



IELTS WRITING BAND 9 ESSAYS

A GUIDE TO WRITING HIGH QUALITY IELTS ESSAYS

Dr Bruce A Smart

Includes 40 sample essays with notes



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Includes 40 sample essays with notes

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IELTS Writing - Band 9 Essays

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1. Table of Contents

1. Table of Contents	4
2. About the Author	10
3. Introduction	11
4. Essays, Language and Communication	13
5. Strategies and Hints for IELTS Writing	14
Grammar Hints.....	14
Use passive forms	15
Use plural forms.....	15
Use simple past and present tenses	15
Misuse of Pronouns	16
Articles (A/An/The/No Article).....	17
Vocabulary	18
Language Variation	19
Commonly Misused Words.....	20
Avoid Unnecessary Language - Fillers.....	23
Unnecessary Language - Duplication	24
Avoid Oral Language	24
Avoid “some/those” Before General Nouns.....	25
Use Precise Language.....	26
Use Positive Language – Negatives of Positives rather than Negatives	27
Ensure that Subjects are Fully Described.....	27
Avoid Leaving Readers Hanging	28
Ideas Generation.....	29
Identifying the Topic	29
Defining a Topic	29
Is the Topic Binary or Graded?.....	30
Pros and Cons.....	31
Have Stakeholders Been Considered?	32
Dimensions – Time, Place and Culture.....	32
Logical Chains.....	33

6. The Academic Task 1 Essay	35
Step 1 – Organising the information – thinking time.....	35
Step 2 – Writing the Introduction	35
Step 3 – Writing the Body	35
7. Academic Task 1 Sample Essays	37
General Task 1 Useful Language	37
Diagram – Tourist Island	40
Essay Notes	41
Flowchart - Silkworm	42
Essay Notes	43
Line Graph – Telephone Calls.....	44
Essay Notes	45
Bar Graph – School Qualifications	47
Essay Notes	48
Bar and Line Graph – Employment	49
Essay Notes	50
Bar Graph and Scatter Plot – Fast Food	51
Essay Notes	52
Line Graph – Aging Population	54
Essay Notes	55
Pie Chart – University Expenses.....	57
Essay Notes	58
Bar Graph and Table – Population in Iran and Spain	60
Essay Notes	61
Pie Chart And Bar Graph – Land Degradation.....	62
Essay notes.....	63
8. The General Task 1 Letter	64
Step 1 – Organising the information – thinking time.....	64
Step 2 – Writing the Introduction	64
Step 3 – Writing the Explanation	65
Step 4 – Writing the Request	65
Step 5 – Concluding the Letter.....	65

9. General Task 1 Letter Examples.....	66
General Task 1 Useful Language	66
1. Letter – Hot Water	70
Notes.....	70
2. Letter - Restaurant	72
Notes.....	72
3. Letter – Coming for a Holiday	74
Notes.....	74
4. Letter - Accommodation	76
Notes.....	76
5. Letter – Car Accident.....	78
Notes.....	78
6. Letter – Cheque Book.....	80
Notes.....	80
7. Letter - Dogs.....	82
Notes.....	82
8. Letter – Philosophy or Computer Science.....	84
Notes.....	84
9. Letter - Accident.....	86
Notes.....	86
10. Letter - Babysitting.....	88
Notes.....	88
10. The Task 2 Essay	90
Step 1 – Analysing the question.....	90
Step 2 – Write a short plan	92
Step 3 – Write the Introduction	92
Step 4 – Write the Body	93
Step 5 – Write the Conclusion	94
11. Topics and Sample Essays.....	95
Topic 1 – Education.....	95
General Topic Information.....	95
Topic Vocabulary.....	98

Sample Essay – Higher Education Costs.....	100
Essay Notes	101
Essay Vocabulary.....	102
Topic 2 - Media	103
General Topic Information.....	103
Topic Vocabulary.....	106
Sample Essay – Editorial Choices	108
Essay Notes	109
Essay Vocabulary.....	110
Topic 3 - Society	111
General Topic Information.....	111
Topic Vocabulary.....	112
Sample Essay – Working From Home	114
Essay Notes	115
Essay Vocabulary.....	116
Topic 4 – Environment	117
General Topic Information.....	117
Topic Vocabulary.....	119
Sample Essay – Extinction	120
Essay Notes	120
Essay Vocabulary.....	122
Topic 5 – The Arts	123
General Topic Information.....	123
Topic Vocabulary.....	124
Sample Essay – Art and Quality of Life.....	125
Essay Notes	126
Essay Vocabulary.....	127
Topic 6 – Government and Health	128
General Topic Information.....	128
Topic Vocabulary.....	129
Sample Essay – Health Care Providers	131
Essay Notes	132
Essay Vocabulary.....	133
Topic 7 – Science and Technology	134
General Topic Information.....	134

Topic Vocabulary.....	135
Sample Essay – Mobile Phones.....	136
Essay Notes	137
Essay Vocabulary.....	137
Topic 8 – Law.....	139
General Topic Information.....	139
Topic Vocabulary.....	141
Sample Essay – Mandatory Sentencing	143
Essay Notes	144
Key vocabulary	145
Topic 9 – Women and Families	147
General Topic Information.....	147
Topic Vocabulary.....	148
Sample Essay – University Quotas	149
Essay Notes	150
Essay Vocabulary.....	150
Topic 10 – Tourism.....	152
General Topic Information.....	152
Topic Vocabulary.....	153
Sample Essay – Tourist Behaviour	154
Essay Notes	155
Essay Vocabulary.....	155
11. Additional Essays	157
1. Essay – Gap Years.....	157
Essay Notes	157
Essay Vocabulary.....	159
2. Essay – Artistic Freedom	160
Essay Notes	161
Essay Vocabulary.....	161
3. Essay – Moral Teaching for Children.....	163
Essay Notes	164
Essay Vocabulary.....	165
4. Essay - Memorisation.....	166
Essay Notes	166

Essay Vocabulary.....	168
5. Essay – Music	169
Essay Notes	170
Essay Vocabulary.....	171
6. Essay – Purpose of Universities.....	173
Essay Notes	174
Essay Vocabulary.....	175
7. Essay – Financial Management for Children.....	176
Essay Notes	177
Essay Vocabulary.....	178
8. Essay Topic – Advertising	179
Essay Notes	180
Essay Vocabulary.....	181
9. Essay Topic – Rewards or Discipline?.....	182
Essay Notes	183
Essay Vocabulary.....	184
10. Essay Topic – Developing Countries.....	185
Essay Notes	186
Essay Vocabulary.....	187

2.About the Author

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to students of all cultural backgrounds. His main focus is teaching writing and speaking to students. He is also an experienced teacher of TOEFL, SAT and thesis writing. In addition, he teaches native speakers essay writing.

3. Introduction

There are many forums providing sample essays for IELTS academic writing Task 1 and Task 2 essays. The majority of these provide samples that are written to a moderate standard (typically IELTS Band 5-7 standard) and in many ways are unrepresentative of typical essays that students produce in exams because they contain very few grammatical errors for essays of this standard.

In addition, their use is limited by often not being written in an academic style and almost always there is little explanation of the choices made by the writer or the limitations of the response. Furthermore, these samples are different in style to what would be produced by an educated native speaker because of the extensive use of “fillers” (unnecessary language that is typically used in spoken language to give the speaker thinking time) that serve to make essays indirect.

This book is an attempt to redress the weakness of these essays by providing 40 high quality essays (10 Academic Task 1, 10 General Task 1 and 20 Task 2 essays) that are written by an educated native speaker. Typically when IELTS students are shown these essays they are surprised by the directness and simplicity of the language. The essays provided are all of IELTS band 9 standard; however, the intention is not necessarily to allow students to reach that standard but to provide a pathway to write better quality essays that are of an academic standard and style. An important part of each essay is the accompanying notes that explain the choices made by the writer.

It is also intended that this book, although directed at IELTS students, has a focus beyond the IELTS exam and provides students with writing skills that can also be used in study and in the workplace.

The first part of the book contains a section on useful strategies and common mistakes. Within the section there are parts outlining common grammatical and vocabulary problems as well methods for generating ideas.

A section on Academic Task 1 essays that outlines the general approach that students should adopt when writing a Task 1 Academic essay is included and is followed by 10 examples of Academic Task 1 essays. Notes that describe the choices made by the author accompany each essay.

An equivalent section is also provided for General Task 1 essays and includes general approach, structure and 10 sample essays.

The sections on Task 2 responses include a section on essay structure followed by examples. The examples section is divided into 10 general topics (e.g. Education, Media, etc.) and the ideas surrounding each topic are described in

detail and important vocabulary is provided. A sample essay is provided for each topic and supplemented with commentary and key vocabulary.

The final section provides a further 10 Task 2 essays with notes and key vocabulary.

4. Essays, Language and Communication

It is critical that IELTS students understand the purpose of writing because this will give students an idea of how they should be constructing essays. Simply, the purpose of writing is to communicate information, and language is the mechanism by which that information is communicated. This means that communication is the goal, not language. It also suggests that content is extremely important because an essay that has few ideas has communicated little.

Many students focus almost exclusively on grammar and vocabulary and fail to consider the primary purpose of their writing. They aim to use complex vocabulary and grammatical structures when they are not required which leads to non-standard use of language, lower quality communication and an increased number of errors.

The primary focus of students should be to communicate in a clear and concise fashion. A quality essay's primary feature is that good ideas are well presented.

An IELTS examiner will spend a very short period of time on each essay and read that essay once only. The largest risk for any IELTS student is that the examiner becomes confused about meaning or the direction of the essay. If this occurs, the writer is unlikely to score Band 7 or above, irrespective of the quality of the language used. Similarly, an essay that the examiner can read through once and be clear on meaning and direction of the essay will usually score Band 7, even if there are many grammatical and vocabulary mistakes.

5.Strategies and Hints for IELTS Writing

The purpose of this section is to help students develop strategies to assist their writing and includes common mistakes that students make. It is divided into three parts, Grammar, Vocabulary and Ideas Generation Strategies.

The list of common grammatical and vocabulary errors is not intended to be comprehensive however it describes many common areas of weakness. Students should pay attention to each of these areas because they are likely to be able to identify weaknesses and reduce the number of errors in their writing.

A section on techniques for generating ideas is also included because communicating good ideas effectively is the key aim of writing. Many students find it difficult to generate ideas for Task 2 responses and for this reason this book includes two critical parts for improving ideas. The first, in this section, is devoted to strategies that students can use to generate further ideas. However since ideas are often culture based, the Task 2 section provides a summary of common IELTS topics including how educated Western people think about each of these topics.

Grammar Hints

Grammar is the conventions of presenting language and is an aid to communication. Grammar is one of the tools of language but is not the purpose, which is to communicate well. The aim of all IELTS students should be to use the conventions of the language that are used by native speakers. Native speakers in all languages express ideas in the simplest way possible and students should do the same. Keeping language as simple as possible aids communication and helps avoid confusion. Using unnecessarily complex grammar can confuse native speakers because it is not standard language. This is particularly true if the vocabulary used is not precise. If a student confuses the examiner, it will have a significant impact on their score.

Tip: Keep grammatical structures as simple as possible

Use passive forms

In formal writing such as an IELTS examination it is almost always best to use passive forms. The over use of first person makes essays seem informal and is a style that is most commonly adopted by children. It is acceptable to use the first person, but it should be understood that using the first person is a literary device designed to draw the reader closer to the writer. If first person is used, it should be used rarely.

For example:

The environment is very important to us because it provides many of the things that we need.

Should be:

The environment is very important because it provides many necessities.

Use plural forms

In academic essays (Task 2) students will usually be writing about general ideas and therefore plural forms without an article (no “the”) should be used.

For example:

In many cities around the world traffic jams present major problems to commuters.

It should be noted that each of “traffic jams”, “major problems” and “commuters” are plural and none have “the” (an article) in front of them.

Use simple past and present tenses

In IELTS Task 1 writing students are usually required to either describe events that have occurred in the past (General) or historical data (Academic). For this reason simple past is almost always the correct tense in Task 1 writing.

In the simple past tense (often the “-ed” form) should be used for the main verb.

For example:

In the 1940's in the UK only 8% of students attended university.

Task 2 essays are usually concerned with current issues. The subjects are events that were occurring in the past, are occurring now and are likely to continue to occur in the future.

If the event is continuing use the present form for the main verb.

For example:

In most Western countries students expect that they will have the opportunity to attend university.

For secondary verbs the infinitive (“to attend”) or gerund (“-ing”) form (“attending”) should generally be used. A common mistake that students make is to confuse the two forms and add “to” in front of the “-ing” form of the verb.

Misuse of Pronouns

Pronouns are replacement words that must refer back to a particular person (he, she, etc.) or object (this, those, it, etc.). Therefore, pronouns always have an antecedent (a noun/noun phrase previously used in the same paragraph) that the pronoun replaces. In other words they reference some other part of the text. A common mistake is that the pronoun has no antecedent and the writer assumes that the reader understands their meaning. Using a pronoun without an antecedent presents a significant problem as it can leave readers confused and causes a failure of communication.

A further problem that may arise with antecedents (the noun/noun phrase being replaced) occurs because of ambiguous referencing. This means that the pronoun could logically replace more than one noun. A simple example of this is:

After the Minister and a senior bureaucrat met he decided that the budget for education was insufficient to meet the needs of society.

In this sentence it is not clear who the “he” refers to, the Minister or the senior bureaucrat. In this sentence most readers will understand that it is probably the Minister that is the intended antecedent. However, this is unacceptable language as the writing must be logically unambiguous.

The sentence should be written as follows:

After meeting with the senior bureaucrat, the minister decided that the budget for education was insufficient to meet the needs of society.

The most significant problems occur with the ambiguous use of “this” and “it”. Unlike problems with articles, misusing these words is likely to result in a significant penalty. The reason is that the examiner is likely to become confused about meaning and or logic, which is the most fundamental part of writing a good essay. To avoid problems with “this” and “it” the following steps should be taken:

- Pronouns must only replace a single word or a simple noun phrase – not a phrase or idea.
- Pronouns must have an antecedent in the current sentence. The antecedent must be the exact noun or noun phrase being replaced.
- There must be no chance of ambiguity.

If in any doubt, students should not use pronouns. There is no penalty for more complete explanations. The incorrect use of pronouns is very dangerous because it can confuse the reader. However, using the noun or noun phrase instead of the pronoun will avoid any problems.

Tip: Avoid using pronouns unless certain that there can be no unambiguity

A further problem occurs when a noun is used many times in a paragraph. In such cases students will often use the noun the first time it is used and for all subsequent uses replace the noun with the pronoun. This is a dangerous strategy because the reader may not be paying careful attention or could become distracted and forget what the original noun was. This may cause the reader to become confused about who or what is being referred to and affect the quality of communication. When a noun is used many times in a paragraph, it is far better to replace noun with a pronoun on every second occurrence.

Articles (A/An/The/No Article)

Articles are one of the most common sources of error and problems are difficult to avoid because articles are used often and there are many exceptions in their use. However, using the table below as a guide will allow students to reduce the number of errors to an acceptable level.

Article	Singular	Plural	Specific	General	When to Use
a/an	✓	✗	✗	✓	One of many
the	✓	✓	✓	✗	It is clear which one(s) you are talking about
no article	✗	✓	✗	✓	Speaking/writing in general terms

The aim should not be to remove every error with articles but to remove the majority of errors.

A good Task 2 essay will usually cover general ideas so in most cases the “no article/plural” form will be required. The most common error is to introduce “the” when general information is being provided.

Vocabulary

Vocabulary is a very important part of IELTS writing but students generally do not understand what constitutes good vocabulary. Precise vocabulary rather than the use of rarely used words is good vocabulary. Good vocabulary use occurs when students express ideas precisely and in a standard way (similar to an educated native speaker), which means using standard phrases and collocations (words that are used together e.g. “wise choices”, “unreasonable demands”, “alcohol consumption”, etc.). By using standard vocabulary students essays can be more easily understood by the reader, show that they understand how language is used correctly and allow the writer’s meaning to be communicated effectively. Vocabulary is assessed based on how words are used rather than what words are used.

However, excellent vocabulary use is often incorrectly understood by students to mean writing essays that have many complex words. Very often students attempt to impress examiners by using complex words and the result is almost always that instead of using a simple correct word they use a complex word incorrectly. They show the examiner that they do not fully understand the words that they are using. Furthermore, no two words in any language have exactly the same meaning (if they did, one of the words would quickly fall into disuse), and changing a choice of vocabulary always means that the meaning of the sentence has also been changed.

Tip: Use vocabulary that is natural. Do not “upgrade”

An additional problem with attempting to use more complex language is that incorrect usage often confuses the examiner. When an incorrect choice of word is combined with other grammar or vocabulary mistakes, the writing becomes very difficult to understand. It is a failure on the part of the student to communicate well and if this occurs students will receive a very heavy penalty and it will usually exclude them from achieving a score of Band 7 in writing.

A further problem with attempting to use more complex vocabulary than is necessary is that the chosen word will not be consistent with the usual writing style of the student and will lead to cohesion problems. Furthermore, native speakers do not aim to impress people with their vocabulary so any attempt to use complex language will lead to non-standard usage. Students should always aim to use language that is familiar to them.

Students should be reminded that there are many examples of great literature (such as George Orwell's "Animal Farm") that uses very simple vocabulary. It is the quality of ideas and the effectiveness of the communication that create very good pieces of writing. Native speakers use very complex vocabulary only when they are seeking to achieve a very exact meaning and this only occurs when they are writing complex arguments or detailed descriptions. When words are rarely used it is because they have very precise meanings and therefore should only be used in very specific circumstances. This makes them very difficult to use correctly and it is typically only highly educated native speakers who use complex vocabulary.

Language Variation

Many students are taught to vary their language. This is not necessary except perhaps at the IELTS Band 8-9 level and often leads to problems. The focus for students should always be to communicate well and varying language often does not lead to better communication and sometimes causes problems. Often students will vary their language naturally to good effect; however, students should not change a word purely to achieve variations as this can cause problems because sometimes there is no reasonable alternative for a word. A good example is the word "children", which comes up as a subject in many IELTS essays. In order to achieve variation many students will replace "children" with "kids", which is far too informal to be used in writing (the original meaning of a "kid" is a "baby goat"). For example, in the sample essay "Moral Teaching for Students" the word "children" is used 20 times. Students should only vary language if there is a clear alternative – often there is no acceptable alternative.

Repeating a correct word many times does not reduce the quality of communication and will not lead to a lower score.

Commonly Misused Words

There are many words that are commonly misused. A few of the most common are listed below:

Efficiency/effectiveness

Efficiency is a much overused word in essays and should usually be replaced with “effectiveness”. Efficiency is how quickly or smoothly an event occurs and effectiveness refers to how good the final result is.

For example:

John completed his work in a highly efficient manner, however he would be more effective if he paid more attention to detail.

It is worth noting that in most cases people are more concerned with effectiveness than efficiency. Effectiveness is a word that is a marker of quality for an examiner. It is rarely used and its correct use will often draw the attention of an examiner.

Knowledge/Learning/Thinking/Skills

“Knowledge” is also a commonly overused word. In this case there is a key cultural difference between developing and developed countries, which causes the overuse of “knowledge”. In developing countries education is focused on obtaining knowledge so students will choose this word correctly based on their understanding. However, in the West the education system is based on idea and skills development resulting in native speakers rarely talking about knowledge. Students should generally seek to replace developing knowledge with words such as “thinking”, “skills” or “learning”

Enhance/Improve

Enhance is arguably the most misused word in essays and should always be avoided.

Enhance is most commonly used in advertising, it is emotive rather than objective which makes it unsuitable for use in academic writing and is most correctly used to describe additional features (not making things better). It should never be used as a synonym for improvement.

Improvement is simply to make things better. It is a very common word and can be repeated a number of times in an essay.

Drugs/Medicine

Drugs and Medicine are commonly misused words in essays because drugs has a very wide meaning that is much wider than in many other languages. A drug is any substance that has the ability to modify the physiology of any species belonging to the animal kingdom. Drugs include illegal drugs such as heroin, cocaine or marijuana, medicines such as aspirin, panadol and morphine and alcohol. Alcohol is a drug because it modifies brain chemistry and affects coordination and judgement. A commonly used phrase is “drugs and alcohol” even though this is duplication because many people do not think of alcohol as a drug.

Medicine has a much narrow meaning when referring to drugs. It is used for drugs that are beneficial and when referring to individual drugs. The correct usage is complex and generally should be avoided in favour of the more general word. It should be noted the correct word for a company that manufactures drugs/medicine is a “drug company” not a “medicine company”.

Popular/Common

Popular is a commonly misused word in essays because it has a narrower meaning in English compared to other languages.

Popular is most commonly used in fashion and entertainment. The use of popular often implies that something is in fashion at the moment but is likely to go out of fashion in future rather than become a permanent change. Music, films, clothes, brands and models of cars or phones, holiday destinations may all be popular. However, going to university, having a mobile phone or a car or driving to school rather than walking or riding a bicycle to school are all common and it is incorrect to use popular in these cases.

Children/Kids

“Kids” is far too informal to be used in formal writing. The original meaning of a kid is a “baby goat”, it is the equivalent of “kitten” or “puppy”. It is highly informal and should never be used in formal writing and probably should not be used in formal speaking (including an IELTS speaking test).

Punishment/Discipline

The purpose of punishment is to cause pain to people who have behaved badly. The aim of discipline is to teach people who have made poor choices. For children the aim is always to teach, therefore children should be disciplined and never punished. Punished is also commonly misused in IELTS questions by examiners to test whether students know the correct language.

