## **Task: Describing Trends**

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### **1. Ways of expressing numbers**

There are a number of different ways of expressing the same figure in English. For example, we can say ‘a half’, ‘one in two’ or ‘fifty per cent’ and they all mean the same. It is a good idea to vary the way you express figures in your description of the table or chart/graph instead of repeating the same word or expression.

All the phrases below can be used to describe figures.

| One in five | one in four | one in ten |
| --- | --- | --- |
| One in three | Three out of four | Three quarters |
| Two out of three | Two thirds | A third |
| A quarter | A fifth | A tenth |

You can also describe **increases** and **decreases** by using fractions to show the **size of the change** over a **certain period**. For example:

The cost of rents **doubled** in less than a year.

Birth rates **have halved** since the turn of the century.

By July, the price of petrol had fallen **by a third.**

The number of school leavers going on to university has risen **by a quarter** since 1980.

**Activity:** Now look again at your chart/graph. Use expressions from above to write 3 to 5 new sentences to describe your illustration. Remember to use a variety of ways to describe the figures.

**2. Using quantifiers**

While writing your report, you may have to describe amounts. You will need to be careful about using quantifiers ­ words like ‘much’, ‘many’, ‘some’, etc.

| a large amount | a little | none of |
| --- | --- | --- |
| a lot of | a small amount | several |
| many | a small number | no |
| much | few |  |
| fewer more | less/ the least |  |
| more | fewer |  |
| most | fewer less |  |
| the majority of |  |  |

The table below shows how men and women spend their time each day. It is a static table ­ i.e. it does not show changes over time, but compares values at one point in time. Notice also that the table has two sets of figures: the black figures show time spent in minutes, while the blue figures show the actual number of people asked who said that they do these activities.

**Activity:** Now look at the table and complete the description by choosing the best word or phrase for each gap.

**Time spent by adults (over 16) on daily activities**

|  |  |  | **Men** |  | **Women** |  | **All** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  | (total interviewed = 100) |  | (total interviewed = 100) |  |  |
|  |  |  | **Average minutes per day** |  |  |  |  |
|  | **Activity** |  | **(Number of people participating in activity)** | | |  |  |
|  | Sleep |  | 503 |  | 513 |  | 508 |
|  |  | **100** | | **100** | |  |  |
|  | Personal care i.e. |  | 41 |  | 52 |  | 47 |
|  | wash/dress | **97** | | **98** | |  |  |
|  | Housework |  | 126 |  | 215 |  | 173 |
|  |  | **85** | | **96** | |  |  |
|  | Entertainment and |  | 6 |  | 6 |  | 6 |
|  | Culture | **5** | | **6** | |  |  |
|  | Hobbies and games |  | 26 |  | 16 |  | 21 |
|  |  | **26** | | **22** | |  |  |
|  | Watching TV |  | 161 |  | 137 |  | 148 |
|  |  | **88** | | **87** | |  |  |
|  | Childcare |  | 11 |  | 28 |  | 20 |
|  |  |  | **14** |  | **24** |  |  |

*(adapted from National Statistics information)*

The table shows how **1. much** time people spend on certain daily activities. Not surprisingly, everybody surveyed spent **2.** **a lot of** time sleeping. However, men spent slightly **3.** **less** time sleeping than women did. After sleeping, the next most time­ consuming activity was housework, taking up 178 minutes per day, on average. Again, though, there was a marked difference between men and women, with women spending **4. much** more minutes per day on this activity than men. In addition, a greater **5. number** of women than men reported that they spent time on housework and childcare. In contrast, men spent a greater **6.** **amount** of time on their hobbies and games than women did. Very **7**.**few** people surveyed spent much free time on entertainment and culture. For the **8**.**majority** of people, free time was spent watching television. Almost nine out of ten people reported that they spent **9**. **several** hours watching TV every day.

**3. Making approximations**

Chart/graphs do not always have very convenient numbers. In real life things are not that simply and they are not likely to show figures that rise and fall by exact fractions, such as a half or a third. What you need to do is make approximations. For example, if real sales figures for oranges rose from 4000 kilos to 7850 kilos, you can say that orange sales almost doubled.

**Activity (a)** Here are some useful words and phrases for making approximations Match phrases with the same meaning:

1. just over a around

2. approximately b nearly

3. just under c slightly more than

**(b)** Now write a few sentences about your graph/chart using quantifiers and approximations (where applicable).

**(Nafisa)** Women spend 28 hours on a daily basis in childcare, whereas men spend slightly less than half of that time in the similar activity.

**(Ashiqul)** Women on average spent much more time on house work compared to men .

**(Jarif)** Men spend more than half again as much time on their hobbies and playing games as women.

**(Fahmid)** Men have spent slightly more time watching TV than women.

**(Rafi)** By comparing the average time spent by men and women on watching television, everyday men spend significantly 24 minutes more time than a woman. -

**(Shihab)** Women have slept and taken personal care more than men did. On the other hand, men have spent much more time on games and hobbies than women did, yet the time spent on entertainment has been the same for both men and women. Moreover, women have spent almost twice as much time than men on childcare, which is about 24 hours.

