* **[IELTS Writing Task 2: how to write a paragraph](http://ielts-simon.com/ielts-help-and-english-pr/2011/04/ielts-writing-task-2-how-to-write-a-paragraph.html)**
* 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?
* Topic sentence to introduce the idea of gun control
* risk of accidents, danger to children
* more violent crimes, criminals will use guns, police will need guns
* higher suicide rates
* 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.
* In many countries, gun ownership is strictly controlled.
* Supporters of this policy point out the risk of accidents with guns, especially when children can gain access to them.
* 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.
* Furthermore, suicide rates have been shown to rise in places where guns are legal.
* 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: 'museums' essay**](http://ielts-simon.com/ielts-help-and-english-pr/2011/05/ielts-writing-task-2-museums-essay.html)
* ***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 you own opinion.***
* People have different views about the role and function of museums. In my opinion, museums can and should be both entertaining and educational.
* On the one hand, it can be argued that the main role of a museum is to entertain. Museums are tourist attractions, and their aim is to exhibit a collection of interesting objects that many people will want to see. The average visitor may become bored if he or she has to read or listen to too much educational content, so museums often put more of an emphasis on enjoyment rather than learning. This type of museum is designed to be visually spectacular, and may have interactive activities or even games as part of its exhibitions.
* On the other hand, some people argue that museums should focus on education. The aim of any exhibition should be to teach visitors something that they did not previously know. Usually this means that the history behind the museum’s exhibits needs to be explained, and this can be done in various ways. Some museums employ professional guides to talk to their visitors, while other museums offer headsets so that visitors can listen to detailed commentary about the exhibition. In this way, museums can play an important role in teaching people about history, culture, science and many other aspects of life.
* In conclusion, it seems to me that a good museum should be able to offer an interesting, enjoyable and educational experience so that people can have fun and learn something at the same time.
* (253 words, band 9)
* [**IELTS Writing Task 2: use related words**](http://ielts-simon.com/ielts-help-and-english-pr/2011/05/ielts-writing-task-2-use-related-words.html)
* Look again at last week's question:
* ***Some people think that museums should be enjoyable places to entertainpeople, while others believe that the purpose of museums is to educate.***  
  ***Discuss both views and give you 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: band 9 paragraph**](http://ielts-simon.com/ielts-help-and-english-pr/2011/05/ielts-writing-task-2-band-9-paragraph.html)
* Below is a 'band 9' paragraph about the benefits of zoos. I took the vocabulary ideas from [this lesson (click here)](http://ielts-simon.com/ielts-help-and-english-pr/2010/09/ielts-writing-task-2-zoo-topic.html" \o "this lesson (click here)" \t "_self) and organised them in the following way:
* Simple topic sentence.
* The main benefit is that...
* Another advantage of zoos is that...
* From a personal point of view,...
* I've underlined the band 9 vocabulary.
* 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: 'sports salaries' topic**](http://ielts-simon.com/ielts-help-and-english-pr/2011/06/ielts-writing-task-2-sports-salaries-topic.html)
* As I've said before, you can't get a high score for IELTS writing task 2 if you don't have good ideas about the question topic. Here are some ideas from my [ebook](http://ielts-simon.com/ielts-help-and-english-pr/ielts-ebook.html" \t "_self)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.
* [**IELTS Writing Task 2: globalisation of culture**](http://ielts-simon.com/ielts-help-and-english-pr/2011/07/ielts-writing-task-2-globalisation-of-culture.html)
* 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: 'hobbies' essay**](http://ielts-simon.com/ielts-help-and-english-pr/2012/04/ielts-writing-task-2-hobbies-essay.html)
* 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: books, radio, TV**](http://ielts-simon.com/ielts-help-and-english-pr/2012/02/ielts-writing-task-2-books-radio-tv.html)
* 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: 'prisons' topic**](http://ielts-simon.com/ielts-help-and-english-pr/2012/05/ielts-writing-task-2-prisons-topic.html)
* 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.
* ***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: 'unpaid work' essay**](http://ielts-simon.com/ielts-help-and-english-pr/2012/06/ielts-writing-task-2-unpaid-work-essay.html)
* ***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)
* **ELTS 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:
* Introduction: I partly agree. Make it clear that you have a balanced opinion.
* 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.
* 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.
* 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.
* You can see my 4-paragraph plan in the lesson, but a student asked me to explain exactly how we can 'partly agree'. So here's my sample introduction:
* *It is often argued that the act of sending a man to the moon has been of no benefit to normal people. While I agree that this is true in****practical****terms, I believe that the****psychological****impact of this great achievement should not be underestimated.*
* **Note:**  
  Can you see how I create a balanced answer by using a 'while' sentence to contrast the 'practical' and 'psychological' impacts of the moon landing?