Surfing the Internet/On the Internet

Students often use surfing the Internet as a general term for using the Internet. Surfing is riding a wave and implies that a person goes where the wave takes them with limited control. In an Internet context this means that a person has no set direction and will simply follow links that attract their attention. Surfing the Internet is a leisure activity.

When using the Internet for a specific purpose such as research or for work it is incorrect to use surf the Internet. Normally it is “use the internet”, “be on the internet” or simply “be online”.

Academic study/Education

Students often use “academic study” when describing areas of importance for young people; however, this language is imprecise. Studying is an action but it is always better to describe the purpose of the action rather than the action itself. In this case the purpose of the action is to become educated and it is far more standard to use phrases such as “young people should focus on their education” rather than “young people should focus on their academic study”.

Avoid Unnecessary Language - Fillers

In speaking, people tend to use unnecessary language and expressions that are sometimes referred to as “fillers”. However, this is not normally done in formal writing and leads to indirect language.

Unnecessary language tends to be found at the beginning of sentences and reduces the impact of sentences as they become more long-winded and less direct. This has the effect of reducing the impact or diluting the ideas being presented.

Examples taken from actual student essays are shown below:

Nowadays, parents become more conscious about their children’s growth than they were before.

In recent days, it is easy to find many news stories on television, in newspapers and on the Internet that describe violent crimes.

As we all know, life on campus is totally different from high school.

Deleting the underlined phrase will make the sentence more direct.

The words or phrases before the comma add no meaning because they are far too vague for formal writing. Educated native speakers almost never use them in writing and as such they should rarely be used. They are used in speaking in order to give the speaker time to think.

Common Phrases that should be avoided include the following:

- From my perception
- In recent days
- As we all know
- I guess
- One of the things
- Nowadays
- Some people believe
- From my point of view
- I am convinced
- As far as I am concerned
- First of all
- One of the things
- On one hand, on the other hand

- Indeed
- After all

Unnecessary Language - Duplication

Similarly, at other times students will add information at the end of sentences (and occasionally in the middle of sentences) that is unnecessary as it is implied already and is a form of duplication.

Some people like to try various ways to live, they are willing to try different things and they enjoy change things.

This makes time more available for students to control by themselves.

It helps them to develop the ability to face problems with urgency and solve them by themselves.

Therefore, because people's standard of living is improved at the time when society improves, people purchase goods because of their popularity instead of buying them for actual use or satisfying their needs.

In all of the examples given above the underlined words can be removed as this information is already stated or implied.

Avoid Oral Language

Sometimes words are used only in oral language and should be replaced by a formal word. Many examples are given below.

Not a mystery – not surprising

A lot of/plenty – many/a great deal of

Get – obtain

Still – continue to/avoid

Happen - occur

On the right track – avoid

Chance – opportunity, probability

Know - understand

Anything/something/things – replace with the actual name

Job hunting – searching for a job

Much more – many more/much greater

Worried - anxious

The rest – the remaining

Like – similar to/such as

Kids – children

Unreal – inaccurate

Try – attempt

Big – large/significant

What's more/Besides – In addition

On one hand/On the other hand – Although

Finish - complete

At the same time - During the same period

Avoid “some/those” Before General Nouns

IELTS Task 2 writing requires students to speak about a topic in general. As a result plural forms of nouns without an article are widely used. However, many students incorrectly add “some” or “those” in front of a noun to show that they are speaking in general, which is a form of duplication. The “some” or “those” is not required and should be deleted:

For example:

Those companies that do not show care for their employees are likely to have their best employees leave.

Should be:

Companies that do not show care for their employees are likely to have their best employees leave.

Or:

When patients are terminally ill, some doctors may feel that they should help patients die to avoid suffering.

When patients are terminally ill, doctors may feel that they should help patients die to avoid suffering.

Avoid Exaggeration

Academic writing requires that the writer expresses their ideas objectively and therefore expressions of exaggeration should usually be avoided.

Avoid “just”, “only” and “even” because academic writing is objective and facts should be stated without emphasis.

Similarly adjectives that are highly emotional and have extreme meanings should be avoided.

Examples include:

Fantastic/amazing/incredible – Use high quality, excellent

Horrible/disgusting – Use undesirable, unacceptable

Use Precise Language

A much higher level of precision is expected in academic writing compared to spoken language because a reader cannot ask questions of the writer and the writer does not have the opportunity to adjust their language if they can observe that people are not understanding what they are attempting to communicate.

As a result there is some language that should be avoided.

Things – “things” is too vague for academic writing and it is far better to name the object that you are describing.

Always/never – In spoken language people often say sentences such as “John never goes to the cinema” when he rarely goes to the cinema. In written language a higher level of precision is required. If “never” or “always” is used there must be no exceptions.

When using verbs ensure that the most precise verb is used.

For example:

People need to jump out of their old style of thinking if they are to adjust to new technology.

Should be:

People need to change their old style of thinking if they are to adjust to new technology.

It must also be possible for the subject to perform the action implied by the verb and it must be possible for the action to be performed on the object.

For example:

An argument, which disagrees with women in engaging in combat roles, is that women are not as strong as men.

This sentence is incorrect because an argument does not have the ability to agree or disagree.

An argument, which implies that women should not engage in combat roles, is that women are not as strong as men.

Use Positive Language – Negatives of Positives rather than Negatives

In formal English it is more acceptable to use the negative of a positive word rather than a negative. For example, it is more common (and much more polite) to describe someone as “unsuccessful” rather than a “failure” or “unwise” rather than “stupid” etc.

Ensure that Subjects are Fully Described

English as a language is precise and literal and therefore it is critical that subjects are fully described otherwise it will lead to confusion. It is often the case that subjects are very long because of the level of precision that is expected in written English.

For example:

“The number of women who have children over the age of 35 in India”

In this case the subject is how many women there are, not the women themselves and is an appropriate subject for a Task 1 response.

“Women who have children over the age of 35 in India”

In this case the subject is the women themselves and has no reference to their numbers and is therefore inappropriate in a task that is focused on data. This subject is appropriate for a Task 2 response.

The most common errors with subjects occur in Task 1 responses where students routinely fail to add the “number of” or “the amount of” of when referring to data. Errors also commonly arise when students attempt to shorten subjects.

Avoid Describing the Amount of Attention Topics Receive

Often students describe topics as being “hot” or “receiving a great deal of attention” in their essays. This is irrelevant information because it adds nothing to the ideas of the essay and the examiner already understands how much attention a topic is receiving in the media or society in general. Using such phrases marks the essay as non-academic and makes an essay feel like a prepared IELTS essay rather than a natural piece of writing. An even more serious problem with using phrases describing the amount of attention a topic is receiving is that students often use them when they are simply not true. Any essay that contains information that is factually incorrect will leave a very poor impression.

Avoid Leaving Readers Hanging

Occasionally students will write that there are advantages of a particular action being taken but fail to say what the advantages actually are leaving the reader wondering what advantages the writer is referring to. This distracts the reader and their focus will shift from the essay to trying to guess what the writer is trying to say. If an essay states that something has advantages, disadvantages or benefits it must be immediately followed by an explanation of what the author is referring to.

Ideas Generation

For any essay to be regarded as high quality it must not only be well structured it must have high quality ideas. Sharing ideas is a key reason for communicating.

Generating ideas and writing a simple plan is essential for developing a clear and cohesive structure.

In practice, during an exam the recommended planning time is only two minutes. However, complete ideas development is important and students will become faster as they write more plans and develop more ideas. The intention of this part of the book is to give students the opportunity to learn methods of developing plans rather than use every strategy in every essay that they write.

Identifying the Topic

Identifying the topic and writing it down is a useful method of avoiding being distracted by the complex wording of some questions. Writing down the topic is designed to keep students on track and to ensure that they address the key point of the question.

Examples of topics are: Education, Working from Home, Arts Funding, etc.

The simple titles of essays in the Table of Contents of this book are good examples of identifying the topic.

Defining a Topic

Sometimes terms used for a topic have a single generally accepted meaning that most people will have the same definition for. However, in a small number of cases people will have different definitions for what a particular word means. Clarifying the topic will allow clear distinctions to be made.

Mostly it is not necessary to define the topic because the intended meaning is usually self-evident. For example, most readers will understand what “working from home” means. However, with a question such as: “Should libraries lend video games, movies and music?” a definition of a library is very useful.

In the case of a library most students will agree that a library is an appropriate place for movies and music but video games are inappropriate. However, usually students cannot explain why video games should not be included (video games, movies and music are all entertainment and provided on a storage

device). The reason that they cannot give clear reasons is because they have not formed a clear definition of what a library actually is.

For example, if the definition of a library is that it is a place where books are made publicly available, it is clear that none of music, movies or video games belong in a library. However, if a library is defined as a place where access to information and learning is provided to the general public, then movies and music have a place in a library but most video games do not (educational games are an exception).

A clear definition can be used to test ideas and a definition can be used to define the scope of what is being discussed in an essay. If an author defines education as formal education, then they are telling the reader that this is the scope of their essay.

In this case defining “education” aids clarity. Many students will think that education is only what is learned in school or formal education. However, education can also include concepts such as developing social skills and self-learning etc. A definition can avoid confusion.

There are three key points that should be considered with definitions:

- Often definitions are not required
- A definition in an essay prevents a misunderstanding of what the author means when they use a word (sometimes people have different definitions of the same word)
- A definition allows the writer to have a reference and clear logic, it is possible to argue whether an object satisfies the definition provided and therefore give a clear reason for its inclusion or exclusion

Is the Topic Binary or Graded?

Many IELTS questions are presented to the reader as an “either/or” implying that the student must choose one choice over the other. If there are only two choices then the question is a binary topic.

Examples of binary topics include:

Buying a House, Having Children, Going to University, Having a Space Program

In all of these cases there are only two choices because a person cannot half buy a house, or half have children. Therefore these topics are all binary.

If there is a range of different possible outcomes then the topic is graded.

Examples of graded topics include:

Arts Funding, Talent, Female Delinquency, Becoming a Good Member of Society

In all of these cases there are degrees; governments can spend different amounts of money on the arts, so it is graded. People do not fit neatly into two groups, talented and non-talented, therefore this topic is also graded.

The challenge in IELTS questions is that many questions are presented as binary when they are really graded and this causes students to use incorrect language.

A typical question like this might be:

Some people believe that educated people will always earn much more money than non-educated people. Discuss.

This question implies that people are either or educated or not educated (i.e. a binary topic rather than a graded topic). This can cause students to use inappropriate grammatical structures in essays. Consider the following two sentences.

If the writer considers the topic binary they might write the following sentence:

Educated people will be able to convince employers that they have many skills while non-educated people will have trouble showing that they are skilled.

If the writer considers the topic to be graded the writer would probably express this differently:

The more educated a person is the more likely they will be able to convince employers that they have many skills.

A further consideration is that a student who does think about whether a topic is binary or not might ask deeper questions about the nature of the topic. For example, in this case a student might begin to ask: "If education is graded and has fine distinctions how do we measure what education really is – is it a piece of paper showing formal achievement or is it learning obtained over time?"

Pros and Cons

Building a list of pros and cons is a standard method of generating new ideas but is not the only method because students usually draw on personal experience and fail to consider the experiences of other people. When building a list of key ideas students will usually ask the basic question.

What are the positive and negative arguments?

Simply listing pros and cons provides a simple plan that is suitable for many of the more simple questions, but in difficult questions students often fail to generate enough ideas. The reason for this is students usually only consider their own personal experience and do not realise that they can extend their ideas by thinking about experiences far beyond their own.

Have Stakeholders Been Considered?

Students may be unfamiliar with the term “stakeholder”. A stakeholder is a person who has an interest in an object or an outcome.

For example:

Stakeholders in a business might be Business Owners, Customers, Employees, Suppliers, Governments and Neighbours.

Each of these groups of people is likely to have different perspectives and thinking from their perspective may lead to new ideas. Consider the question whether businesses should open late at night. Some of the perspectives of the different groups are listed below:

Owners – More profits, need to be available more often to attend to problems

Customers – Greater flexibility when they can buy things

Employees – Can get more work, more jobs in general, could interfere with family life

Suppliers – More sales

Government – More taxation revenue from business and employees

Neighbours – More vibrant local environment, increased traffic and noise

By considering stakeholders and their perspectives the number of ideas can often be increased substantially. In this case the number of ideas has become quite high by considering stakeholders.

Dimensions – Time, Place and Culture

Students can also broaden their ideas by not just considering their own personal experiences but also the wider world. They can do this by considering

different times, places and cultures because what is true in one time, place or culture may not be true in another.

Consider time - Talent is important in modern society but was less important 500 years ago. It is likely to be even more important in the future. Knowing how to read wasn't important for most people 500 years ago, is extremely important in the current age but may be less important in future because of technology.

By considering different times students can generate more ideas.

Place – The Arts should be funded in wealthy nations but perhaps they should not be funded in poor nations. Whether countries should have a one-child policy depends on whether there is stress on the population. It may be necessary in highly populated countries such as India and China but probably not in New Zealand.

Place is also an important consideration. The one-child policy is a very interesting question. Asking why it is appropriate in one place but not another leads directly to the idea that the one-child policy is undesirable but necessary in some circumstances.

Culture – Miniskirts may come back into fashion in the future in countries such as Japan or the United States but is unlikely to ever be fashionable in Saudi Arabia.

What is true in one culture is not necessarily true in another. Failing to follow local culture can have serious consequences. Considering IELTS questions in different cultural contexts may also lead to different ideas.

Consideration of different dimensions is helpful as students can demonstrate both broadness and show they can make fine distinctions rather than view the world as black and white.

Logical Chains

The body of a strong IELTS essay should be filled with ideas, explanations and consequences. Ideas should be developed and taken to their logical conclusion. Sometimes the reason given for why something occurs is superficial and there may be deeper reasons. Even when a reason for an event is explained it is often possible to ask “why?” again and dig down to a deeper underlying reason. Consider the example below:

Why is having space program a good thing?

It makes people feel proud of their country

Why does the space program make people feel proud of their country?

It shows technical skill

Why do people care about technical skill?

It shows development of a nation

Why is developing a nation important?

It helps make the nation more politically and economically secure

And so on...

There are also deeper levels of why than this if required. *In general a high quality essay will contain logical chains.* In other words, something causes an effect and that causes another effect that causes another effect. The conclusion is unimportant; it is the quality of the logic behind those conclusions that is the key as that ultimately determines that validity of the conclusions drawn.

6. The Academic Task 1 Essay

Task 1 essays require students to describe data, diagrams or processes using English. Most students find Task 1 essays much easier to write than Task 2 essays. Nevertheless, there are a number of choices that students can make to ensure they write an effective essay.

The first is that writers should have a clear idea of the aim of the essay. The goal of the writer should be to allow a reader who has never seen the information presented in the question to reproduce the information presented in the question accurately.

Step 1 – Organising the information – thinking time

The Task 1 response will almost always have an introduction and two body paragraphs. The first step is to analyse the data and determine how to split the data into two logical parts. Very occasionally data is best split into three parts, but this is unusual. This decision is often very simple to make, for example when there are two diagrams or two graphs. On other occasions it is more difficult and sometimes it is appropriate to combine two small logical pieces that are related into one paragraph. The way in which data is split is a critical decision in writing an essay as this defines the high level structure of the essay and have a significant impact on the essay's readability.

Step 2 – Writing the Introduction

The introduction in a Task 1 essay is usually one sentence, or very rarely two short sentences. After reading the introduction the reader should be able to describe the form of the data (i.e. diagram, graph, table etc.), provide a title for the data and draw and label axis correctly. For example

The bar chart shows the percentage of males and females that completed various educational qualifications in 1999.

Step 3 – Writing the Body

From Step 1 students should have already decided what is going to be described in each body paragraph. The opening sentence must describe the data that will be covered by the paragraph. When describing data it is best to

describe trends rather than individual pieces of data. The most accurate picture of data can be provided when the start and end points as well as the nature of the trend is described.

In 1940 both countries had 7-9% of their population aged 65 or above and this increased steadily until 2040 when both countries are expected to have around 25% of their population aged 65 or above.

In this case the reader will know that both graphs start at around 8% in 1940 and are a straight line and reach 25% in 2040. The reader can draw this graph accurately.

Another useful item that can be added (this is good to have rather than essential) is an analysis of the data. Adding a reason why data is like it is makes the piece feel like a more authentic piece of writing.

The data suggests that people prefer fish and chips because they are inexpensive.

All body paragraphs have the same structure. No conclusion is required for Task 1 essays.

7. Academic Task 1 Sample Essays

In this section, ten Task 1 Academic IELTS essays are provided. For each essay a set of notes is included that describe the key choices made by the author. It is most important to remember that a successful response allows the reader to accurately reproduce all of the data presented, even if they have not seen the question.

There are typically two key problems that most affect student responses to Task 1 essays. The first is that students sometimes fail to make good choices when breaking data down into two (or occasionally three) logical parts resulting in a weak structure that is difficult to follow and sometimes leads to some data not being fully described. The second major problem is that students sometimes do not fully describe subjects and units. Often subjects are long (e.g. the number of people aged sixty five and above in Japan) and students often leave out key features of the subject that change what the subject is. In the example given it is common for students to leave out the “number of”. If this occurs the subject changes and is about the people themselves and not about how many people there are.

This section includes a list of useful language and ten sample Task 1 essays. The responses provided are intended to cover a wide variety of data types including, Diagrams, Bar Charts, Line Graphs, Pie Charts and Tables and come with notes to explain author choices.

General Task 1 Useful Language

Since Academic Task 1 responses focus primarily on processes and data, they tend to have a standard form that students can take advantage of in their writing. A number of useful standard phrases are provided that can be used by students in their essays. They are divided into three sections; opening sentences, describing trends and describing points.

Opening Sentences

The [number] [form of data] show – used at the beginning of the introduction or a body paragraph (the number and type of graph can be changed to suit the question)

The first [form of data] shows... while the second [form of data] shows – used at the beginning of the introduction when there are two sets of data

The number of [Data names] follows a remarkably similar trend. – used at the beginning of a body paragraph to provide an overview when two or more sets of data display similar trends.

Describing Trends

[Data name] increased throughout the period from [month/year] to [month/year] – implies that the graph is linear

[Data name] increased steadily from [number] to [number] – implies that the graph is linear

[Data name] was around [number] in [month/year] and increased to [number] in [month/year] – implies that the graph is linear

The number of *[Data name]* dropped/increased slightly/dramatically – refers to the size of the gradient of the graph on a linear graph

[Data name] increased/decreased at an increasingly rapid rate – implies that the graph curves upwards/downwards with an increasing gradient

[Data name] increased/decreased by progressively smaller amounts – implies that the graph curves upwards and downwards but is becoming a flat line

Describing Data Points

For [Data type] there is a higher proportion of [Data name] than [Data name] – used for describing relative amounts/numbers

The number/amount of [Data name] varied widely from [number] to [number] – used to describe a range of values when they are vary a great deal

The number/amount of [Data name] was confined to a narrow range and varied from [number] to [number] – used to describe a range of values when they are narrow

The actual and expected number/amount/percentage of – used to compare actual and predicted numbers

[Data name] represented [percentage] of the total number of [Data type] – used to describe the percentage of a total

[Data name] made up the largest/smallest part/proportion/component of [Data type] – used to indicate the importance of a particular data point

[Data name 1] was much lower/higher than for [Data name 2] – used in comparing different types of data

[Data name] was made up mostly of ... with a small contribution from ... - used when one particular type of data dominates

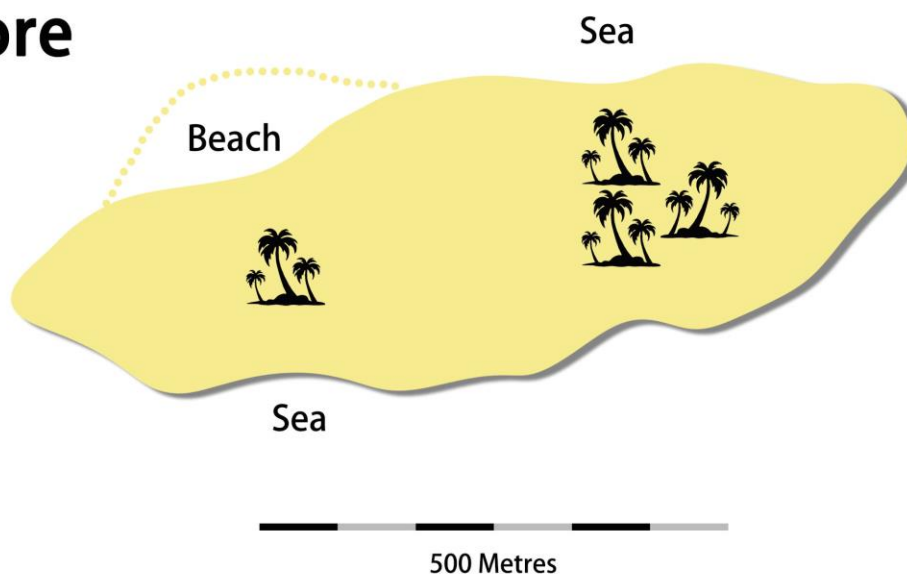
The number of [Data name 1], [Data name 2] and [Data name 3] were found to be [Number of Data name 1], [Number of Data name 2] and [Number of Data name 3], respectively. – used for an ordered list of data

Diagram – Tourist Island

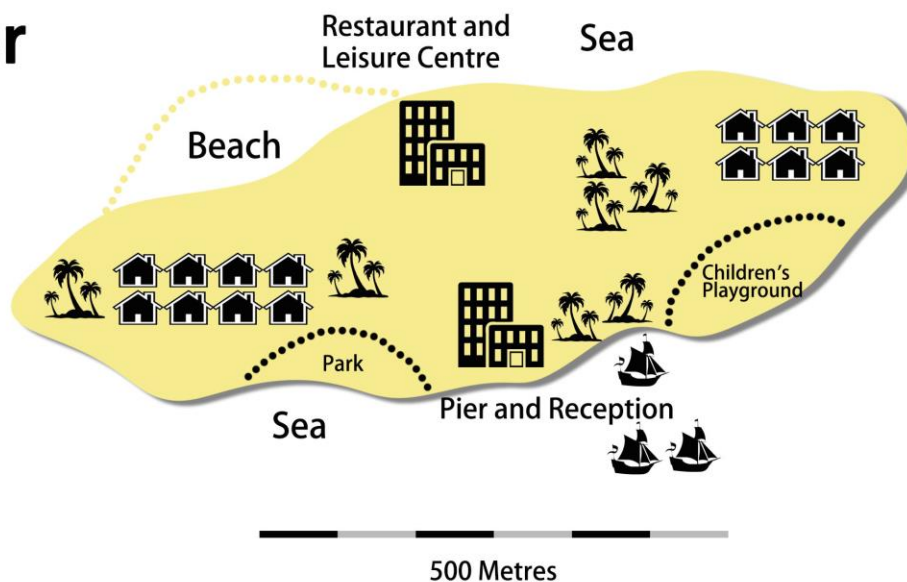
The diagrams below show an island before and after the addition of tourist facilities.