**(Monisha)** The number of men and women participating in entertainment and cultural activities was approximately equal.

**4. Dynamic Charts and Verb Tenses**

Some dynamic charts show a change in values from one time in the past to another time in the past. Other charts, however, may compare the past with the present. Occasionally, charts even show predictions about the future. In each case, you need to make sure that you are using the correct verb tenses to describe the chart. For example, you could

use:

**Present perfect:** *The price of oil* *has risen* *by €0.10 every month since January.*

**Present perfect continuous:** *Average temperatures* *have been increasing* *since the beginning of the* *century.*

**Future perfect:** *The population* *will have reached* *sixty million by 2030.*

Remember that it is important to use the correct time phrases with the tense you are using.

**Activity**

**(a):** Now look below and complete the description with the correct verb tense.

The chart **1…shows……..** (show) the ratio of the population aged 65 and over to the labour force of twelve different countries, and how this **2. has changed** (change) by 2020.

It is clear from the chart that in 2000 some countries already had a high ratio. In Italy, for example, the population aged 65 and over **3. was** (be) over 40% of the size of the working population. Hungary also **4 had** (have) a high ratio in 2000. Its retired population was over 30% the size of its working population. However, the figure varied a lot between countries. In Turkey and Korea, for example, it **5. was** (be) only just over 10%. The chart also **6.made** (make) predictions about how this ratio **7. will have changed** (change) in the future. It is clear that all the countries shown have an aging population. Hungary **8. has had**(have) the biggest change. By 2020 the ratio of retired people to workers**9. have reached** (reach) almost 60%. This is an increase of almost 25%. Even in Korea the ratio **10 had increased** (increase) to over 30% by 2020.

**(b)** Now revise some of your sentences checking for the correct verb tense.

**5. Describing increase and decrease**

From your handout, you learned some useful phrases for describing increases and decreases. There are also two useful sentence structures for doing this:

**1.** [noun phrase] + [verb] + [adverb]

**For example:** The unemployment rate rose rapidly.

The cost of living fell dramatically.

**2.** [There is/are] + [noun phrase]

**For example:** There was a rise in unemployment.

There has been an increase in the cost of living.

**Activity (a) Finish each sentence below so that it means the same as the one given.**

1. The price of oil rose sharply.

There was a significant rise in the price of Oil.

2. There is a noticeable increase in temperature from May onwards.

Temperature has increased noticeably starting from May.

3. The number of people attending the theatre has fallen dramatically.

There has been a dramatic drop in the number of people attending the theatre.

4. There had been a steady rise in DVD sales for the first six months of the year.

DVD sales have seen a consistent increase in sales for the first six months of the year

5. There has been a rapid growth in the use of alternative energy sources.

The use of alternative energy sources has increased sharply.

**Activity (b):** The highlighted words in the description of the chart below are useful phrases for describing increases and decreases. Read the report below carefully and find phrases from the text which mean the same as:

went up and down frequently - **fluctuated a great deal**

did not change (2 phrases) - **remained stable, stayed at this level**

went up a little - **had risen slightly, there was a small increase**

went up very quickly (2 phrases) - **rose sharply,** **the figure shot up**

arrived at its highest point - **reached a peak**

went up noticeably over a period - **there was a marked upward trend**

went down (2 phrases) - **had** **fallen to, there was another small drop**

went down gradually over a period - **there was a steady downward trend**

The line graph shows figures for unemployment in the UK workforce between May 2003 and July 2006. It is clear from the chart that the rate of unemployment **fluctuated a great deal** during this time. At the beginning of the period, unemployment stood at 5.1 per cent. A few months later the figure **had risen slightly** to 5.2 per cent. Unemployment then **remained stable** until September 2003. From this point on **there was a steady downward trend** and by January 2004 the rate **had** **fallen to** 4.9 per cent. It **stayed at this level** until May the same year, but from May to July **there was another small drop** of 1 per cent. There were no further changes in the level of unemploymentuntil March the following year. From March to May 2005, **there was a small increase** of 1 per cent, but this did not last long and the figure had fallen back to 4.8 per cent by July. From September 2005 onwards, however, **there was a marked upward trend** in the rate of unemployment in the UK. From September 2005 to November the same year, **the figure shot up** from 4.8 to 5.2 per cent. The rate remained stable for a few months, but then **rose sharply** again, and had **reached a peak** of 5.7 per cent by July 2006.

