideas for the advantages of leaving home before marriage, then 2-3 minutes writing notes for the disadvantages. Then decide what your opinion is, according to whether you have more advantages or disadvantages.
3. If you can't think of any ideas, start by thinking of some examples e.g. Did you or any of your friends leave home before getting married? Do you know anyone who lived with their parents until they got married? What were the reasons and benefits or drawbacks of each decision?

IELTS Writing Task 2: how to use your 40 minutes

You have 40 minutes for task 2, so try organising your time in the following way. Please note that these are suggestions, not rules.

First 10 minutes

Read the question and make sure you understand what it is asking you to do. Write a plan for a 4-paragraph essay (introduction, 2 main paragraphs, conclusion) and spend most of the 10 minutes thinking of ideas for the 2 main paragraphs.

5 minutes

Write your introduction: 2 sentences are enough.

20 minutes

Spend 10 minutes on each of your main body paragraphs. These are the most important part of your essay, and the key to a high score.

Last 5 minutes

Write a quick conclusion then check your work.

IELTS Writing Task 2: the 10-minute plan

If you are struggling to improve your score for writing task 2, the solution might be to spend more time planning before you start writing.

I asked the students on my most recent [one-day course](#) to spend 10 minutes planning a question about whether the only purpose of prisons is to punish people. Here are the ideas that my students had:

Paragraph 2: prisons do punish offenders

Punishment makes offenders think, reflect, feel sorry, understand the consequences (that we have choices about the actions we take), suffering, revenge / justice for victims, debt to society, taking away freedom and privileges, miss family, deter people from committing crimes in future - fear of prison

Paragraph 3: other purposes of prisons

Reflection time, rehabilitation - help the prisoner to prepare for normal life: new skills, education, courses, qualifications, treatment - reform, reeducate, find employment, re-enter society - address the root causes of crime

With a plan like this, you should find it easier to write a great essay.

IELTS Writing Task 2: answer all parts of the question

A student sent me the following question:

The role of prisons should be to punish criminals who have committed serious crimes. Training courses and education offered to prisoners are a waste of taxpayer's money. To what extent do you agree or disagree?

The student who sent me this question noticed that it contains two sub-topics:

1. Should the role of prisons be to punish serious criminals, not petty criminals (less serious criminals)?
2. Are training courses and education a waste of money?

Apparently there is a model essay for this question which only addresses the second sub-topic. I think that would be a mistake; you should try to answer all parts of the question.

In this case, the two sub-topics help you because they tell you what you should write about in your two main body paragraphs. Always study the question carefully, and make sure you know exactly what it is asking you to do!

IELTS Writing Task 2: no surprises!

The examiners' band descriptor sheet states that a band 7 essay "***presents a clear position throughout the response***".

A "clear position" means that your opinion must be clear (if the question asks for it), and "throughout the response" means from the beginning to the end of your essay.

For this reason, it's a bad idea to save your opinion for the conclusion. We don't like 'surprise conclusions' in English academic writing. Instead, you should state your position in the introduction, support it in your main paragraphs, and repeat or summarise it in the conclusion.

IELTS Writing Task 2: introduction and conclusion

In [last week's lesson](#), I explained why you shouldn't save your opinion for a 'surprise conclusion'. Look at the following introduction and conclusion for an essay about whether it is better for students to work alone or in a group:

Introduction

People have different views about the most effective way for students to work. While there are some advantages to studying alone, I personally believe that group work is usually more productive.

Conclusion

In conclusion, both individual and group study can be useful under different circumstances, but I generally prefer to work with others as part of a team.

Notice that my 'position' is clear in the introduction, so the conclusion simply repeats my view in a different way.

IELTS Writing Task 2: 'music' topic

Arnie shared this question about music:

There are many different types of music in the world today. Why do we need music? Is the traditional music of a country more important than the international music that is heard everywhere nowadays?

Here's a quick plan to show you how I would approach this question:

1. Introduction: Paraphrase the idea that many types of music are found around the world, then briefly answer both parts of the question.
2. Paragraph answering the first question: Explain why we need music e.g. for enjoyment, to express ideas and emotions. Give an example from your experience, and/or explain what life would be like without music.
3. Paragraph answering the second question: It might be easier to argue that traditional music is more important e.g. because it expresses cultural identity, customs, history. Give an example from your country, and/or explain how you would feel if traditional music disappeared.
4. Conclusion: Repeat / summarise your views.

I'll continue with this question next week.

IELTS Writing Task 2: correct the mistakes

Several people tried writing about the [music topic](#) in last week's lesson. Try to correct the mistakes that they made in the sentences below. I'll share my full essay next week.

1. We have different types of music all over the world, we need music for various reasons.
2. The first I think we need music almost for enjoyment.
3. People listening to a variety of music is due to a number of reasons.
4. It is clear cut evidence why we need for music.
5. Traditional music of a country has more weight that the famous international music.
6. At a glance, we need music for enjoyment.
7. The people is more happier listening all kind the rhythms and sounds than without it.
8. It helps to make relaxed from any sort of strain.
9. If the international music would replace it then the whole historical experience of a country will die

IELTS Writing Task 2: 'music' essay

There are many different types of music in the world today. Why do we need music? Is the traditional music of a country more important than the international music that is heard everywhere nowadays?

It is true that a rich variety of musical styles can be found around the world. Music is a vital part of all human cultures for a range of reasons, and I would argue that traditional music is more important than modern, international music.

Music is something that accompanies all of us throughout our lives. As children, we are taught songs by our parents and teachers as a means of learning language, or simply as a form of enjoyment. Children delight in singing with others, and it would appear that the act of singing in a group creates a connection between participants, regardless of their age. Later in life, people's musical preferences develop, and we come to see our favourite songs as part of our life stories. Music both expresses and arouses emotions in a way that words alone cannot. In short, it is difficult to imagine life without it.

In my opinion, traditional music should be valued over the international music that has become so popular. International pop music is often catchy and fun, but it is essentially a commercial product that is marketed and sold by business people. Traditional music, by contrast, expresses the culture, customs and history of a country. Traditional styles, such as ...(example)..., connect us to the past and form part of our cultural identity. It would be a real pity if pop music became so predominant that these national styles disappeared.

In conclusion, music is a necessary part of human existence, and I believe that traditional music should be given more importance than international music.

(261 words, band 9)

IELTS Writing Task 2: collocations

Collocations are groups of words that are often found together. Native speakers have a large repertoire of these word groups, and can use them without thinking. Language learners need to build their own repertoire of collocations through reading and listening, and by noticing word groups that commonly occur.

Here are some collocations from the [essay](#) I wrote last week:

- a rich variety
- a vital part, a necessary part
- a range of reasons
- musical preferences
- life stories
- express emotions, arouse emotions
- a commercial product
- cultural identity
- human existence
- give importance

These are just some of the most obvious collocations in the essay. We could also add grammatical collocations like 'a means of' and 'valued over'. To read more about collocations, click [here](#) and [here](#).