Summarise the information in the maps and make comparisons where appropriate.

Before



After



The diagram shows an island that is approximately 900 meters wide and 300 meters across before and after its development into a tourist resort.

Before being developed the island was unpopulated apart from a few palm trees and had a beach on the northwest side of the island.

After development, the island has a pier and reception centre built on its southern shore. In addition, a number of small sailing boats are available for transport or leisure. On the western side of the pier and reception centre is a small park that also overlooks the sea. On the opposite (north) side of the island is a combined restaurant and leisure centre.

On the western end of the island are 8 huts that are close to the beach and surrounded by trees. The eastern end of the island is protected by trees and contains a group of six huts and a children's playground. This area allows family groups and couples to have separate areas so they do not disturb each other.

Essay Notes

The aim of a strong Task 1 response is to allow a reader who has not seen the diagram to reproduce the diagram from the text. In this case it is important that the reader understands the basic shape of the island and has a reference point. The most logical reference point is the pier and reception complex because it is a major feature, centrally located and is the place where visitors enter and leave the island.

The introduction describes the basic shape of the island, tells the reader that there are two maps and the basic information that they are intended to provide.

The body of the essay is broken up into two logical parts, the island before and after development, and these form the three body paragraphs.

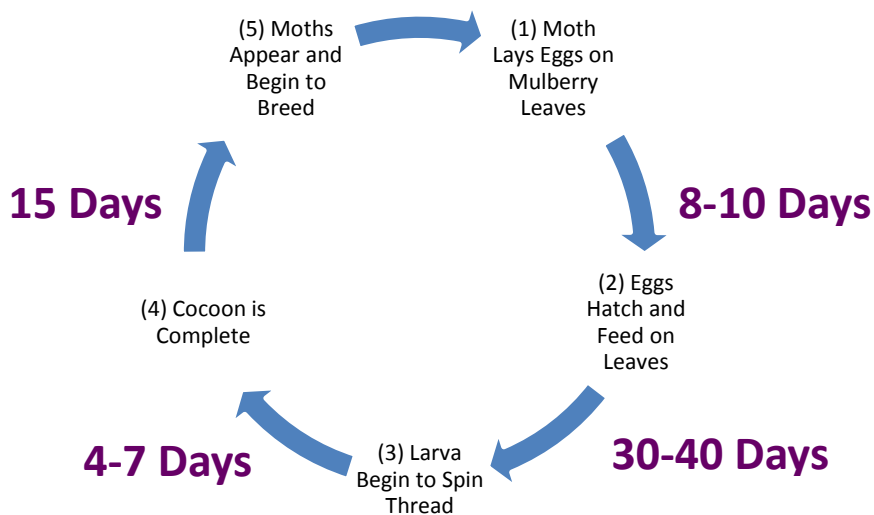
The first body paragraph is very simple and has only one sentence because there is very little information to convey. The second and third body paragraphs are much longer and describe each of the key features of the island. The second body paragraph describes the shared areas including the pier and reception complex and the restaurant and leisure complex. The third body paragraph describes the private areas and includes a description of the accommodation.

Flowchart - Silkworm

The diagrams below show the lifecycle of the silkworm and the process for producing silk cloth.

Summarise the information in the charts and make comparisons where appropriate.

The Lifecycle Of The Silkworm



Process For Producing Silk Cloth



The two graphs show the lifecycle of the silkworm and the process for producing silk.

The lifecycle of the silkworm begins with a mature moth laying eggs on a mulberry leaf. After 8-10 days the eggs hatch producing silkworm larvae that feed on mulberry leaves. The feeding continues for 30-40 days after which the silkworm larvae spin a cocoon around their bodies. This process takes 4-7 days to complete. After a further 15 days the larvae hatch to form adult moths that reproduce by laying further eggs beginning a new cycle.

The cocoons created by the larva are carefully selected for the silk making process. Once selected, the cocoons are boiled in water allowing the thread of the cocoon to be unwound into thread that is usually in the range of 250-900 meters in length. The individual threads are then twisted together to form a stronger thread and then weaved into cloth in preparation for dyeing.

Essay Notes

The aim of a strong Task 1 response is to allow a reader who has not seen the diagram to reproduce the graphs from the text. In this question there are two distinct diagrams that allow the question to be neatly divided into two paragraphs. The focus should be on describing the individual steps in chronological (time) order.

The introduction should be a single sentence that describes the process in the two diagrams. After reading the first sentence the reader should be able to suggest a title for both diagrams.

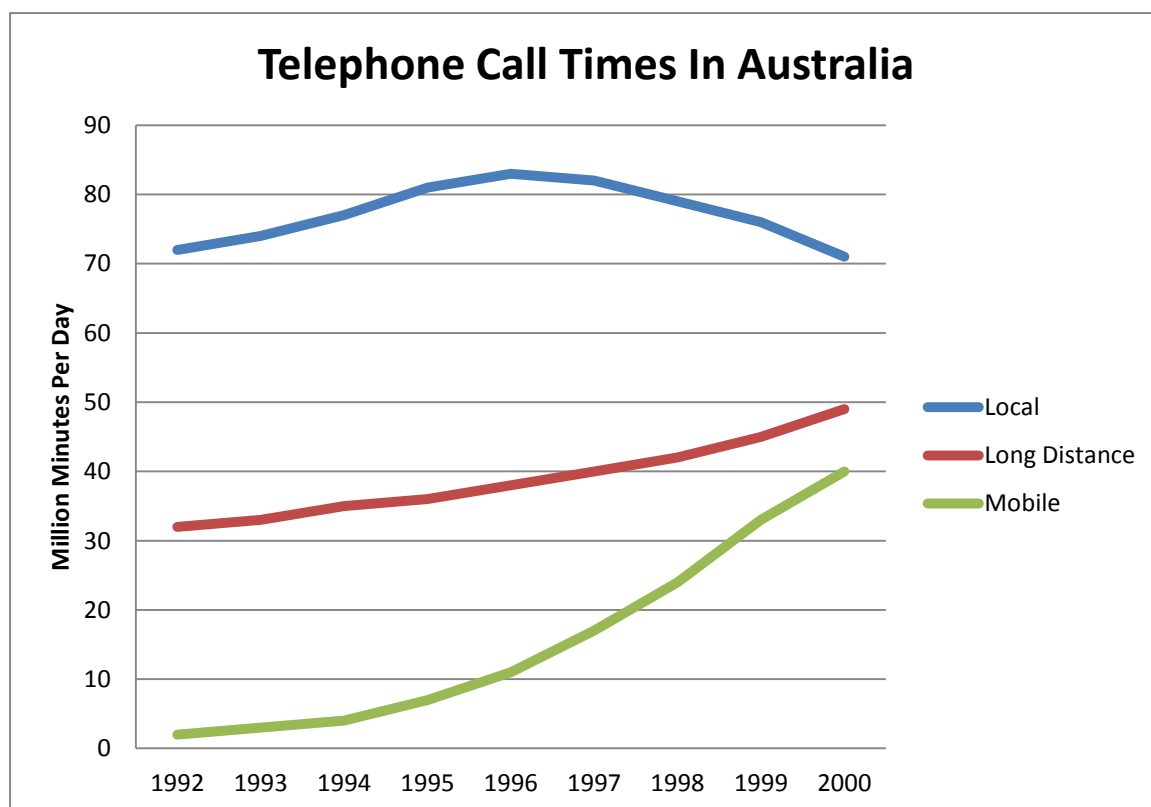
In the first paragraph there are five sentences and each sentence covers approximately one stage of the silk making process. This is a useful strategy for ensuring that each stage is treated as a separate logical step. In this response the stages are not labelled; however, it is equally acceptable to either label or not label the individual steps. It is not acceptable to label some steps but not others. It is important in any cycle to redescribe the first step at the end of the paragraph to demonstrate to the reader that the process is cyclic.

The second paragraph is a simple linear process. In this instance the reasons for the steps have been added, if they are not obvious. Some of the steps are simple and it is best to combine these steps in a single sentence in order to avoid a series of very short sentences.

Line Graph – Telephone Calls

The graph shows the number of minutes of three types of phone calls in Australia between 1992-2000.

Summarise the information in the charts and make comparisons where appropriate.



The line graph shows the total daily call times for local, long distance and mobile calls in Australia from 1992 to 2000.

In 1992 the total time for local calls in Australia was approximately 72 million minutes per day and this increased by progressively smaller amounts and reached a maximum of 84 million minutes per day in 1996 before falling steadily to about 71 million minutes of calls per day in 2000.

In contrast, long distance and mobile call times increased throughout the period from 1992 to 2000. Long distance call times were around 32 million minutes per day in 1992 and increased steadily, reaching almost 49 million minutes of calls per day by 2000. In 1992 mobile call times were at only about 3 million minutes per day but this figure increased at an increasingly rapid rate

reaching 10 million minutes per day by 1996 and 40 million minutes per day in 2000.

Overall, the number of calls increased with mobile calls appearing to replace local calls. In addition, increasing globalisation has probably led to a steady increase in the number of long distance calls.

Essay Notes

The aim of a strong Task 1 response is to allow a reader who has not seen the diagram to reproduce the graphs from the text. In this question there is a single graph with three types of telephone calls. The data has been logically broken up into two paragraphs; the first covers local calls and the second both long distance and mobile calls. The decision to logically group long distance and mobile calls has been made because these two sets of data show a similar increasing trend while local calls show a very different trend (increasing to a maximum and then falling away).

The introduction is a single long sentence that allows the reader to understand the type of graph, the title of the graph and to add and label both axes, even if they have not seen the original graph.

The first body paragraph is short, contains only one sentence and describes local calls. The sentence lists the three key data points on the graph (initial point, the maximum and the final value) and describes the two different trends over the period. By listing the values for the key points on the graph the reader should be able to draw the graph accurately from the information provided, even though it is described in a single sentence.

The second body paragraph describes long distance and mobile calls. The opening sentence describes the basic trend for both of these graphs allowing the reader to get a basic understanding of the common trend. This is followed by a single sentence for each of the two types of data. It is worth noting that the order of these two paragraphs is the same as described in the opening sentence to ensure that the essay is cohesive. For long distance calls, the initial and final data points are given as well as the trend (a straight line) allowing the reader to visualise the data. In the case of the mobile calls data, the graph has a more complex shape (roughly exponential) and in addition to the end points a middle data point is provided in the text to allow the reader to visualise the shape of the data more clearly.

Throughout the essay full units have been given by the writer to avoid any confusion. In this essay the units are long and many students will seek to abbreviate units, which can lead to confusion. Therefore students are encouraged to provide a full description of units at all times.

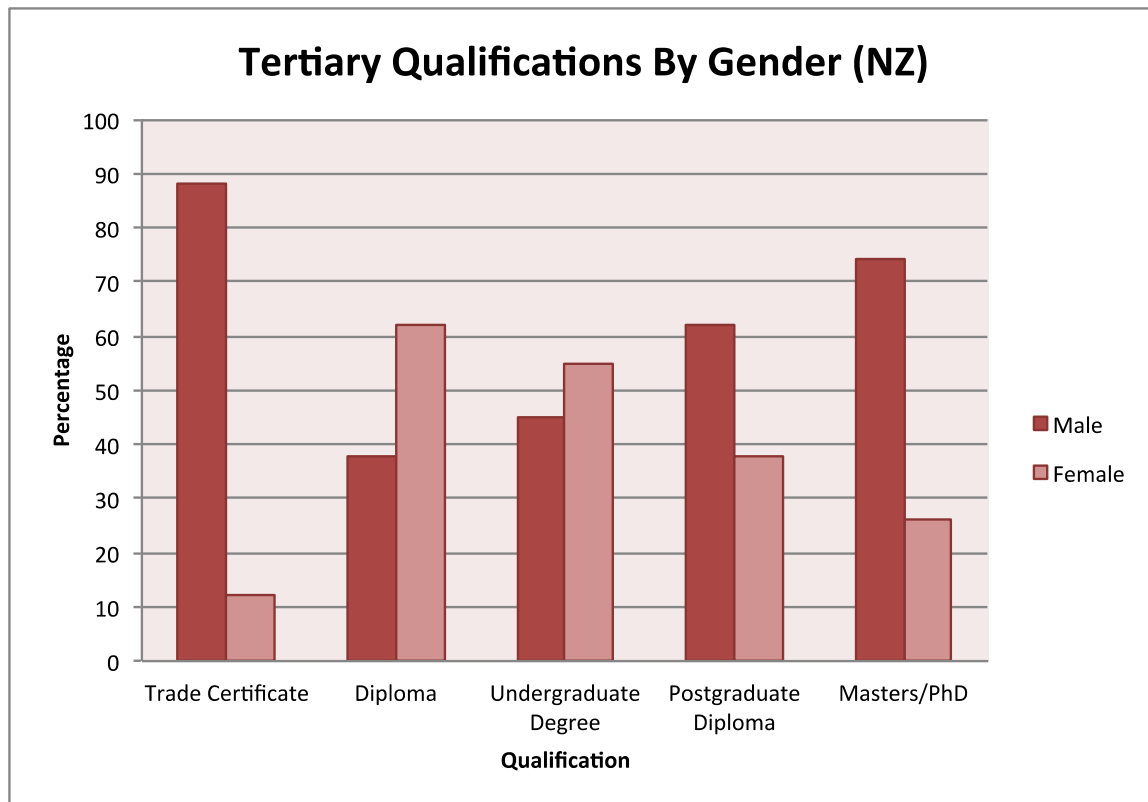
It is worth noting that the essay describes the data simply. The data is described one set at a time from the highest number of calls to the lowest and each set is treated individually imposing a strong structure on the essay.

Normally, the essay would end at this point; however, the efficient way in which the data has been described means that only 154 words were used to describe the graph and so the essay just meets the minimum word length for the essay. In this case the essay is long enough but by only 4 words and would probably not receive a penalty for failure to meet the word limit. However, a conservative approach has been adopted and to ensure the essay exceeds the word limit comfortably a short conclusion has been added. After the conclusion has been added the essay has a length of 186 words.

Bar Graph – School Qualifications

The graph shows the percentage of males and females who hold each type of qualification in 2005 in NZ.

Summarise the information in the charts and make comparisons where appropriate.



The bar chart shows the percentage of males and females who completed various educational qualifications in NZ in 2005.

Nearly 90% of people who completed trade certificates were male compared to a figure of around 10% for females. The reason for this difference is likely to be that skilled trade certificate courses comprise mainly male dominated trades such as plumbing, brick laying and carpentry.

In contrast, diplomas and bachelor's degrees are more female dominated with 62% and 55% of people completing these qualifications being female. The figures for males are less than 50% (38% and 45%, respectively). This reflects the fact that many females prefer to work in an office environment performing administration or professional based tasks.

For higher qualifications (postgraduate diplomas and master's or PhD degrees), there are a higher proportion of males (62% and 74%) compared to females (38% and 26%) who completed these degrees. This difference is most likely to be due to the preference of females to focus on families at the expense of higher education.

Essay Notes

The aim of a strong Task 1 response is to allow a reader who has not seen the graph to reproduce the graph from the text. The focus should be on describing key trends rather than providing many numbers.

The introduction should be a single sentence that describes the type of graph and the two axes of the graph. After reading the first sentence the reader should be able to draw and label the axes and put a title to the graph. Students should not list the five types of qualifications because there are too many to list.

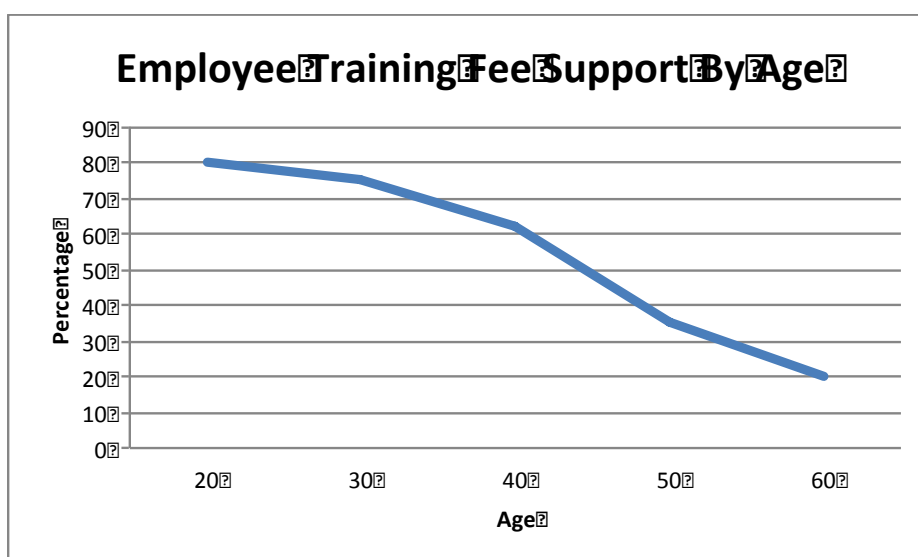
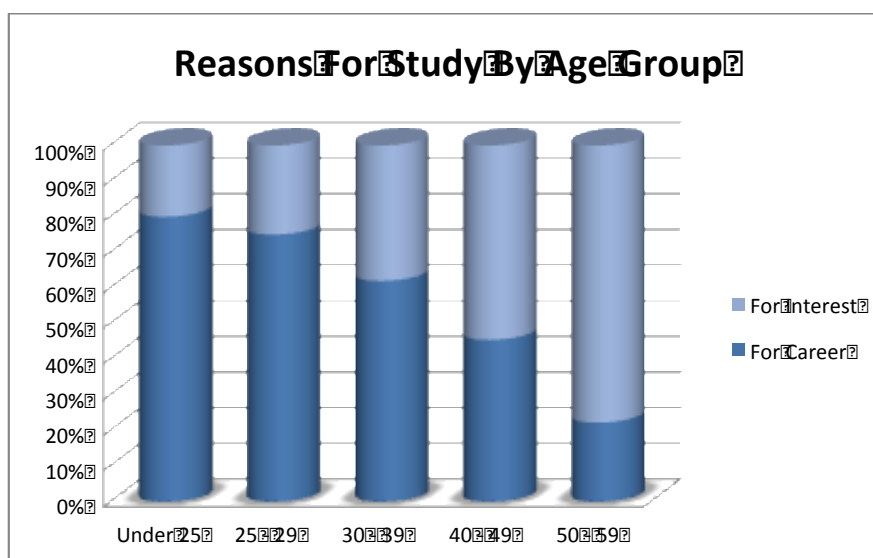
A key decision is to divide the data in to two or three logical parts. In this response the decision has been made to divide the data into three paragraphs based on presenting qualifications in the order that they are presented in the graph (lowest to highest). The first covers the male dominated trade certificates, the second describes female dominated diplomas and degrees while the third covers male dominated higher qualifications. An equally valid approach to this question is to use two paragraphs and divide based on gender.

A key difficulty with this question is that there is very little data, which means that either the data must be described in precise detail or the reasons for patterns in the data must be discussed. In this case each of the body paragraphs has two sentences. The first describes the data and the second describes probable reasons for the results.

Bar and Line Graph – Employment

The first graph shows the reasons for studying in the UK by age, while the second graph shows the support given by employers for training by age.

Summarise the information in the charts and make comparisons where appropriate.



The bar chart shows the percentage of students who choose to study because of their career or interest in the UK in five different age groups while the line graph shows how the level of support as a percentage from employers in terms of time-off work and help with fees changes between the age of 20 and 60.

The bar shows that young people in the under-25 age group study primarily for reasons of career development (80%) but this number decreases steadily over time and falls to 67% for the 30-39 age group. By the time people reach the 50-59 age group fewer than 20% study because of their career. The opposite trend is seen with the number of students studying because of interest increasing steadily as they age with only 20% studying because of interest in the under 25 group, but this rises to nearly 70% in those in the 50-59 age group.

The second chart shows that the level of support for study by employers is high in the early stages of people's career at about 80% for people aged 20, but this decreases steadily to around 60% by age 40 before falling more steeply to 20% by age 60.