**6. Prepositions of time**

While describing dynamic charts/graphs, correct use of prepositions is also important. Here are some of the main prepositions you will need to use:

**in** [month / year / morning, afternoon etc]

**at** [9 o’clock, 10.30 am etc]

**from**..[a point in time]..**to**… [another point]

**between…[**a point in time]..**and**… [another point]

**during** [a period of time]

**before** [a point in time or a period of time]

**after** [a point in time or a period of time]

**by** [a point of time arrived at]

**until** [a point of time reached]

**since** [from a point in the past until now]

**Activity:** Now complete each of these sentences with the correct preposition.

1. **……In…** January there was a noticeable rise in the number of people taking sick leave from work.

2. Temperatures usually reach a peak **…at……** about 1 o’clock in the afternoon.

3. From 1997 **……to…** 2006 there was a steady increase in sales of organic produce.

4. **…During……** the recession, unemployment grew steadily.

5. Television audience viewing figures rise dramatically **…at……** 6 o’clock in the evening.

6. **…In……** June sales figures were low, but later they began to increase rapidly.

7. The price of oil had shot up to $70 per barrel **…in……** August.

8. From November **…until……** the end of the year energy consumption continued to rise.

9. There has been a marked decrease in road accidents **since** the new laws were introduced in 2005.

**7. Preposition to describe increase and decrease**

You will also need to be careful when using prepositions with numbers. Simply changing the preposition can change the whole meaning of a sentence. For example, what is the difference between these two sentences?

1. Newspaper circulation rose **by** 20,000 newspapers per month.
2. Newspaper circulation rose **to** 20,000 newspapers per month.

Sentence 1 *describes the size of the increase*. Perhaps newspaper circulation was already 40,000 per month, and there has been a 20,000 per month increase. The final figure will be 60,000 per month.

Sentence 2 *shows the point reached*. Perhaps newspaper circulation had been 15,000 per month and it then rose by another 5,000 to reach 20,000 per month.

Remember also that not all words for describing rise and fall will take a preposition, and the preposition will depend on whether you are using the word as a verb or a noun. See the table below for more details:

| **Verbs that take a** |  | **Verbs that do not take** |  | **Nouns that take a** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Preposition** |  | **a preposition** |  | **Preposition** |
| rise to/by |  | reach |  | a rise of |
| increase to/by |  |  |  | an increase of |
| fall to/by |  |  |  | a fall of |
| drop to/by |  |  |  | a decrease of |
| shoot up to/by |  |  |  |  |
| plunge to/by |  |  |  |  |
| stay at |  |  |  |  |
| remain at |  |  |  |  |
| fluctuate between/around |  |  |  |  |

**Activity:** Now look at the chart and complete the report below with a suitable preposition where needed.

The chart shows fluctuations in the price of crude oil over a thirty five year period, and clearly illustrates how oil prices are affected by world events.

In general there has been an upward trend in the price of crude oil **[1]……..** 1970, when it was only $1.30 per barrel. The oil embargo of the early 1970s, however, caused the price to rise sharply **[2]……..** nearly $11 per barrel. The crisis ended soon afterwards, but the price remained **[3]……..**around $11 to $13 per barrel until 1979. The Iranian revolution of that year had a huge impact on oil prices, which shot up **[4]……..** $17 to reach **[5]……..** about $30 per barrel in the same year. The following Iran­Iraq war caused a further increase, and the price reached **[6]……..** a peak **[7]……..** nearly $36 in 1980. From that point until 1985, the price fell steadily. However, from 1985 to1986 the price suddenly plunged **[8]……..** $13. For the next few years the price fluctuated **[9]……..**$14, but with the invasion of Kuwait in 1990 there was a sudden rise **[10]……..** $5. The price quickly fell again and remained stable for most of the 1990s. Things changed once again at the end of the decade, and from 1999 to 2000 the price increased **[11]……..** almost $10 per barrel. Despite a slight drop in 2000, the rise continued and by the end of the period, the price of crude oil had shot up **[12]……..** a peak of $50 per barrel.

**8. Using appropriate transitional words**

It is very important to use proper and appropriate transitional words while describing different trends in the report. Skim through the sample reports in Section 2, 4 (a), 5 (b) and 7 and make a list of transitional words that have been used.

**9. Using Formal Style**

There are a number of ways to make your writing more formal in style. As a general rule, remember that formal writing is different from spoken language, and your report should not sound informal or conversational. Here a number of things you should avoid.

**Activity:** Match the rules on the left with the examples on the right.

| 1 | Do not use contractions | a) Of course, we all know what big nature­lovers car manufactures are. |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 2 | Avoid using phrasal verbs | b) Nobody wants war, do they? |
| 3 | Avoid using idioms | c) It isn’t only the government who are to blame. |
| 4 | Do not use tag questions | d) If you ask me, what we should do i… |
| 5 | Do not use irony or sarcasm | e) If we keep on like this, we will have used up all our resources. |
| 6 | Avoid conversational style | f )There are loads and loads of reasons why this will not work |
| 7 | Avoid exaggeration | g) That idea is just a pipe dream. |

**Once you have finished describing your chart/graph, revise your writing for a more formal style.**