Essay Notes

The introduction describes the form of the two graphs and allows the reader to understand the title, axis and form of the data for both of the graphs. The body of the essay can be readily split into two body paragraphs, one describing each of the two graphs in the order that they appear in the question.

The first body paragraph describes the two reasons for undertaking education (career development and interest). The data for career development is described first because at the first age (under 25) it is the higher value. Each set of data is described in a single sentence and in both cases the starting value, end value and trend is described allowing the reader to readily reproduce the graph from the description.

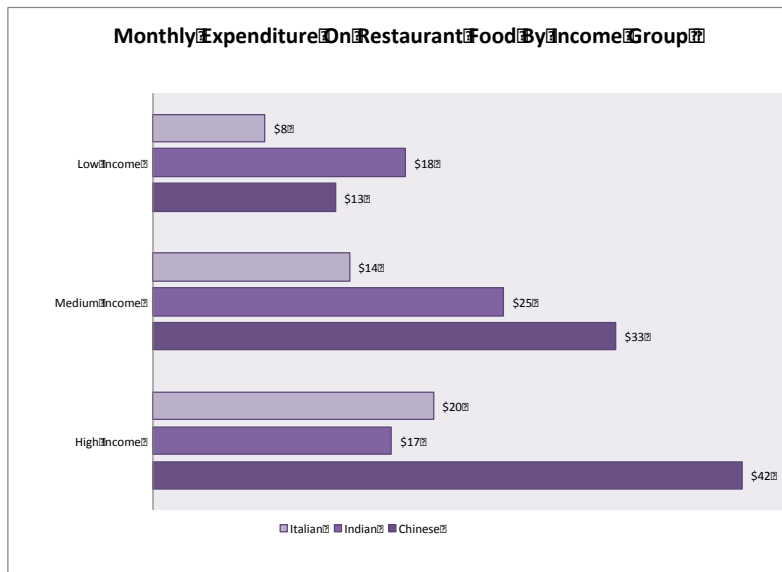
The second body paragraph describes the amount of time-off that employees are given to study. In this case the amount of time off given decreases slowly initially and then decreases more rapidly and shows two trends. For this reason the start and end point and the general trend are described for both parts of the graphs.

Overall the data is clearly described by the essay and a reader should be able to reproduce the graphs even if they have not seen the original question.

Bar Graph and Scatter Plot – Fast Food

The graph shows the monthly expenditure on three types of restaurant food in Australia. The plot shows the annual number of restaurant visits for the same types of food between 1965 and 2015.

Summarise the information in the charts and make comparisons where appropriate.



The bar graph shows the expenditure of different income groups in Italian, Indian and Chinese restaurants in Australia, while the scatterplot shows the

number of annual visits per person to the same type of restaurants between 1965 and 2015.

The proportion of money spent on Chinese and Italian food is similar for high (\$42 and \$20), medium (\$35 and \$14) and low (\$13 and \$8) income groups. As people's income becomes higher, the proportion of money that is spent on Indian food drops from being the most to least favoured style of food. This suggests that Indian food is preferred because it is the least expensive option.

In 1970 the total number of restaurant visits per year was approximately 5 visits per person, which was made up of 3 and 2 visits per person to Chinese and Italian restaurants, respectively. The total remained low until 1985, but after that time increased steadily to around 50 visits per year by 2015. After 1985, the number of visits to Chinese restaurants increased in a continuous upward trend reaching 22 visits per person per year by 2015, while visits to Italian and Indian restaurants initially followed a similar trend but the number of visits began to level out after the year 2000 reaching 15 and 12 visits per person per year by 2015, respectively. People having higher disposable incomes and less free time are probably the causes of the dramatic change in eating habits.

Essay Notes

The aim of a strong Task 1 response is to allow a reader who has not seen the charts to reproduce the graphs from the text. In this question there are two distinct graphs that allow the question to be neatly divided into two paragraphs. The two separate graphs mean that there is a significant amount of information to cover in the essay and reaching the word limit should not present a problem.

The introduction is a single long sentence, but could be written as two shorter sentences that describe the title of the graphs. After reading the first paragraph the reader should be able to suggest a title for both graphs.

The first graph is challenging and could be described in many ways. In this case the body paragraph is very unusual as it contains no direct reference to individual values for Indian food and this means that the reader would find it difficult to be able to reproduce the scale on the left hand side of the graph accurately. This was a deliberate choice to keep the word limit down and complete the essay within an acceptable time limit.

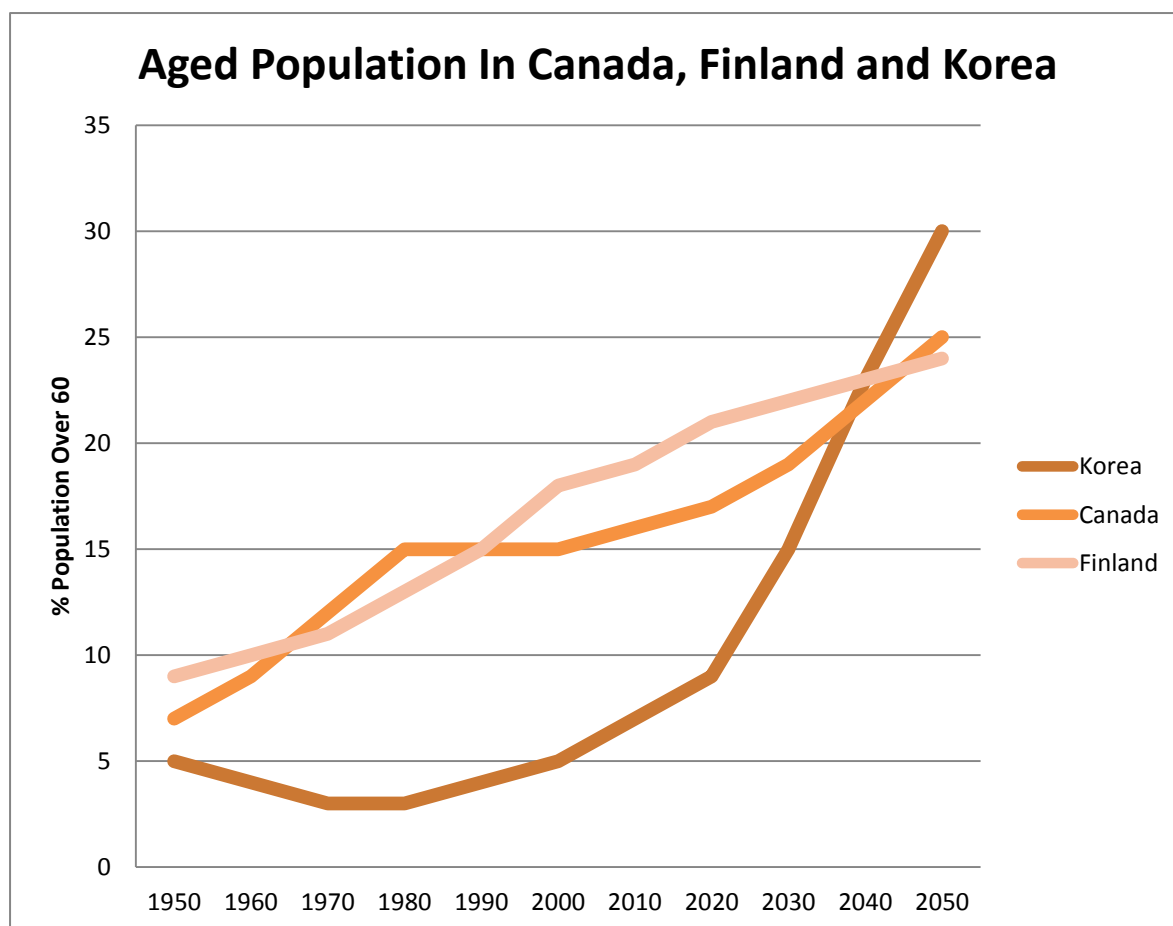
The second paragraph is also challenging as the graph has an unusual shape. The first two sentences of the paragraph focus on the overall changes because

these are quite dramatic. In the second half of the paragraph the number of visits to individual styles of restaurants is described. Chinese restaurants have the highest number of visits and are described first. Italian and Indian restaurants are grouped together as both show a flattening trend after 2000. It should be noted that the data is presented in order of importance – total visits, followed by visits to Chinese restaurants and finally visits to Italian and Indian restaurants. It is worth noting that for all three foods, the first and last values are provided as well as the shape of the graph. This allows the reader to draw the graph accurately and is a good strategy to adopt. Providing both the shape and start and end values should allow the reader to reproduce this graph very accurately. The paragraph concludes by offering a suggestion for the reasons for the changes.

Line Graph – Aging Population

The graph shows the percentage of people aged over 60 in Canada, Finland and Korea between 1950 and 2050.

Summarise the information in the charts and make comparisons where appropriate.



The graph shows the percentage of people aged 60 and over in Canada, Finland and Korea between 1950 and 2050.

The number of people aged above 60 in Canada and Finland follows a remarkably similar trend. In 1950 both countries had 7-9% of their population aged 60 or above and the percentage increased steadily until 2050 when both countries are expected to have around 25% of their population aged 60 or above.

In contrast, Korea had only 5% of its population aged 60 or over in 1950. This number dropped slightly in the subsequent years and only recovered to the

original level of 5% in 2000. Between 2000 and 2020 the number of people aged 60 or over in Korea increased more rapidly and is expected to reach 9% in 2020. After 2020 the aged population is expected to increase very rapidly overtaking Canada and Finland in around 2035 and reaching 30% by 2050.

The lower initial aged population of Korea can be attributed to the lower development of Korea in the early part of the 20th century, but rapid development and healthy diets in the second half of the 20th century are probably the cause of the increased longevity in Korea.

Essay Notes

The aim of a strong Task 1 response is to allow a reader who has not seen the graph to reproduce the graph from the text. The focus should be on describing key trends rather than providing many numbers. In this question tense presents a challenge because students are expected to describe both historical data and forecast (future) data. When describing trends that start in the past and extend into the future, the correct tense for the initial value and the trend is simple past because the initial value occurred in the past and the trend began in the past. For future values the correct phrasing is “is expected to”, which is also simple past tense. It should be noted that the expectation occurred in the past, but the expectation is for future values. Many students use “will reach/be” for future values; however, this wording is incorrect because it implies certainty and does not allow for the possibility that the forecast value may be different from what actually occurs.

The introduction should be a single sentence that describes the type of graph, the axes of the graph and the three countries that are mentioned. After reading the first sentence of the essay the reader should be able to draw and label the axes and put a title to the graph.

A key decision is to divide the data into two or three logical parts. In this response the decision has been made to divide the data into two paragraphs. The first body paragraph covers Canada and Finland because the shape of these graphs is similar. Grouping these two countries allows the graphs to be described in detail using efficient and simple language. This paragraph is also presented to the reader first because the initial values are higher than that of Korea.

The shape of the Korean graph is quite different and in the second body paragraph there is also the opportunity to contrast this set of data with the data for the other two countries. It should be noted that the Korean graph

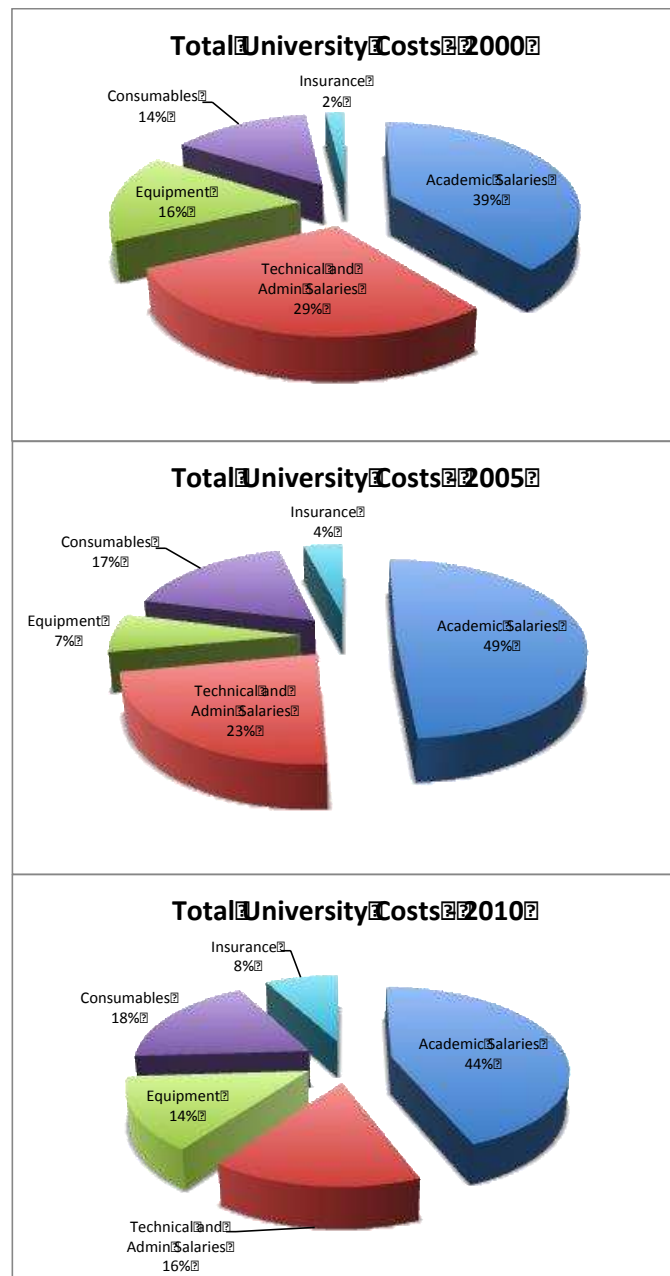
changes shape and as a consequence the graph has been divided into three sections (1950-2000, 2000-2020 and 2020-2050). For each of these sections the start and end points are provided along with a description of the trend in each section of the graph. Only the key features of the graphs are described, however the reader should be able to draw the graph from the text without assistance.

The final paragraph in the essay does not describe the graph but the reasons that the graph could be the shape it is. This is not required by the examiners but gives the passage a more authentic feel as data is usually analysed not just described. In this case it helps lengthen the essay and ensure that it is longer than the minimum word length.

Pie Chart – University Expenses

The three pie charts below describe the breakdown of costs at a Canadian University in 2000, 2005 and 2010.

Summarise the information in the charts and make comparisons where appropriate.



The three pie charts show the breakdown of spending at a particular university in Canada in 2000, 2005 and 2010.

Salaries made up the largest part of expenditure in all three years for which data has been provided (2000, 2005 and 2010). Academic salaries made up 39% of the total cost in 2000 and this figure increased to 49% in 2005 before decreasing to 44% in 2010. In contrast, technical and administrative salaries have declined steadily and were 29%, 23% and 16% in the years 2000, 2005 and 2010, respectively.

The remaining budget was spent on consumables, equipment and insurance. The spending on consumables was in the range of 14-18% in 2000, 2005 and 2010, while the spending on equipment varied widely in the 3 years provided and was in the range of 7-16% of the total budget. Insurance costs made up a very small percentage of the overall budget at 2-4% in 2000 and 2005 but this figure jumped to 8% in 2010.

Essay Notes

This question presents the challenge of how to logically divide the data because there are three pie charts. The simplest way to manage this question is to separate the different types of costs and treat them individually. Many students will choose to write three body paragraphs for this question and break the essay down by time. In general, at the highest (paragraph) level it is usually a poor choice to separate data by time because this causes the writer to describe a particular feature (costs in this case) in three different places and makes the description of changes less clear to the reader. In the three charts, two of the largest costs are academic staff costs and technical and administrative staff costs. As both represent a large percentage of the overall cost and are both related to staffing, they were logically grouped together in the first body paragraph while all other costs were described in the second body paragraph.

The introduction describes the form of the data (pie chart), a title for the data, the specific years for which the data is presented and that the data is represented as percentages.

In the first body paragraph staff salaries are grouped together. Since the cost of academic staff represent the largest cost, they are described first and in most detail, followed by technical and administrative salaries.

The second body paragraph covers the remaining three costs. In this paragraph consumables and equipment are described first as they represent the largest of the remaining costs to be described. They are also grouped together because they are of similar size. The remaining cost, insurance, is the last cost to be

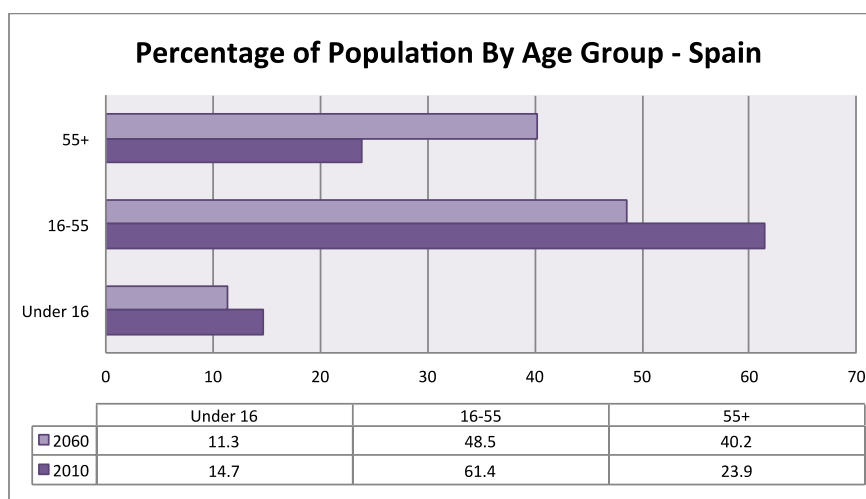
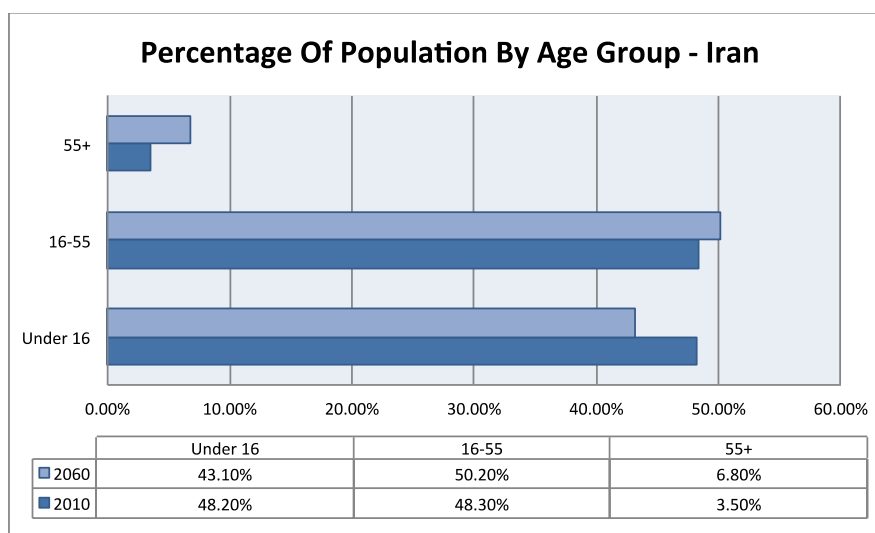
described because it is the smallest and cannot be easily grouped with other costs.

It should be noted that all items in the pie charts are described allowing the reader to reproduce the data reasonably accurately from the text even though not all numbers are described.

Bar Graph and Table – Population in Iran and Spain

The charts below describe the population in Iran and Spain in 2010 and the expected population in 2060.

Summarise the information in the charts and make comparisons where appropriate.



The two bar charts show the actual and expected percentage of the population in three age groups (0-15, 16-55 and 55+ years) in Iran and Spain in 2010 and 2060.

In Iran in 2010 the number of people in the 0-15 age group was just under half (48.2%) of the total population, while the population aged 16-55 years was

slightly higher (48.3%). In contrast, the number of Iranian people aged over 55 represented only 3.5% of the population. By 2060, it is expected that the population will have aged significantly, with the number of people aged 0-15 years expected to decrease to 43.1%, while the number of people in the 16-55 and 55+ age groups is expected to increase to 50.2% and 6.8%, respectively.

In Spain in 2010 the percentage of young people was much lower (14.7%) compared to Iran, while the 16-55 and 55+ age groups made up 61.4% and 23.9% of the population, respectively. By 2060 the population of Spain is expected to age further with the number of people in the 0-15, 16-55 and 55+ age groups expected to be 11.3%, 48.5% and 40.2%, respectively.

Essay Notes

This question is quite challenging as there are 2 bar charts, and data is both for the past and the future and there are relatively few data points (12 in total). The introduction is particularly difficult because of the number of different elements that need to be included.

From a structural point of view the data can be readily divided logically in two ways. The first is by country and the second by year. It is best to divide the data by country as this leads to a more simple and clearer description of the data. In general, it is best not to logically divide the data into paragraphs by time. Data should be divided by time within a paragraph.

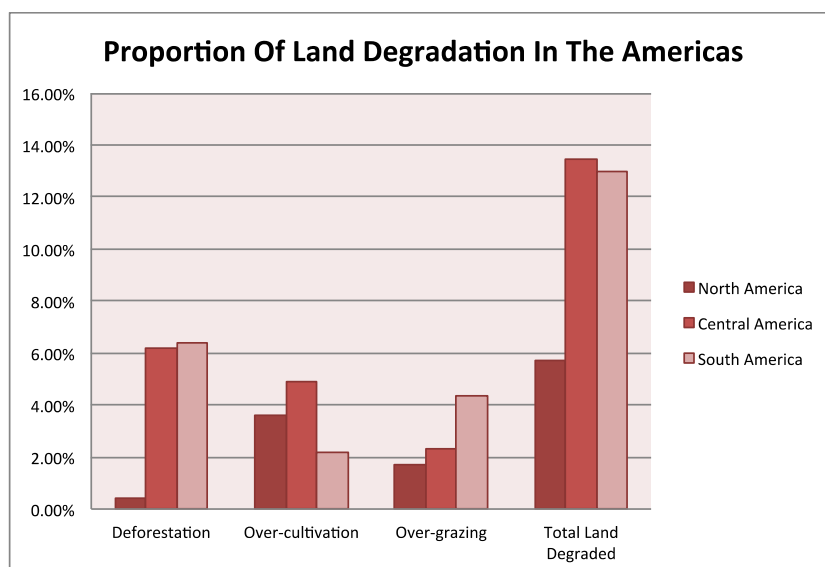
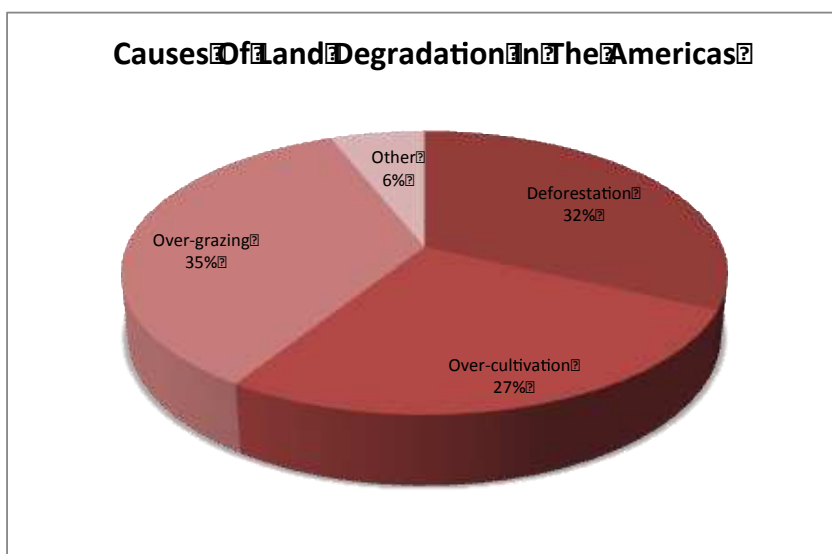
The first body paragraph focuses on Iranian data because it is the first bar chart presented in the question. The data is also described in chronological (time) order. The earliest to latest year and youngest to oldest age group is the order that is adopted throughout giving the essay a clear consistent structure. There are so few data points provided in the question that each individual point should be described. However, it should be noted that trends are also described – notably that the population is expected to age and there are expected to be a higher proportion of older people in the future.

The second body paragraph describes the data for Spain. The data is presented in the same order as for the Iranian data and the only difference is that the situation in Iran is contrasted with that in Spain. Again the small amount of data means that each individual data point can be described which means that a reader who has not seen the original question should be able to reproduce the data exactly.

Pie Chart And Bar Graph – Land Degradation

The pie chart shows why agricultural land in America has become less productive. The table shows how these causes affected the three regions in the Americas.

Summarise the information reporting the important features and make comparisons where relevant.



The pie chart shows the causes of land degradation (deforestation, over-cultivation, over-grazing and other causes) in North, Central and South America, while the bar chart shows the percentage of land degraded in America by cause and region and the total percentage of land degraded.

The pie chart shows that over-grazing makes up 35% of land degradation while deforestation and overgrazing are responsible for 32% and 27% of land degradation, respectively. Other causes of land degradation make up 8% of the total degradation.

Central America has by far the highest level of land degradation at 13.8%, which is caused by deforestation (6.2%), over-cultivation (4.9%) and over grazing (2.3%). Approximately 13% of land in South America is degraded and is caused by deforestation (6.3%) with smaller contributions from over-grazing (4.4%) and over-cultivation (2.3%). North America has by far the lowest level of land degradation at 5.8%, which is mainly due to over-cultivation (3.7%) and overgrazing (1.8%). Deforestation made up only 0.3% of land degradation in North America.

Essay notes

This question includes both a pie chart and a bar chart that allows the question to be logically divided into two parts. The introduction describes the high level content of the two data sets including the forms of the data (pie chart and a bar chart), a suitable title, the breakdown of the types of degradation and is presented in percentage form rather than as absolute values. It should be noted that because the pie chart is presented first in the question it should always be described first in the response.

The first body paragraph describes the pie chart and because there are only four data points, all can be listed and they are described in order from highest to lowest value.

The second body paragraph describes the bar chart. The bar chart describes the overall percentage of land degradation in each region as well as the breakdown of that degradation. Since the total land degradation totals are highest, they are described first in each case followed by the breakdown of the data by degradation type. Similarly, Central America is described first because it has the highest level of land degradation, and is followed by the other regions in order of the percentage of land degraded.

There is very little data provided in the question so every data point is described. Initially, the last sentence was not included in the essay because the percentage of deforestation was so small it was considered unimportant and also because it can be calculated from the other data that was presented. However, adding this sentence increases the essay length from 155 to 166 words ensuring that it more comfortably exceeds the minimum essay length.

8. The General Task 1 Letter

The IELTS General Task 1 response requires students to write a letter asking for a problem to be resolved or to describe a situation to another person. Most students find the letter much easier to write than the Task 2 essay. Nevertheless, there are a number of strategies that students can use to ensure they write an effective letter.

The first is that writers should have a clear idea of the aim of the letter. The goal of the letter should be to create a believable scenario and describe it to a reader. In many questions the writer must request for a specific action to be taken. It should also be noted that the tone of the letters should always be polite and understanding as many of the scenarios involve a request for an action to be performed that the recipient could easily refuse. Failure to have an understanding tone is likely to lead to the request being rejected by the recipient.

Step 1 – Organising the information – thinking time

A key part of drafting a Task 1 response is to create a believable scenario that is sufficiently detailed to allow the student to write a minimum of 150 words because a failure to reach the word limit will result in a significant penalty. The scenario must be believable otherwise the letter will not feel authentic.

Step 2 – Writing the Introduction

All letters should begin with a greeting that is appropriate for the recipient such as “Dear Sir/Madam” or “Dear Tom”. It is critical that the form of the greeting reflects the nature of the relationship between the writer and the recipient of the letter.

An introduction in a Task 1 letter is usually one sentence, or very rarely two short sentences. It should contain a brief description of the problem and may include a request. After reading the introduction the reader should be able to describe the reason for the letter.

Step 3 – Writing the Explanation

The first part of the body of the letter is to explain the scenario. This will be the longest part of the letter and it is important to ensure that the scenario being described is sufficiently complex to allow the letter to be long enough to meet the minimum word length. Typically the first body paragraph should include a detailed description of a problem that needs addressing. This paragraph usually forms the majority of the essay and often is around 100 words in length. It is critical that the letter is believable and must include believable names and dates in order to ensure that the letter feels natural to the reader.

Step 4 – Writing the Request

The second part of the body includes a description of precisely what the reader is requesting. For example the request could be to pay an overdue bill, to cut back dangerous overhanging branches from a neighbours house or to ask for the return of a long ago borrowed book. It is normal to also provide a reason for the request. The request paragraph is usually short and may be as little as one or two short sentences. For this reason well developed scenarios are critical for achieving the word limit.

Step 5 – Concluding the Letter

The essay will normally finish with a one-line sentence thanking the reader or asking for a timely response and will be signed off with a phrase such as “Yours sincerely” or “With thanks”.

9. General Task 1 Letter Examples

In this section, ten Task 1 General IELTS letters are provided. For each essay a set of notes is included that describes the key choices made by the author. It is most important to remember that a successful response allows the reader to feel as though the letter is genuine.

A serious common problem in the General Task 1 response occurs when students create a scenario that is unnatural and not believable to the reader. Students also often avoid putting in names and dates and this also causes letters to feel not authentic. Well-chosen names of people and places make a significant difference to the authenticity of a letter.

General Task 1 Useful Language

Letters have a particular form and students can take advantage of this in their writing because many standard phrases can be used throughout the letter that can improve the authenticity of the letter. Below is a list of some of the useful standard phrases that can be used in letters.

Salutations

Dear Sir/Madam – Formal when the recipient is unknown to the writer

Dear Mr/Mrs/Miss/Dr [Surname] – Formal when the recipient is known to the reader on a professional basis

Dear [First Name] – Informal, used for friends and family only

Introducing the reason for the letter

I am writing to you in regards to – to inform the reader what the subject of the letter is

I am writing to inform you – to provide information to the reader

I am writing to you express my sincere thanks – to give thanks to a reader for help provided

Showing understanding

I appreciate that – used to recognise efforts already made by the recipient

I would also like to thank you on behalf of – used to express thanks for someone else

I am not too concerned about – used to show that one aspect of a problem is unimportant to the writer

Providing Information

As you are aware – used to acknowledge that the recipient is already aware of a piece of information that is being provided

I called to notify you of – used to refer to a previous telephone call

On one occasion – used to provide an example

I am really pleased to let you know that – used to express good news

I advise that – used to provide information in a neutral tone

With regards to the question of – used to refer to a specific issue

I am happy to – used to offer to provide assistance

Requesting Information

I would appreciate it if you could – used for polite requests

I hope that you will – used to indicate a desire for something to be done

I am requesting that – used for a direct request

My suggestion is to – used for providing new ideas

I hope that you will consider – used to suggest a preferred solution

I would be really grateful if you – used to express thanks in advance if a request is to be granted

I would like to understand what – used to request an explanation

Expressing Thanks

I was absolutely delighted to hear that – used to express pleasure

Thank you for contacting me in regards – used to show appreciation

We were particularly impressed that – used to express admiration

Apologising

I am sorry to trouble you but – used for apologising for inconvenience caused

I am deeply sorry for the inconvenience caused – used for apologising for causing a problem for another person

Unfortunately, this Saturday I have already committed to – used for showing that a person is unavailable to attend an event due to a previous appointment

Finishing

I look forward to hearing from you in the near future – used to show warmth and a desire to continue a relationship

I look forward to your rapid response – used to set the expectation that a reply will arrive soon

Signing off

Yours sincerely, - used for formal letters, not used for close friends

With thanks, - used for both semi-formal and formal letters

Kind regards, - formal but warmer than “Regards,” or “Yours sincerely”

Your friend, - informal, and used for friends only

Cheers, - very informal, for people that you know well

Addresses

7/26 Willisden Rd., Brighton – used for full addresses, abbreviations are acceptable but must end in a full stop

Hadfield Road – used when referring to a general location and can be abbreviated if desired

Dates

17th of December – standard form for a date

(17/12/2014) – used when a date is not required as part of a sentence but the writer wants to provide the information – this is generally true when brackets are used

December 17 – an alternative standard form for a date

1. Letter – Hot Water

You are a student at a university in Brighton and are living in private accommodation and have not had hot water or heating for some time. The landlord's workmen have tried to fix the problem but without success.

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to you in regards to the ongoing problems with the hot water service in the apartment at 7/26 Willisden Rd., Brighton.

As you are aware the hot water service has not been working since the 17th of December when I called to notify you of the problem. I appreciate that within a day you arranged for tradesmen to come to the flat to resolve the problem. However, after the workmen arrived without the appropriate tools for the job and after spending 10 minutes looking at the job advised that they were aware of the cause of the problem and would return later in the day to fix it. They did not return until the 22nd of December when they advised that the problem was different to what they first expected and would need to order in new parts. On their return just after Christmas they replaced the thermostat and declared that the problem was fixed, but we still have no hot water.

I would appreciate it if you could either arrange different workmen to come and either fix or replace the hot water service before the 31st of December as we have guests coming to stay over New Year and would not wish them to fall ill.

I look forward to your rapid response,

Kind regards,

Simon Smith

Notes

This is a standard question where students are asked to explain a problem and request for the problem to be resolved. The key challenge is to create a scenario that is believable.

The letter opens with "Dear Sir/Madam" as the writer is writing to either a real estate agent or the owner directly and may not know their name. The opening sentence introduces the problem and provides the reason that they are writing. It should be noted that an address has been made up by the author in order to make the letter feel authentic.

The first body paragraph describes the problem in detail. In this case the scenario is well developed with the problem not being fixed on several occasions. This makes the paragraph long and ensures that the word limit is



comfortably reached. In order to provide authenticity, dates are included in the paragraph. Essays often include dates and students should pay attention to ensure they use acceptable forms.

The second body paragraph describes the action that the writer of the letter wants to be taken. It is normal to explain why the requestor wants action to be taken.

The final line is short and the phrase “I look forward to your rapid response” is a useful way of politely but firmly requesting that action be taken.

2. Letter - Restaurant

You had a very good experience in a local restaurant with your family. Write a letter to a newspaper to tell them about it, describe what you liked about it, and why you think the restaurant is worth visiting.

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to you regarding The Caulfield Gazette's request (15/10/13) to notify your newspaper of excellent businesses in the local area.

Last night my husband and two children went to Mario's Pizzeria on Hadfield Road for a meal and were delighted with our experience there. The staff were friendly and welcoming and the overall quality of service was excellent. Our orders arrived quickly, were hot, of a good size and inexpensive. In addition the drinks were reasonably priced. We were particularly impressed that when our children became a little impatient towards the end of the meal, the staff provided pencils and drawing material for them and greatly eased the burden of what had been a long and tiring day.

I hope that you will publish this letter so that many other people in the area can enjoy this excellent restaurant and that it will thrive and be a part our community for a long time to come,

Yours sincerely,

Felicity Maxwell

Notes

This question should be reasonably straightforward for most students as they have most likely been to many restaurants. However, the challenge in this question is having an opening that is realistic because normally people will not write to newspapers about restaurants they enjoyed. In this case the author has chosen the letter to be a response to a request from a local newspaper to support local business in order to make the letter feel authentic to the reader.

The opening sentence of the letter explains the reason for the letter. The letter has only one main paragraph that describes the positive experience the writer had at the restaurant. Different writers will choose very different restaurants, sometimes very high quality restaurants with an excellent atmosphere. The choice of restaurant is not important but the believability of the response is critical.

In this case a family restaurant has been chosen as the subject of the letter and describes events and experiences that a family might appreciate in a restaurant such as cost, meal size, time for meals to arrive etc.



The final paragraph is to explain what the result the author hopes to achieve by writing the letter. In this case it is to bring awareness of a good restaurant to other people.

In order to further increase the authenticity of the letter the name of the person who wrote the letter is female. This is a deliberate choice by the author because in most families

such a letter is much more likely to be written by the mother rather than the father of a family.

3. Letter – Coming for a Holiday

A friend wants to spend a four-week holiday in your country and has written asking for advice about the trip. Write a letter to your friend. In your letter: offer to find somewhere to stay, give advice about what to do, give information about what clothes to bring.

Dear Chris,

I was absolutely delighted to hear that you are able to finally come to Australia and visit Melbourne in September. Spring is a great time to visit Melbourne because there are many mild, clear days, but the nights are much cooler so make sure that you bring at least one light jumper.

I hope that you will spend a couple of days living with us but I also recommend spending a night or two in a hotel in the centre of town so you can experience the nightlife and enjoy the parks and galleries at your leisure.

I highly recommend that you ride on “Puffing Billy”, a steam train that runs through the Dandenong Ranges. While you are there you should also visit Healesville Sanctuary, which has many native Australian native animals including kangaroos and koalas. I will be working during the week but on the weekend I hope that you will agree to join us on the Great Ocean Road and can enjoy the beautiful coastline and spectacular views.

We can’t wait until you arrive,

Your friend,

Anthony

Notes

This question allows writers wide scope and they should have no difficulty in reaching the word limit. It is advisable that when answering questions that students write about areas that they are familiar with, if possible. Tone is important in this letter. It is written to a friend so the tone should not be too formal.

It is always critical to ensure that all aspects of the question are answered. In this case the elements are what to do, where to stay and what to wear. However, it is also important that the response is natural and these elements do not have to appear in the same order as the question. It is not unusual for examiners to present the requirements in an order that is different to what

would normally be written in a letter. Students need to ensure that they fully analyse questions and do not assume that the information provided by examiners is correct and provided in a logical order.



In this case, the most important question for any host is when and this is addressed in the first paragraph of the letter and time of year naturally leads to recommendation about clothing (which is the final element mentioned in the question).

The second paragraph focuses on where to stay and is extended in this case by recommending staying at a hotel and coming to stay with their friend.

The final paragraph focuses on places to visit and is an opportunity to provide longer descriptions of desirable places to visit if there are problems reaching the word limit.

4. Letter - Accommodation

You will move to a new city because of you work. Ask some friends who live there for help finding accommodation. Tell them where you would like to live. Tell them the type of accommodation you are looking for.

Dear Jin,

I am really pleased to let you know that I got the job at Zhongshan International Secondary School and am moving to Zhongshan early next year. I will spend at least a year teaching there and was hoping that you could help me find a suitable place to live.

Since a number of family members and friends are planning to come and visit me I am hoping to rent an apartment that has three bedrooms and a good size living area so that I can entertain. I would really like one in one of the newer estates because most of them have beautiful gardens, a lake that you can sit beside and read and a swimming pool. I am not too concerned about the location as Zhongshan is not that big but it would be great if the apartment is located in the East District so I am close to work. I am happy to pay up to 4000 yuan per month for the apartment.

I am arriving in Zhongshan on the 14th of January and it would prefer to move straight in. I am sorry to trouble you but I would be really grateful if you could arrange something like this. Thank you!

Your friend,

Tom

Notes

This question should be fairly straight forward as most students will have little difficulty in creating a reason and a list of requirements for accommodation



that will allow them to comfortably reach the minimum word length. It is generally best if students describe a place that they are familiar with. The style of the letter should be semi-formal as the recipient of the letter is a friend but the request is important to the writer.

In the sample essay the first paragraph describes the reason why the writer is moving

to a new city and asks assistance in finding accommodation. It is worth noting that place names and the name of the workplace are both mentioned in order to give the letter a more authentic feel.

The second paragraph focuses on the requirements for the apartment. To ensure that the word limit is met a number of different requirements including for location, the type of accommodation, the size and some of the facilities are included.

The final paragraph describes the specific request and the date of arrival. As the request could require significant effort on the part of the recipient, expressing sincere thanks is important.

5. Letter – Car Accident

You hired a car from a rental company and while you were driving on holiday, you have a small accident. You will have to write a report to the company to explain it. You need to explain the following:

- 1. Where you hired it and when?**
- 2. Describe how the accident happened?**
- 3. What you did after the accident?**

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to inform you about a minor car accident that I had in the Toyota Camry that I hired from Dalkeith Car Rentals on the 12th of December.

I was driving slowly on West Mains Rd. at approximately 7:40 pm on the 13th of December when a car stopped suddenly in order to avoid a squirrel running across the road. I was paying attention and braked however the car skidded on line markings and ran into the back of the car in front at low speed causing a small amount of damage to both cars. As the damage is very minor I have continued to use the car but felt I should let you know of the accident. After the accident I exchanged details with the other driver and have enclosed them on the attached sheet of paper.

I have hired the car for two weeks and would like to understand what I need to do to fix the problem. I would be grateful if you could advise me of any other action I need to take. I am deeply sorry for the inconvenience caused,

Kind regards,

Paul Richards

Notes

This letter requires the writer to describe a car accident in a car hired from a hire car company and to ensure that both the car company is informed about the details of the accident and also to request what the writer needs to do in order to meet their obligations. The subject of the letter is a business transaction and requires a high level of formality. It is advisable that students

describe roads that they are familiar so that the letter is as authentic as possible.



The first paragraph explains the purpose of the letter, including basic details of the circumstances surrounding the incident.

The second paragraph describes the accident in detail and the actions taken after the accident and is the explanation contained within the letter. The details including places, times and dates are provided and the letter informs the company of the details of the driver to ensure authenticity of the letter.

The final paragraph includes the request, which is that the company informs the writer of any further action that they need to take in order to fix the problem. This paragraph also includes an apology to the company for the problems caused.

6. Letter – Cheque Book

You asked the bank for a new chequebook two weeks ago but you haven't received anything. Write a letter to the manager complaining about the service. Say how and when you ordered the chequebook. Tell them when you need the chequebook by and ask the manager to send it to you before this date.

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to you to express my disappointment with the poor service I have received from your bank recently and in particular with regards to the chequebook that I ordered two weeks ago that has still not arrived.

I run a small business that uses many different suppliers and need to write many cheques to ensure that I pay them on time and do not damage the good relationships I have with them. After realising that I would need a new chequebook on the 12th of April I went to the Bayswater branch of the Bank of Southern England to request a new chequebook and was told that it should arrive within five working days. As of the 26th of April it still has not arrived and I have now used up all the remaining cheques in my current book.

I would be most grateful if you could ensure that I receive a new chequebook no later than the 30th of April because that is when many of my bills fall due,

Yours sincerely,

George Mathieson

Notes

This question asks students to write a letter in regards to a simple request for a new chequebook that has not yet been received. The request is short making it



difficult for students to reach the word the limit unless they develop a scenario that is detailed. In this case the letter includes the impact of not having the chequebook as well as the urgency of the request in order to reach the word limit. Since the letter is related to business/professional matters it is important that a formal

style is used in the both the forms of address and the style of writing.

The opening paragraph describes the purpose for writing the letter while the second paragraph describes the situation facing the writer of the letter. The first sentence in this paragraph is used to describe the importance of the request. The second to describe what action has been taken by the writer and their expectations, while the third paragraph describes the current situation. The second paragraph is slightly over 100 words and the details of the scenario that have been imagined are critical in ensuring that the word limit is reached.

The third paragraph is one sentence and describes the request that is being made and the reason that it is important that the author receives the chequebook on time.

7. Letter - Dogs

Write a letter to complain about a dangerous situation when some adolescents let their dogs run wild in public.

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to Whitehorse Council in regards to a group of adolescents that regularly allow their dogs to run free at Springfield Park in Doncaster where young children can often be found using the playground equipment provided for them.

Often on a Saturday morning there are a group of young people at Springfield Park who allow their dogs to run free throughout the park and threaten other users of the park, particularly the elderly and small children. On one occasion a large dog ran into a small child. Fortunately, the child although very frightened, was not harmed by the incident. However, there is the risk that one of these dogs could attack a small child or an elderly person leading to very serious consequences.

I am requesting that some of your rangers visit the park on the weekend and observe the problem and take appropriate action to ensure the safety of the community,

Kind regards,

Michelle Harris

Notes

This question is challenging because the request is a simple complaint and it can be challenging for students to reach the word limit. To reach the minimum word limit in this case it is necessary to develop a reasonably complex scenario and describe an incident involving dogs at the park.



The opening paragraph describes the problem of allowing dogs to run free in a park. It should be noted that the author has used names of the park, suburb and council involved in order to give the letter an authentic feel.

The second paragraph is used to provide additional information about the problem and describing an incident makes the letter longer, as does describing the risks of future events.

The third paragraph describes the specific action that is being requested. Overall the letter is just over the 150 word minimum length.

8. Letter – Philosophy or Computer Science

You have a friend who is about to go to a university, and he wants you to suggest to him on which course to take – philosophy, in which he is very interested, or computer science, which offers better job prospects.

Dear Mike,

Thanks for your letter; it was great to hear from you again. Also, many congratulations for getting a place at Princeton. Princeton is undoubtedly one of the best universities in the world and I am sure your parents are very proud of your achievement.

With regards to the question of whether you should study Philosophy that you have been passionate about for many years or Computer Science, which would give you much better career options, I think you have a really difficult decision to make. My suggestion is to do a double degree. I think it is important to have a backup plan so I would consider focusing on your Philosophy as that is your true passion but have Computer Science in case you are not able to find a job related to Philosophy.

I think this choice is a very personal one, but my choice would be to go with your passion and choose Philosophy if you are unable to do a double major. You only live once and it is important that you do things that you love.

Congratulations on getting into Princeton and good luck with your choice. I am confident you will choose wisely,

With very best wishes,

Harold Kostas

Notes

This question is interesting from a cultural perspective as the purpose of education is viewed differently in different cultures. This is one of the few Task 1 questions that have cultural elements to the question. The writer is asked to give advice on whether a student should study subjects that they are passionate about or subjects that lead to a good career. For many people education is seen as a means to improve their lives through financial gain or the ability to migrate. It is certainly reasonable to advise students to make that choice in the letter because this is the kind of advice that many people would give. Therefore it could also lead to a letter that is authentic and may be closer

to many students' experiences. As a consequence many students may feel more confident about writing a letter expressing this view.

In this case the author has chosen to write a letter encouraging the recipient to follow their passion. Mostly, students will not choose to make this recommendation in their letter because it is not what most people around them would normally recommend. In Western society many more students choose to follow study paths that they are interested because employers are



more likely to employ graduates with a range of backgrounds and will more often choose people who demonstrate excellence rather than specific, marketable skills. In addition, many people in the West have not experienced significant hardship in their lives and are therefore more likely to choose to study subjects that they are interested in rather than subjects that protect their future.

This letter is to a friend and should have an informal style. The opening paragraph of the letter is designed to make the letter feel authentic to the reader and does not address the question.

The second paragraph explains the two choices and the advantages and disadvantages of the two paths. The second sentence acknowledges the difficulty of making a choice. The recommendation is clearly stated in the third sentence of the paragraph. The fourth sentence explains the detailed position of the reader, which is that it is better to do what you love but it is also a good idea to have a backup plan.

The first sentence of third paragraph is to make it clear to the reader that they must make the choice for themselves and be happy with that choice. This sentence also has a strong cultural element because in Western culture people generally believe that it is better to give people the freedom to make their own decisions as this typically leads to fewer regrets. The intention of the writer is to give information and their opinion but at the same time give freedom to choose to go against the advice that is given.

It is also culturally normal to write positively, be supportive and focus on advantages of a particular course of action rather than give warnings about choosing an undesirable path. The last paragraph adopts a supportive and confident tone and is respectful of the choice made by the person receiving the advice.

9. Letter - Accident

After being involved in a bad accident, you were cared for by a person that you do not know. Write a kind letter to express your thanks.

Dear Mr Harris,

I am writing to you to express my sincere thanks for your assistance after last week's boating accident.

After the boats collided and I was thrown into the water I was terrified. After knocking my head and breaking my arm I was afraid I would drown as I was also dizzy and couldn't see properly. I later learned from friends that you were walking your dog and after seeing me in the water jumped in to save me. It was a truly courageous act for which I will forever be grateful.

I would also like to thank you on behalf of my parents who were deeply shocked by the accident and who also wish to thank you for your bravery. It is really comforting to know that when I was in difficulty there were people on hand ready to assist.

I hope that you will accept the small gift that I have attached to express my thanks,

With very best wishes,

Melissa Dawes

Notes

It is quite difficult to reach the word limit for this question as it only requires a thank-you and it is possible to write a very short letter to do this effectively. To ensure that the minimum word limit is reached for this question it is best if students create an incident and describe how they felt. It is important that a highly grateful tone is used throughout.

In this letter it is unlikely that the writer knows the rescuer. For this reason it is best to use a title for the person and write the letter in a formal style.

The opening sentence of the letter simply explains the reason for the letter. The second paragraph explains the scenario to the reader and explains the experience of the author and expresses their feelings to the person who helped them.

The third paragraph expresses thanks to the recipient of the letter and describes the potential impact of the incident on the parents of the author and acknowledges their bravery and willingness to help others even when the situation presented a danger to them.

The fourth paragraph in which the author indicates to the recipient that they have given them a gift of thanks helps to give the letter a feel of authenticity and also to extend the length of the letter.



It should be noted that the in total the text of the letter is only 160 words. This letter exceeds the minimum word length, but only by a small amount and it is important that students ensure that they

reach the word limit in all cases to avoid a penalty. Students should be aware of the likely length of the scenario that they have developed.

10. Letter - Babysitting

A friend has asked you to babysit on Saturday night and wants to know how much you charge per hour. Unfortunately, you already have a commitment this Saturday and cannot babysit. However, you hope they will use your service in future.

Write a letter to your friend explaining that you are not able to babysit this Saturday. Explain what your fee for the service is.

Dear Michelle,

I am writing in regards to your request for me to come and babysit your children on Saturday night.

Thank you for contacting me in regards to babysitting. Unfortunately, this Saturday I have already committed to babysit for another family in the local area and am unavailable to sit for your children. I am free the following weekend if you require my services.

I hope that you will consider using my services in future. My rate is \$10 per hour before midnight and \$15 per hour after midnight. As part of my service I am able to provide a number of educational games and videos that are appropriate for all ages. I am happy to supervise meal times and homework and also ensure that children are in bed by the time chosen by their parents.

I look forward to hearing from you in the near future,

Kind regards,

Tania Ericson

Notes

This is a challenging letter to write as the request is very simple and does not require a detailed response making it difficult to reach the word limit. In this case the essay is 152 words long and has achieved the minimum word limit by describing in detail the services provided by the baby sitter.

In this case the recipient of the letter is addressed informally (by first name) in order to ensure authenticity because typically children are baby sat by people who are known to the family.



The opening paragraph of the letter covers the purpose of the letter. The second paragraph specifically addresses the request and the reasons why the request cannot be fulfilled.

The third paragraph describes the desire to seek to babysit for the family in future and provides details of the service provided. In this case a number of details are provided to ensure that the letter reaches the minimum word length.

10. The Task 2 Essay

The Task 2 essay is probably the most significant challenge of the IELTS exam. It requires careful planning and clear strategy to develop a coherent essay that is ideas focused. The Task 2 essay requires good thinking and good language. The most serious problems occur in Task 2 essays when students attempt to “upgrade” vocabulary and which almost always results in the misuse of language, causes cohesion problems and often confuses the reader. Students should remember that in all languages, educated native speakers communicate in a clear, direct and concise fashion.

Step 1 – Analysing the question

Examiners are well aware that students copy language from questions and typically avoid the correct language. Students must look at questions critically if they are to provide high quality responses. Consider the following question:

Some people believe that there should be fixed punishments for each type of crime. Others think that the circumstances of a crime, and the reason for committing it should be considered when deciding on the punishment. Discuss both views.

The first common strategy used by examiners is to replace the correct word or phrase with a definition. By doing this they can test whether students know the correct language. In this, case the correct word for “fixed punishments for each type of crime” is “mandatory sentencing”. Other examples include replacing “tourists” with “visitors to other countries” and replacing “gap year” with “work or travel for a year between finishing high school and starting university studies”.

The second strategy that examiners use to test students is to use non-academic phrasing. A common example of this is “Some people believe...” which is used in the example question above. Academic essays are about presenting ideas objectively and drawing conclusions. What an individual believes is unimportant – only the ideas are important. Using this phrasing serves no useful purpose and distances the writer from the ideas being presented. An academic writer must take responsibility for the ideas they are putting forward, rather than distancing themselves from them.

The third strategy used by examiners is to present two extreme points of view drawing some students into thinking that there are only two alternatives when there is a range of possibilities resulting in incorrect language choices.

Some people think visitors to other countries should follow local customs and behaviour while others say that the host country should welcome cultural differences. Discuss.

In this case the choice is between tourists adjusting to the cultural beliefs of locals or locals adjusting to the cultural beliefs of tourists. These are extreme views and a good answer is likely to include the possibility that adjustments on both sides should occur.

In this particular instance, the question could be rephrased as:

To what extent should tourists and locals adjust to each other's culture?

This is how this question would be presented to native speakers.

A good strategy for analysing a question is to read the question and write down a one or two word topic for the essay. This will often lead to choosing the right language and avoiding extreme views. In this case the topic is "Cultural adjustment for tourists".

An additional strategy used by examiners is to present examples in questions that are not the most important ideas. Students often become focused on the idea presented in the question rather than thinking about the deeper question that is being asked.

For example in the question:

Some people believe that public health should be improved by increasing the number of sports facilities, while others believe that it has little effect and other measures should be taken to solve this problem. Discuss both views and give your opinion.

In this example the underlying question is: How can public health be improved? The example that is provided in the question is by "increasing the number of sports facilities". This idea is not strong as there are far more effective ways of improving public health, such as encouraging healthy eating, taxing unhealthy foods, limiting working hours and providing a healthier workplace environment (stand up desks, healthy snacks, etc.), mandatory participation in sport at school and so on. Students should always focus on the underlying question.

Examiners may also write questions that have logical problems and students who fail to carefully analyse questions may find it difficult to write well structured logical essays.

Step 2 – Write a short plan

Students have 40 minutes to write a Task 2 essay and 2 of those 40 minutes should be used to write a quick plan. The plan can be simple and should consist of as many ideas as possible. Most Task 2 essays will include three body paragraphs and so a minimum of 3 key ideas is usually needed. If the plan includes more than 3 ideas, related ideas should be grouped together with the aim of constructing 3 key paragraphs.

Many students do not realise the importance of quality content - good ideas are key to scoring well. The primary function of any form of communication is to present ideas. Therefore an essay with few or low quality ideas will almost always receive a low score. In addition, the ideas presented must be logically presented to the reader otherwise they could become confused about the direction of the essay. A plan is the method by which students organise their thoughts so that they can present them to the reader in a logical fashion and thereby communicate effectively.

Step 3 – Write the Introduction

The importance of introductions is often under rated. The introduction is where the examiner first experiences students' writing and they will form judgements quickly. A poor introduction will require the writer to change the examiners mind in later paragraphs to score well. In addition, introductions are the place where the reader outlines the structure of their essay and can prevent examiners from becoming confused about the direction of an essay.

In the opening sentence of the essay students should state the topic and suggest a reason why the topic is important. Introducing the topic in the first sentence is critical if the reader is to be sure of what the topic of the essay is and a reason "sells" the essay to the reader. The reason is not essential but is designed to tell the reader why they should be interested in the topic.

The second sentence is the ideas sentence. This sentence is probably the most critical of the essay and has two functions. The first is to present the key ideas to the reader and let them know what will be discussed in the essay. This is important as it prevents the reader from guessing whether the author has thought about a particular idea and helps prevent the reader from becoming distracted. The second function of the ideas sentence is to allow the reader to understand the direction of the arguments and the overall structure the essay. Each body paragraph should have one main idea and the main idea in each body paragraph should be listed in the order that it appears in the text. The

listing of key ideas is very important because it also helps keep the writer focused on the topic rather than drifting and writing about unrelated topics. In some cases two ideas sentences may be used. This usually occurs when the author is contrasting two sides of an argument or if the topic can be readily broken down into two logical parts.

The final sentence in an introduction is a thesis statement. A thesis statement tells the reader the aim of the essay and has a standard structure. "In this essay [add aim] will be discussed". The first and last three words should never change. The language used is formal and uses passive voice as is standard with essays written in an academic style. Pronouns should never be used in thesis statements nor should the reader refer to the "ideas above". A thesis statement must not refer to any other part of the text and can be tested by asking: "What is the aim of this essay?" if the thesis statement makes sense as an answer to this question it is a valid thesis statement.

A thesis statement is not essential, but is formal and shows the reader that the writer understands the conventions of writing in English. If a student is concerned that their essay may not reach the word limit a thesis statement is a good idea as it adds length to the essay.

At the end of the introduction a reader should know what the topic is, why the topic is important, the key ideas as well as the structure and the aim of the essay. If all of these items are present the reader is unlikely to become confused about the direction or the content of the essay.

Step 4 – Write the Body

The body of the essay will usually contain three paragraphs. The key idea associated with each paragraph should be listed in the ideas sentence in the introduction. The order in which they are presented in the introduction should be the same as in the body of the essay to give the essay structure. It is usually best to have the most important idea presented first.

The opening sentence of each body paragraph should explain what the key point of the paragraph is and gives the reader a logical link back to the introduction.

The following sentences should be related ideas and explanations, consequences and/or implications of these ideas. In general, the more ideas the better as this will give the essay a more academic feel. There is no limit to

the number of this type of sentence and it is here that students can show their quality.

The third type of sentence in the body is example sentences. The purpose of an example is to support an idea. Examples are secondary to ideas and as a result examples should be short. They should rarely be more than one sentence and should never be more than two sentences long. A common mistake made by students is to give an example and expect the reader to draw the principle from the example. The idea must be stated before an example is used, academic essays are about ideas and principles, not individual situations. It is possible to have more than one example sentence in a paragraph, but the structure should be opening sentence, ideas sentence(s), example sentence, ideas sentence(s), example sentence etc.

Step 5 – Write the Conclusion

The conclusion rarely causes difficulties for students; however, there are a few important concepts that students should keep in mind. The first is to have a conclusion marker as this lets the reader know that the essay is concluding. This seems an unimportant point, but sometimes IELTS essays are a little longer than a page and if no conclusion marker is used the reader may find that an essay has unexpectedly ended leaving them with the feeling that the essay is incomplete. There are a number of conclusion markers that can be used but the most formal is “In summary”. Only one conclusion marker is used in an essay, which means that there is no risk of over use. For this reason, in all of the essays presented in this book, “In summary,” is used to begin the conclusion.

The conclusion should also refer to the topic and the key ideas that are presented in the essay.

If an opinion is to be expressed directly in an essay, the conclusion is the best place for it. The reason for this is that Task 2 essays are academic and therefore should be objective. For this reason it is usually best if the ideas are presented first in the body of the essay and the opinion included as part of the conclusion.

It is worth noting that, even if the question asks for an opinion, students do not need to use phrases such as “In my opinion...” or “I believe...”. These phrases are slightly non-academic in style and are not needed because the reader should already know your opinion from your ideas and the way in which they are presented.

11. Topics and Sample Essays

In this section ten different IELTS Task 2 topic areas are described along with topic related vocabulary. In addition, a sample essay with notes and essay vocabulary is included for each of the ten topics.

Topic 1 – Education

General Topic Information

For many students, particularly those from developing countries, education is a means to an end – usually a good job. Students will often fail to consider that education is more than what is learned at school or a certificate and different



people will have different definitions of what education consists of. For this reason a definition is sometimes worth including in an essay on education.

Education is not just a piece of paper – the piece of paper is the representation of skills and quality of a person. It is the skills that are obtained that are much more important than marks or the actual qualification. People are ultimately judged on what they can do, not their qualifications.

Education improves quality of life.

People who are better educated have a better life. This is not because they tend to have more material things, but because they have a greater level of understanding and therefore they have a broader vision and a better ability to appreciate the world. It should be remembered that happiness is mostly related to achievement, which is closely related to education, not material possessions.

Learning is done in many places, not just school. Many of the world's greatest thinkers and leaders did not have very good educational backgrounds, but all are highly educated because they learned in other ways.

It is also often assumed that pre-school age children do little learning; this is not accurate. Very young children are born understanding virtually nothing about the world but have mastered many skills by the time they have reached

school age. Important steps for the early development of children include learning to smile, bringing their hands together, focusing their eyes, putting objects in their mouth, sitting up, holding a spoon, crawling, understanding basic instructions, making different sounds, walking, speaking, interacting with other children, etc.

Students often think that getting education is the process of gaining knowledge. Knowledge is the lowest form of learning and is not the focus of Western education. Education is the process of learning to solve problems. Many educated people work in fields other than which they are qualified – they know how to solve problems, including the problem of lack of knowledge.

Essays should focus on learning, skills development and creativity, not knowledge. Consider this book – it contains a great deal of knowledge but there is also high focus on thinking. The book explains the reason for choices and good students will take the broad principles from this book and apply them in many different situations. Education is much more about learning to think well than having knowledge.

IELTS questions focus on many different areas of education, including that of very young children. The roles of parents versus teachers in education are common topics. Key ideas in these questions include that children spend their earliest years with parents and that parents set standards for children's behaviour and education. Parents also spend more time with their children and that time is often on a one-to-one basis. It is families that have the most significant affect on children. They provide children's genes and control their environment in their earliest and most formative years.

The role of teachers in children's moral and behavioural upbringing is limited. Teachers have a limited ability to discipline children and their major role in this area is to ensure that the classroom environment is free from disruption and is safe. Teachers can spend little time with students on a one-to-one basis and therefore are restricted in their ability to teach students how to behave well. They also do not have the right to discipline children in the same way that parents do. Teachers' primary role is to educate students in a variety of subjects.

The key areas of learning are students' first language (literacy) and mathematics (numeracy) as all other academic disciplines require a solid foundation in one or both of these areas. Governments focus on literacy and numeracy in most testing because it is the foundation of all learning.

Success for students does not just depend on students' learning in academic subjects but also in many other areas. Students need to understand about the

world and relationships and have a wide variety of other skills to be successful. Learning is closely related to experience and having wide experiences are important for becoming highly educated. This means that extra-curricular activities such as participating in sports and joining clubs are important for building skills in non-academic, but equally important areas, such as team work, people management, project management and financial skills.

Occasionally, questions on funding for education arise. In these cases it is worth remembering that both society and the individual benefit from education and therefore it is not unreasonable to expect both students and the government to make a contribution to education costs. Society gains benefits by having more skilled people in important areas (doctors, nurses, teachers, etc.) and people who are tolerant and respectful of others, while students often (but not always) benefit through higher incomes, a greater understanding of the world, better skills and a richer life.

If questions on quotas for access to education arise, equality and fairness should be a key consideration.

There are some questions around the best starting age for school. Typically the starting age for school age children is between 5 and 7 years old. Younger starting ages mean that students can get more years of schooling, and can start learning key skills such as reading earlier in the brain development process, which often allows them to reach higher levels of skills later in life. It also frees their parents/carers to re-join the workforce. The advantages of starting later are students are more mature and there is less funding required for schools.

There are questions on whether schools should focus on just academic subjects or other skills as well. A very wide range of skills is necessary for being successful in life. Classes such as cooking (sometimes called home economics), sewing, driving, woodwork, financial management, physical education, etc. are valuable life skills. However, schools primary function is to provide an academic education. Therefore, it is essential that schools main focus is academic learning, but this can be supplemented with useful non-core subjects that are of interest to students and provide them with a varied and balanced school life. Studying non-academic subjects also provide a useful break for students and allow them to concentrate better in class.

Answers to questions on team sports should primarily focus on students' ability to help people learn cooperation and teamwork. Team sports are also useful for developing strategy based skills, physical coordination and appropriate risk taking. Further benefits are for health, fitness and achieving a balanced life.

There are occasionally IELTS questions on the role of memory in education. Memorisation is a fundamental part of learning as it is necessary to be able to retain information in order to learn all skills, including languages and mathematics. However, memorisation is only a base skill and does not by itself lead to people becoming highly educated because learning by memory only allows students to draw on what they have previously experienced. A key part of learning is thinking as this allows students to take what they have remembered and use it in a wide range of contexts, a much wider range than they have previously experienced.

Questions on the role of lectures also occasionally appear. Lectures are an important way of delivering education in a cost effective way as they allow many people to be taught at once. If exactly the same material needs to be delivered to many people lectures are highly effective. However, they fail to be effective when individual attention is required, such as when students have individual problems. For this reason it is often best to deliver lectures that teach principles and support students with small class tutorials or one-to-one sessions where their individual problems can be addressed.

Topic Vocabulary

Formal education – Formal education refers to learning that has been undertaken in schools, universities, and other educational institutions.

Primary, secondary (schools, education) – Secondary school is much more formal than “high school” and is the correct language in writing. It should also be noted that Junior High School and Senior High School should generally be avoided because this distinction is not made in English speaking countries that use IELTS (the UK, Australia, New Zealand etc.) and is an American term.

Tertiary (Institutions, Education) – Tertiary Institutions include any type of post-school education, including universities, institutes and technical colleges.

Diploma/qualification/certificate – Diploma is often misused as a general term covering all types of tertiary education. It is the name of a qualification that is below the level of a degree. A certificate is the physical piece of paper that is given by the institution while the qualification is the recognition by an institute that the conditions for a particular level of achievement have been met.

Punishment/discipline – Punishment is designed to make people suffer, discipline is designed to teach. Always use discipline when referring to education and children.

Extra-curricular activities – Extra-curricular activities are activities undertaken outside school and include music lessons, sport and attending hobbies based events.

University places/entry – University places refer to the number of students a university will accept. University entry is the process by which students enter university.

Quotas (women, minority groups) – Quotas refers to placing limits (maximums or minimums) on the number of people who may be involved in a particular group or activity. Arguing for or against quotas should be done on the basis of equality and justice.

Core subjects/electives – Core subjects are those that students must complete in order to receive a qualification. Electives are subjects that are optional, although often students will need to complete a minimum number of electives to receive the qualification they are attempting.

Life skills – Life skills are non-academic skills that people learn to function well in society but are not necessarily taught at school and include, social skills, driving a car, cooking, managing personal finances, etc.

Learning/skills/knowledge/creativity – Most native English speakers will refer to their education as giving them learning, understanding, skills and creativity. Only rarely will they refer to knowledge.

Learning by rote/memorising – Learning by rote is often used in a negative context and implies a lack of thinking. Memorising is neutral and refers to the process of memory and does not imply judgement.

On-line learning/distance learning – On-line learning refers to learning over the Internet. Distance learning refers to learning at a different location from the educational institution and in the past was often referred to as learning by correspondence.

Co-educational – Co-educational refers to schools that accept students of both sexes. Schools that only accept students of one gender are referred to as single-sex schools.

Curriculum – The curriculum is the overall course provided by educational institutions and typically includes many subjects.

Sample Essay – Higher Education Costs

Higher education could be funded in three ways. All costs paid by government, all costs paid by students or students paying all costs through a government loan. What are the advantages of these choices?

Since university funding benefits both university students and society as a whole, both parties should bear some of the cost of university educations. University students gain both personal and economic benefits by attending university; however, society also benefits by having a more educated population. In addition, it is important that all members of society have the opportunity to attend university regardless of wealth. In this essay the various models of funding for university places will be discussed.

There is little doubt that people who attend university usually benefit through higher salaries and greater opportunities. It is therefore reasonable that society expects students to make some contribution to the cost of their education. However, expecting students to fully fund their own education may cause students to avoid courses that lead to less well-paying jobs such as the sciences, nursing and teaching.

Society as a whole also benefits from having a more educated community and should support people who make an effort to become educated. It is therefore reasonable that governments also provide money for university places, particularly when the cost of doing a course or the return for students discourages them from completing a course that is needed by society.

The funding model that is used for university placements is also very important as governments have a responsibility to provide an opportunity for all members of society to attend university. Deferred repayment of fees through low cost loans and the partial subsidising of university courses by government are effective methods of ensuring fairer access to university education since they allow people to pay for their education when they are best able to afford to.

In summary, university education benefits both individuals and society and both governments and individuals who receive a university education should make a contribution to the costs of tertiary education. In addition, it is important that appropriate loan schemes are in place to ensure that access to university is available to all members of society.

Essay Notes

This question invites students to choose an extreme position where the entire cost of funding is paid either by the government or by individuals but this does not mean that the writer must choose either of these positions. The question seems to offer the reader one of three choices of funding however careful analysis of the question should reveal that this is really a question with two parts. Who should pay for university education? If it is the student, is it appropriate to use loans? The question does not present any particular difficulty from a cultural point of view.

The introduction contains four sentences. The opening sentence tells the reader the topic and the reason why both society and students should make a contribution to the costs of education. The second sentence explains the key reason why students should make a contribution to the costs of their education and why government should also commit funds. The third sentence describes the importance of low cost loans in ensuring that access to university is available to all members of society. The second and third sentences logically divide the essay into two parts and contain the three main ideas, which are presented in the same order that they appear in the essay and define the high level structure of the essay. The fourth sentence is a thesis statement and outlines the aim of the essay. It should be noted that all key elements of the essay are presented in the introduction in order to prepare the reader for the content in the body. By providing a clear position in the introduction the reader is not likely to become confused about the direction of the essay.

The three key ideas in the introduction are developed in the body paragraphs in the order in which they first appear. In the first sentence of each body paragraph the key point in the introduction is restated to provide the subject for the paragraph. The following sentences are used to provide reasons and explanations. In this essay there are no examples, and the essay is ideas focused.

A simple two-sentence conclusion is used and each sentence explains the key ideas of the essay. The first covers the idea that both governments and students should make a contribution to students' education and the second underlines the importance of having a university system that is accessible to all students.

Essay Vocabulary

Salaries – There are a number of words to describe the money that people earn from an employer. The most formal word is salaries and this should generally be used. If the money received is from other sources such as investments or a business, the most formal word is income.

Deferred – The word deferred means delayed but is more formal than delayed. Both words are sufficiently formal to use in written language.

Funding model – Funding model is a phrase that is very formal and typically used to describe the way in which projects are paid for by government or business.

Effective – Many students use the word efficient rather than effective in their essays. Usually effective is a better word to use as it refers to the result being positive. Efficient indicates that a process happens smoothly or quickly, but this does not imply that the result is positive.

Topic 2 - Media

General Topic Information

The media plays an important role in Western society as it makes individuals and governments more accountable for their actions.

The media plays a very different role in some countries compared to those in the Western world and these differences must be understood by students in order to write high quality essays. In many countries the media is tightly controlled by the government and is used as a tool to disseminate propaganda. In the West the media is controlled by private companies and is sometimes viewed as having a role to play in ensuring government accountability. It should be recognised that controlling media gives enormous power as it can be used to manipulate public opinion. In all cultures media is used as a tool of power and information is usually controlled according to the interests of those holding power. In some countries this is the government, in the West it is owners of media organisations (not reporters or editors!).

In the West, traditionally there has been a delicate power balance between government and the media. Individual newspapers and television stations will sometimes support one political party over others. This means that governments are dependent on their support and media organisations are sometimes openly biased. However, media organisations are also dependent on government, as governments have the power to restrict ownership and create laws around media ownership.

Since 1990, the power of individual media outlets in the West has decreased because of the Internet. Social media and other web sites are able to pass on information rapidly and the number of publicly available media sources has become enormous, diluting the power of individual media organisations. The increased availability of media also has significant implications for government as it has become virtually impossible to control publicly available information sources. In the West the most notable example of this is Wikileaks – a website that publishes leaked government documents around sensitive issues including drone attacks and the treatment of prisoners held without trial (Guantanamo Bay, Pakistan, etc.) and the killing of citizens without trial. In other countries the media is controlled to prevent details of government scandals being released; however, the Internet is making controlling the flow of information more and more difficult.

A common IELTS topic is the relationship between news reports and people's lives. The key concepts are that people learn more about the world from news

programs. They become aware of issues that they might have previously been unaware of but could affect them in the future. People also become more aware of the conduct of organisations and this may influence their decision-making. For example, people have become more aware that companies are not acting in their interests. They become aware of important upcoming changes in laws so they can make appropriate changes to their lives. People also become more aware of opportunities in society. Information is always useful – but not always in obvious ways – people’s decisions are made up from our experience and the wider people’s experience the better their decisions will be.

Trust in journalists and media organisations is also a significant issue. Most people will be honest and truthful unless doing so is in conflict with their own interests. This is also true for governments and companies and equally applies to media organisations. When considering information provided, the interests of the source should always be taken into consideration. A journalist reporting a story must act in the interests of the editor, who must act in the interests of the owners of the media organisation.

In general, the restrictions placed on media organisations are limited. However, there are three key restrictions that are placed on media organisation relating to libel, harassment and privacy. Libel (or slander) is the idea that media



organisations (or any individual) must not make false or unproven allegations against another person. This law exists to protect people from having their reputations unfairly damaged by other people. This is currently a problem in social media where people can make false claims against other people that can be deeply hurtful. A further problem on social media is that there are few

restrictions in publishing material (including photographs) that can be used to harass or bully other people. This is a significant issue facing young people who may be socially isolated because of harassment by people who are often known to them and can lead to serious consequences including self-harm. Many countries have recently introduced laws to make bullying and harassment a criminal offence. A further, but poorly implemented part of media restrictions is privacy and mainly applies to people who have a high public profile (politicians, celebrities, well-known sportspeople etc.) who sometimes have unwelcomed pictures taken of them or private information published about them. The general test of whether something should be published is that if

information is “in the public interest” it should be published. However, this expression is too vague to be very useful. It is clearly in the public interest to inform people about criminal or immoral activity committed by a person in authority however it is questionable whether information about personal relationships should be published. The consequences of allowing such material to be published can be very serious as it can impact people’s emotional wellbeing. In addition, it creates an environment where people are followed in public affecting people’s sense of security and can be dangerous as people take action to avoid being followed.

Advertising to children occasionally appears as a topic in IELTS. The key issues around advertising to children are that children do not understand the motives of advertisers and will not realise that advertisers are not necessarily acting in children’s best interests. The exposure to advertising that children have is controlled by parents, who play a key role in educating children about advertising. A further important principle is that children are some of the most vulnerable people in our society and as such all adults and organisations have responsibilities to them. It should never be acceptable for adults to take advantage of children. In many countries there are strict laws around the amount and type of advertising to children.

Advertising to adults also often appears as an IELTS question that often presents difficulties for students. Most students identify the role that advertising plays in informing people about products and discounting. However, it is rare that students identify that advertising exists only to benefit companies and often attempts to manipulate people into buying unnecessary products or services. Advertising also preys on unattractive qualities of people including the need to be seen as more successful or beautiful than others.

Violence on television is a difficult topic – whether violence in the form of crime or violent accidents. Unfortunately violence is a part of society and seeing violence on the news or other programs can act as a warning to people to act with care. However, there is the risk that people can become desensitised to violence and become more violent. It is very important that displays of violence are followed up with the impact of violence because seeing the impact of violence on people’s lives can serve as a reminder that violent behaviour has serious consequences and displaying those consequences can be a powerful teaching method.

The reporting of crimes in the media must balance the needs of the public against the victims of crime and their family’s interests. It is almost certainly in the public interest to report that crimes have taken place and the general nature of those crimes as this can raise public awareness and vigilance. The

public can often provide information to solve crimes and can take action to limit the chances of becoming victims of crime. However, there should be restrictions around the details of crimes as these may be hurtful to families and victims, particularly if they are of a violent or sexual nature.

What media should be made available in public libraries is also an interesting question that arises. The key to answering this question is having a clear definition around the purpose of a library. A good definition is to provide educational material to the public at little or no cost. Having a definition allows what libraries should provide to be clearly determined. Under the above definition, books, movies and music should be made available in libraries, but video games (except if they are educational) should not.

Topic Vocabulary

Media organisations – The word “media organisations” has very general meaning and can refer to any organisation that publishes material for the public and includes newspapers, television stations and web sites.

Freedom of the press – This is the idea that media organisations are allowed to act freely within the law and publish any information that is in the public interest. The concept mainly refers to freedom from the interference by government and the protection of information sources.

Accountable – Accountable means that a person or individual is responsible for their actions and will face consequences if actions are illegal or immoral.

Disseminate – Disseminate is a formal way of saying to pass on and it should only be used with disseminate information or disseminate propaganda.

Manipulate – Means to handle something in a controlled way. It is often used with events, particularly when there is an attempt to influence an outcome to obtain a desired result.

Bias – Bias is to favour one side over another.

Media ownership – This is a general word that describes who does or can own media outlets and is often used when discussing the concentration of media ownership. If one person controls all the newspapers and televisions in an area, it gives them a very high level of influence that government will usually prevent from occurring.

Scandals – An event that can negatively affect a person or organisations reputation. Common collocations include sex scandals and political scandals.

Vested interests – Vested interests are where somebody stands to benefit from a particular outcome of an event and as a result may attempt to affect the outcome of that event.

Desensitised – “Desensitised” means that somebody is no longer sensitive to something. It is usually used for sexual images or violence and means that people are no longer shocked by something that they would have been previously been shocked by because they have seen it many times before and is therefore no longer unusual.

Libel – Libel is the crime of publishing harmful untrue or unproven allegations against a person or organisation that could lead to damage to a person's reputation.

Public interest – The public interest refers to information that it is beneficial for the public to be aware of.

Sample Essay – Editorial Choices

News editors decide what to broadcast on television and what to write in newspapers. What factors influence these decisions? Do you think we become used to bad news? Should more good news be reported?

News editors have challenging decisions to make when deciding what to publish because they must consider the interests of many competing factors. The primary consideration for editors is the interests of their employers, or the government if they play a significant role in determining the future of media outlets. If owners have no particular interest in a story, editors will often choose to publish many negative stories as they often contain warnings for the general public, but this should be balanced with positive stories to avoid pessimism and cynicism in society. In this essay the role of the media will be discussed.

Editors are employees and although they make decisions about what is to be published, they make those decisions with the interests of their owners in mind. Media organisations often take a political stance and will favour one political party over another to reflect the interests of the owner. In this way the media influences political debate and are therefore very powerful. This situation is both undesirable and unavoidable but the overall impact of individual media organisations has become less because of the wide availability of different information sources on the Internet.

If there is little political gain in a story then editors will generally choose to publish more negative than positive stories in the media because these stories often serve as warnings to the general public. For example, stories of children dying because of being left in cars on hot days and people charged with serious offences such as drug trafficking in other countries are useful reminders to the population of the serious consequences of these actions.

However, it is important to balance negative articles with more positive articles to avoid people becoming depressed and cynical and to remind people of the goodness that exists in almost everyone. Stories of people rescuing others or providing support to the ill and underprivileged are important in reminding us of the many positive things that we do for others and are done for us each day.

In summary, news editors represent the owners of media organisations and will make decisions in their best interest. Where there is little or no interest they will usually report more negative stories as these serve as warnings to the public, but balance these with positive ones to remind us of the goodness we all possess.

Essay Notes

This question is exceptionally difficult because to answer it well requires deep cultural knowledge as well as a deep understanding of the role of media. The question is further complicated by the fact that three questions are asked and linking these together logically is difficult.

The cultural element to this question is simply that media organisations have different controls placed upon them in different countries. In many developing countries the media is often viewed as the mechanism for which the government disseminates information. In the West the media is viewed as providing an important check on the behaviour of government and plays an important role in the political systems of Western countries. However, editors and journalists are employees and have limited control over what is published – owners control the content of what is published and will act out of personal interest rather than the common good.

The question itself asks about what is broadcast and what is printed. It should be noted that the correct word “published” and the word “media”, which is the underlying topic, are both avoided by the examiners. Beware of using language directly from the question – examiners know that students use this language and deliberately avoid including key vocabulary in questions.

There are three separate questions asked in the question itself. This provides a natural way to break down the essay into three body paragraphs. It should be noted that the second and third questions are closely related and in the introduction these are grouped together so that there are two rather than three ideas sentences.

The introduction contains four sentences. The first sentence tells the reader the topic and the reason why it is important. The second and third sentences contain the main ideas and are presented in the order that they appear in the body and define the high level structure of the essay. There are two ideas sentences because the argument has been broken into two logical parts, what influences editorial decisions and the breakdown between negative and positive stories. The logical link between these two sentences is that the first sentence covers the stories that news organisations have an interest in, the second covers stories that media organisations have no interest in. The fourth sentence is a thesis statement, which outlines the aim of the essay. It should be noted that all key elements of the essay are presented in the introduction in order to prepare the reader for the content in the body. By providing high-level detail in the introduction the reader is not likely to become confused about the direction of the essay.

The first body paragraph is the most challenging for students as they are drawn by the question into thinking that editors have power and control. This is true to a limited extent, but a student who states that owners are the true influencers will impress examiners with their ideas. This paragraph is by far the most sophisticated of the essay and contains deep underlying reasons why media organisations behave in the way that they do.

The second and third body paragraphs cover the questions surrounding the balance between good and bad news stories. It is worth noting that the purpose of each of these stories is explained to the reader giving the essay an ideas focus. These explanations are supported with examples.

The conclusion is two sentences and contains the same grouping of the questions as in the introduction resulting in an essay that is highly structurally consistent.

Essay Vocabulary

Media – The question refers to television and newspapers. The best general word to describe this is media. Students commonly copy language from the question into their essays. To test whether students know the correct vocabulary examiners will often avoid the correct word in the question and replace it with a definition. Common useful collocations are media organisations or media outlets.

Publish – Publish is a general word that is mostly used for books and magazines but can be used more generally. The best general verb for movies and television is “release”.

Cynicism – A useful formal word that refers to the lack of willingness of a person to trust information that they are presented with and will usually assume that what they are told is not true as an initial view. This word is closely related to pessimism.

Underprivileged – This is a very general word that describes any person who has fewer opportunities in life. Examples of the underprivileged are the poor, those that lack access to basic education and healthcare and people who are mentally or physically impaired.

Topic 3 - Society

General Topic Information

Society is a very broad subject and overlaps with areas such as Law and Order, Education and Government. A successful society is diverse and made up of many parts. The smooth running of each of those parts is often dependent on fairness/equality and opportunity. Similarly, problems in many societies are almost always related to these two issues and they can be used as underlying principles to create good ideas.

An important problem in many societies is an aging population. Elderly people want to be treated with respect. They have contributed to society in the past and wish to be treated fairly. However, health care is expensive and labour intensive and problems arise if a society has a high percentage of elderly people because the elderly are typically unproductive, require many resources and often place a strain on economies. An aging population results in fewer working people leading to less income for governments, higher taxes on working people and less money to spend on services. A higher demand for labour means higher prices but fewer unemployed people.

Work satisfaction and work life balance is also an important issue facing many



families. People want the opportunity to learn and achieve at work and have some control over decision making in the work place. After contributing at work they must be given adequate time to spend with family and to pursue other interests and

receive an income that allows them to live a reasonable lifestyle. Many people find achieving a balance between their work and life difficult because of the expectation that they work long hours and often spend a great deal of time traveling to and from work.

Societies are also challenged by immigration. Immigrants have been given an opportunity to build a life in a new country and should make an effort to learn the language and culture of the new environment and obey local laws and customs because this shows fairness and respect to existing citizens. However, new immigrants must be allowed to practice existing religions, language and culture, provided it does not conflict with local culture. At times, local people do not welcome new immigrants because immigrants are sometimes viewed as

living off society and taking jobs from local people. However, this is a one-sided view as they also use services, create businesses and contribute to the local economy. The impact of immigrants is close to neutral because immigrants both provide and use similar amounts of services. However, a rapid inflow of immigrants can strain infrastructure.

Occasionally questions arise regarding the advantages of living in cities compared to the countryside. In general, cities have better infrastructure such as schools, hospitals, libraries, roads, public transport etc. and are a centre for people with expertise, provide greater opportunities and attract the best people. The countryside has a cleaner environment, more space, less pressure and lower cost. Moving jobs to regional centres is encouraged by governments through incentives but usually fails because city based workers will usually not want to move because of families and houses and companies usually find it difficult to find skilled workers in regional areas.

Questions also arise about the causes of crime in society. Criminals are mostly people who have limited opportunities and are almost always poorly educated, come from lower class homes and often have poor childhoods. People who become criminals usually have little disincentive to commit crimes. Therefore, solutions to lowering crime rates should focus on improving general levels of education, opportunity and support.

Topic Vocabulary

Elderly – The elderly is a general term for older people, is very formal and highly appropriate for academic writing.

Equality/equal opportunity – Equality and equal opportunity are important cultural terms and can be used to describe the belief that all people in society should be given equal access to opportunities for education and access to health care, jobs etc. irrespective of their culture, race, disability, religious beliefs or sexual orientation.

Work-life balance – This is the need to balance the needs of caring for a family and a successful career.

The criminal justice system – This is very formal language and refers only to the part of the legal system that deals specifically with criminal activity. It does not include civil cases.

The legal system – The “legal system” is a general term that covers all aspects of law and the way in which the law is implemented.

Ageing population – An ageing population is one in which the proportion of older people make up an increasingly large percentage of the population. This poses particular problems for society because there are fewer taxpayers to support an increasing number of older people.

Rural lifestyle – A rural lifestyle refers to people of who are living in the countryside and often refers to farmers.

Urban lifestyle – Urban lifestyle refers to people who are living in the city and their lifestyle. It includes components such as housing, entertainment, access to facilities and education.

Quality of life – Quality of life is a key concept that is commonly referred to by people in the West and is an acknowledgment that a good life is made up of many different parts including family, leisure activities, work, freedoms, etc.

Sample Essay – Working From Home

Many people are working at home rather than in the workplace. Some people believe this will bring benefits to the workers and their families, but others suggest it will cause stress in the home. Discuss both sides and give your opinion.

With technology increasingly being able to support a suitable home office environment, working from home is becoming an attractive option for many employees. Employees gain the advantages of being able to make better use of time and avoid costs associated with working, but at the same time this arrangement may interfere with their home environment. In this essay the merits of working from home compared to working in the office will be discussed.

Working from home allows people to avoid the need to travel to and from work giving employees additional hours in the working week that can be used for either work related activities or provide a more balanced lifestyle. For example, the additional time could be used to take children to and from school.

Employees will also have lower costs, particularly in relation to transportation. For example, if one partner works from home a family may be able to avoid buying a second car providing them with significant savings. Savings may also be made in other areas such as food and entertainment costs.

In addition, the breaks from work that most people take during the day can be used to perform household chores. The lack of other employees also means that there are no social norms and in quiet periods an employee can read the paper or a book or even watch television, activities that would be socially unacceptable in an office environment but do not impact on performance and may lower stress and have a positive influence on wellbeing.

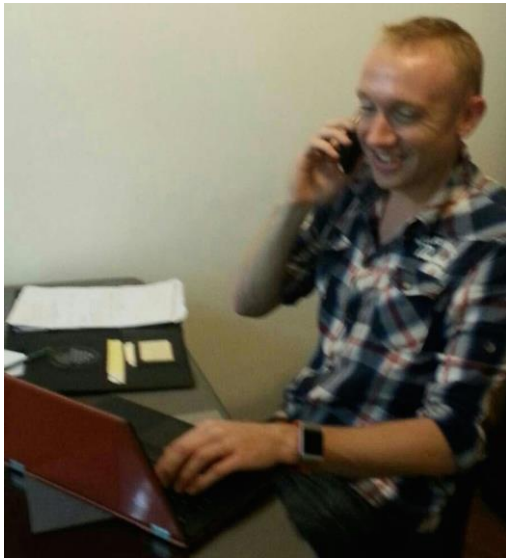
However, employees may experience significant difficulties in working from home. They have no physical barrier between their work and home life as their office is ever present and could interfere with having a normal family life unless carefully managed. Employees may also feel isolated as they do not have co-workers with them and may lose valuable information that is sometimes passed by casual interactions in the office and fail to have the opportunity to build the relationships that are essential for career development and promotion.

In summary, working from home provides many advantages including lower costs, having more available time and being better for the environment. However, the time spent working from home must be managed carefully as

there are risks of isolation, negatively impacting family life and loss of productivity.

Essay Notes

The question asks about working from home and applies mainly to white-collar workers. As a result it is more standard to compare working from home with working in the office rather than workplaces. This question uses a non-academic style by referring to what “some people think” rather than stating the idea. Copying language from the question in this case will result in a non-



academic style. The question presents no particular challenge from a cultural perspective and is student friendly as there are many different ideas that students could include that support the idea that working from home is good for employees. These include saving time, reduced costs (transport, lunches, coffee, after work activities, etc.), environmental benefits and relationship benefits. In addition, there are also a number of key risks, including isolation, missing critical information, loss of networking and promotion opportunities,

lack of separation between work and home environments and health problems arising because of being less active. As a result of the very large number of ideas for this topic, students should have little difficulty in reaching the word limit. In cases where there are many ideas students should focus on ideas and use fewer examples.

In the sample response the author has chosen to prepare a short introduction in order to allow more time to present ideas in the body of the essay. The introduction consists of three sentences. The opening sentence introduces the topic and explains why the topic has become important. The second sentence covers the key ideas and provides a structure for the essay. It is worth noting that the author has used a single ideas sentence in order to keep the introduction shorter but has introduced the most important ideas. The third sentence is a thesis statement that outlines the aim of the essay.

This essay is unusual in that it has four body paragraphs and is quite long because of the number of ideas being presented. The first three body paragraphs refer to the benefits of working from home, while the fourth

describes the problems associated with working from home. Although the question encourages the writer to use many examples, the author has chosen to keep these to very short one or two word examples in order to ensure the essay is ideas focused and as a result has a more academic style.

The conclusion begins with “In summary” as a conclusion marker and has two sentences. In the first sentence the many advantages of working from home are listed. However, in order to provide a more balanced essay a second sentence highlighting the risks of working from home is also included.

Essay Vocabulary

Telecommuting – Telecommuting refers to using technology to work from home.

Balanced lifestyle – A balanced lifestyle is normally associated with a desire of most people to balance the time they spend at work and with their families and is usually associated with leading a less demanding work life. A person who spends too much time at work is described as a “workaholic”.

Socially unacceptable – Actions which are social unacceptable are acts that are not illegal or immoral but are not approved by many people.

Topic 4 – Environment

General Topic Information

Topics focusing on the environment usually cover a number of key areas including preservation of animal and plant species, preservation of habitat or natural areas and pollution in its various forms.

Animals have rights and this is an idea that many students are unlikely to have given much thought to. Animal testing is used for scientific research, for testing



of drugs and consumer products. It would be unacceptable to perform this kind of testing on humans without consent, so it therefore could be argued that it should be equally unacceptable on animals. It may be possible to justify the use of animals in medical research that leads to cures for serious diseases but probably not for cosmetics.

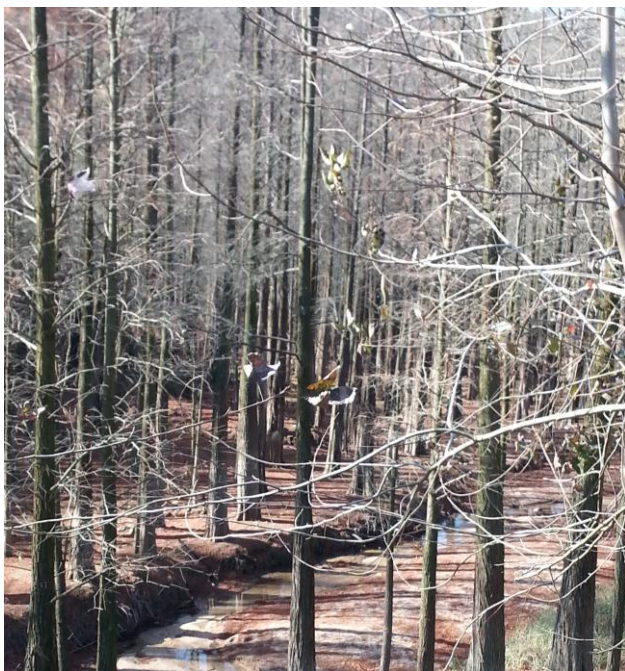
Animals are a source of important products, including foods, drugs and materials (e.g. leather, sheep skin). They are used as pets and as such are often denied the opportunity to reproduce and socialise with other creatures of the same species. However, they are usually well treated, have comfortable lives and probably would not have had a life at all if not for the pet trade. Animals are also part of our education and part of the richness of the world. Animals are also important for maintaining biodiversity and a healthy planet.

IELTS examinations also ask questions regarding whether environmental issues should be addressed at local or global levels. Environmental issues must be addressed locally as the largest environmental impact is felt locally and therefore local change offers the greatest hope for change. For example, soil, water and air pollution are felt much more at the source of the problem than globally. Local initiatives can drive change at the source of the problem. Addressing many local problems will also have a significant impact on the global environment. However, in poorer countries the environment is often sacrificed in order to achieve growth while wealthy nations have strict environmental laws. This causes the transfer of environmentally unfriendly production and associated environmental problems to poorer nations. The role

of global environmental initiatives is to encourage countries to manage the local environment well in order to reduce overall pollution levels.

Excessive consumerism is another cause of environmental problems. Products that are designed to have short lives, have excessive packaging, are unnecessary or frivolous, and a lack of community sharing all contribute to environmental problems. Prices often do not accurately reflect the environmental cost of products. For this reason many countries are beginning to price carbon and companies are starting to be held accountable for environmental damage that they cause.

Nuclear Power is capable of producing large amounts of energy and in normal circumstances does not pollute the atmosphere. The risk with nuclear power is that there can be catastrophic failures such as Fukushima, Chernobyl and Three Mile Island. Although these failures are rare, they receive an enormous amount of attention and affect public opinion. It can be argued that many other forms of energy generation cause far more deaths and rarely receive public attention



because they usually do not usually result in major news events. The number of deaths in polluted cities that arise from poor air quality is very high. Respiratory illness, lung diseases, and cancers are all significant problems. However, one of the major problems with nuclear energy is the storage of waste products. The half-life of nuclear waste is in the hundreds or thousands of years and it has to be stored carefully. Radioactive waste is usually buried but this is not without risks as pollutants can leech into

water. The very long life of these products also means that over time there could be geological activity that exposes dangerous pollutants.

Water is essential to all life forms and must be managed carefully. Water conservation is becoming important for two key reasons – population growth and pollution. The problems with water are that it moves and is therefore capable of transporting and dispersing pollution to other places. This makes it difficult to clean and pollution can build up over time. Problems include hormones in water (which can interfere with reproduction) and other chemicals that can damage environments such as oil and other toxic chemicals.

Noise pollution probably does not have a big impact on physical wellbeing but may impact emotional wellbeing. It is possible to separate the noises in people's lives to those that are unavoidable such as from machinery and cars and sound that people choose to listen to as background noise such as, music or television. People are rarely in a low noise environment. This may prevent people from having thinking time and affect their ability to relax. However, people's brains are good at filtering out information that is distracting and background noise may prevent people from feeling lonely or isolated.

Topic Vocabulary

Sustainability – This refers to the idea that natural resources should not be used at a greater rate than they can be produced to ensure that resources will never run out. Useful collocations include sustainable energy sources and sustainable consumption.

Conservation – Conservation describes the maintenance of the environment for future generations.

Global warming – Global warming is a process that causes a planet to retain heat. Global warming is caused by gas (CO₂, CH₄, etc.) that is capable of trapping heat within the atmosphere.

Environmentally friendly – Actions or products that help preserve the environment can be viewed as environmentally friendly.

Environmental protection – This describes protection of the environment.

Materialism – Materialism is the desire to own objects or money.

Consumerism – Consumerism is closely related to materialism and describes the desire to own, consume or use goods.

Half-life – The time it takes for a radioactive material to decay to half of its original mass.

Wellbeing (physical, emotional) – Wellbeing refers to a person's condition. It may refer to their health, living conditions, or emotions.

Toxic – A substance that is harmful to living creatures is toxic.

Sample Essay – Extinction

There are many extinct animals' species in the world. Some people think we should protect animals from dying out, while others believe we should spend more time on problems of human beings. Discuss both sides and give your opinion.

The rate of extinction is now greater than at almost any point in history and this is important not just for the species that are dying out, but also impacts humans. The loss of species not only reduces the understanding, diversity and beauty of the planet, but also has the potential to create an unstable ecological environment. In addition, there is no reason environmental problems cannot be addressed alongside other human problems. In this essay the importance of protecting animal species will be discussed.

It is important to protect animal and plant species from dying out due to human activity as their loss means that the genetic history of that species will be lost along with the opportunity to study and understand the world better. In addition, the world would be a far less interesting and beautiful place without the many now endangered species such as giant pandas, tigers and polar bears.

Of even greater concern is that the loss of species creates the risk of creating an ecological environment that is unstable, with a small number of species dominating the planet as they become free from predators leading to an environment that lacks genetic diversity and becomes vulnerable to diseases or natural disasters. In addition, the lack of diversity could slow the recovery from such disasters.

Although, there are many other human problems in the world to be solved including, poverty, political instability, wars and pollution, people should not ignore environmental issues. It is possible for societies to attempt to address many problems simultaneously and all issues that threaten the long-term stability of the planet should be addressed urgently.

In summary, maintaining the diversity of the planet is critical for human survival and should be dealt with along with many other important problems.

Essay Notes

This is a difficult topic and many students may find that producing enough ideas is a problem. The question is asking what actions, if any, that humans should take to prevent the loss of species. The question refers to both species and animals. This means that if students choose, it is possible to include plants

as well as animals in the response. However, this would require the reader to link the word species to both animals and plants in the introduction. An opening sentence that would do this is “The loss of both animal and plant species should be of concern to humans as such a loss could threaten the future of the planet”. This question also uses “Some people say... while others say...” and students should avoid using this language in their essay as it is non-academic and distances the writer from the ideas being presented and can give



the impression that the writer has no ideas of their own or is not prepared to support the ideas that they have.

Students should also notice that the question states “there are many extinct animal species in the world today”, which is logically incorrect. Extinct animals are dead and therefore there are no extinct

species in the world ever - they are all gone. This is a deliberate decision on the part of examiners to give incorrect language to students rather than the correct language that students can copy from the question. In this case the correct language is “endangered animals”.

The opening sentence of the introduction specifically refers to the topic (extinction of species) and provides a reason why the topic is important (it impacts humans). This is followed by two ideas sentences. The first addresses the first part of the question, which is the impact of the loss of species, and the second addresses the second part of the question, which is whether we should focus on this problem given that there are so many other problems in the world. The two ideas sentences divide the essay into two clear logical parts. A thesis statement has been added in order to provide an aim for the essay.

The essay has three body paragraphs that cover the key ideas in the same order that they are presented in the introduction. The first paragraph is focused on loss of beauty and understanding and this is supported by a simple example of endangered animals that the world would be poorer without. The second body paragraph describes the potential risk to humanity because of loss of diversity, while the third makes the point that there is no reason why environmental problems cannot be addressed alongside other world problems.

It should be noted that the body is ideas focused and uses few examples and they are short and are included to provide simple examples that allow the reader to better imagine the ideas that are being described.

Essay Vocabulary

Ecological – Ecological refers to plant and animal life.

Genetic – Genetic refers to anything related to genes.

Extinct – Extinct describes a species that has completely died out.

Endangered species – Endangered species refers to species that is at risk of become extinct.

Vulnerable – Anything (living or not) that has a weak position or could be attacked can be considered to be vulnerable.

Topic 5 – The Arts

General Topic Information

Questions regarding the arts provide significant challenges to students as they have rarely given much thought to the impact that the arts have on society. The arts include literature, painting, cinema, sculpture, architecture, fashion and design.



Many students fail to consider that the arts play an important role in challenging commonly held ideas, particularly in fields such as literature and cinema. Great literature challenges the views of society. For example the works of Charles Dickens and Victor Hugo challenged injustice in the 1800's in England and France, while George Orwell exposed the failures of communism and correctly predicted that it usually leads to totalitarian societies. Vibrant societies almost always have a tolerant and vibrant arts community. For example, the Tang and Song dynasties are often viewed as being the height of

Chinese civilisation and these periods were characterised by their art. Similarly, when art and innovation was restricted during the Ming dynasty, Chinese civilisation fell into decline.

Art can directly impact people's thinking and educated people typically value the arts for this reason. Sometimes they directly address problems in society such as major political and social issues, such as animal rights, the use of torture by governments, homosexuality and gay marriage etc. and sometimes art focuses on relationships and feelings and helps people to understand others better. Although ideas focused art is mainly found in literature and film, there are also examples in other forms of art such as painting and sculpture.



Art also plays a role in creating a desirable and beautiful environment. It plays a role in everyday life with art objects around the home that have a positive impact on wellbeing, particularly psychological wellbeing.

Art also plays a significant role in making public places beautiful and desirable. For example, architecture and sculpture are used to create beautiful public spaces, and are enjoyed by both locals and tourists. Many of the great cities of the world that attract tourists do so because of their art. This art may include paintings (e.g. Paris, Louvre etc.), architecture (Venice, Beijing, Sydney etc.) and sculpture (Xian - Terracotta Warriors, Florence - Michelangelo's David). This means that art plays a significant role in the economies of these cities because of tourism. Hotels, restaurants, tour operators and other tourism related business benefit from the desirability of cities as destinations. In addition art can also create new industries from small scale "cottage industries" to large industries such as filmmaking. Art also has a role in design and making products desirable.

Most questions about art are focused on whether governments should spend money on the arts, but students should consider how much they should spend rather than just whether the question of whether they should spend at all. In terms of funding the arts it is important to consider that arts do not represent a significant part of a government's budget. Programs such as defence, education and health use most of a country's budget and therefore having a well-funded arts program often has little impact on other services a country provides.

Topic Vocabulary

Artistic freedom – Artistic freedom is that ability of artists to produce works of art and literature without interference from governments.

Diverse – Diverse can be used to describe societies that contain people with very different views and lifestyles.

Vibrant society – A vibrant society is a one that is rich in culture and full of activity and change.

Psychological wellbeing – Psychological wellbeing refers to whether people are psychologically healthy and whether they are happy and comfortable.

Sample Essay – Art and Quality of Life

Some people think art such as sculpture and music cannot improve the quality of people's lives so the government should not spend money on them but on health and defence. What is your opinion?

Art is a fundamental part of society and should be funded as it enriches lives through beauty and thought provoking ideas. Art presents ideas and objects in new and interesting ways that allow people to think more deeply about the world and appreciate beauty. In addition, Arts funding represents a small fraction of the amount of money spent by governments and does not significantly impact the amount of taxes that need to be collected. In this essay, the value of funding the Arts will be discussed.

Although many pieces of art are derided as being worthless or inaccessible as they include ordinary objects taken out of their normal context or objects that have no obvious meaning, they provoke thinking. People will question artists' motives, and whether the piece is useful, valuable or beautiful. In more accessible forms of art such as music, literature and painting a story is told and allows us to build empathy with people in different situations and can expose prejudice and injustice. Supporting the Arts therefore improves our thinking and ultimately our society.

A further value of Art is that it brings beauty to public spaces. In many cities around the world people can be seen having their photographs taken with sculptures or architecture. Public art, which is almost always government funded, makes cities more interesting and is appreciated by both locals and tourists. Art attracts people to cities and has economic value. Cities including Cannes and Edinburgh are famous for their arts festivals and draw in enormous numbers of tourists. People also visit many cities for their permanent art collections.

A key consideration for any government is the extent to which it should fund the arts. Almost always, the arts represent a very small proportion of government funding, which is primarily focused on health and education. Therefore, modest funding for the Arts has little impact on taxpayers.

In summary, Art provides a source of beauty and provokes thought and is worthy of funding, particularly as it usually does not represent a significant proportion of government funding.

Essay Notes

This is a question that challenges most students because they have rarely given much consideration to the role that art plays in people's lives and the wider society. The question presents no particular difficulty except for the final part which questions whether governments should spend any money on the arts. In this part of the question students should be reminded that even when the Arts are well funded, this funding represents an extremely small fraction of government spending which means that there is very little benefit in not having some kind of arts program. Like many IELTS questions, this question uses a non-academic style because it uses "Some people think..." and students should avoid this phrasing as it distances the writer from the ideas being presented.

The opening sentence describes the topic and provides a key reason why funding the Arts is important. The essay has two ideas sentences that logically break the essay into two parts. The first covers how art improves people's lives and the second explains why governments should spend money on the arts. The final sentence is a thesis statement describing the aims of the essay which is the reasons why funding the arts is worthwhile.

The first body paragraph is very ideas focused and contains no examples. It explains how art adds value to society by contributing ideas and stories while the second paragraph focuses on the second function of art, which is to add beauty to our cities and explains the economic value of art. In this paragraph there are two examples of arts festivals (Cannes and Edinburgh) that add economic value. It is worth noting that the two examples are quite different from one another, one is for film and the other is for live performances and they are situated in different countries. The use of varied examples serves to give the reader the sense that the reader is knowledgeable about the world. The final paragraph focuses on the final part of the question, which is whether governments should provide funding for the arts. It is also worth noting that the ideas around economic benefits at the end of the second body paragraph are related to the question of whether governments should fund the arts. Having these ideas close together allows a link to be drawn between the two parts of the essay, increasing overall cohesion.

A very simple, one sentence conclusion is provided for this essay that uses the phrase "In summary," to indicate to the reader that the essay is concluding followed by a brief description of the most important ideas.

Essay Vocabulary

Enrich – To make people's lives richer by providing different experiences.

Thought provoking – To cause people to think about something and come up with new ideas that they had not previously considered.

Inaccessible – Here inaccessible means that people find something or someone hard to understand. It also means that a place is difficult to enter or reach.

Context – Context is the background situation of an event.

Topic 6 – Government and Health

General Topic Information

When considering questions around governments, there are two very important considerations that should not be overlooked. The first is that governments have restrictions placed on them by the amount of money that they have – they must make choices about how they spend money and cannot fund every program that they would like to. When discussing whether governments should allocate money to a particular program it also should be viewed in terms of the overall budget – an Arts program might not be as important as healthcare but the amount of money spent compared to healthcare might be negligible. The second consideration is that people often view government spending as other people's money. It is not – it is taxpayers' money that is raised from the citizens of a country.

When considering aid to foreign countries the funds belong to citizens and governments have an obligation to ensure that any funds given in aid must represent value. Governments usually give aid indirectly to ensure that funds go to the intended recipients. This means that the form of aid is very important and it is often best done through providing skill (people) or through donor government agencies.

All people (and organisations) have an obligation to assist others in need; however, those who are receiving aid have a responsibility to use aid given in the best way possible. This creates problems when governments are corrupt and not acting in the best interests of citizens – mostly countries are poor because of conflict, corruption and poor management. Usually this means that aid must be given very thoughtfully if it is to reach the intended beneficiaries. Handing over cash invites corruption – most successful emergency aid provides basic necessities given directly to those in greatest need. In the case of development projects, funding is usually controlled by the donor and is given in foreign expertise and materials. A key element of successful projects is by involving local organisations that must ultimately manage the aid that is provided.



It is a basic responsibility of governments to look after the health of their citizens and governments should provide a basic level of health care to all of its citizens. However, private health organisations also have a role to play in public health. They can provide higher level services that can support the health system – these higher levels of support can

cover items such as avoiding long waiting lists, providing higher levels of care, providing non-essential services such as knee or hip replacements, varicose



veins removal, lap-band surgery and other desirable but non-essential services. The higher paying patients are also removed from the public system removing strain and reducing waiting times.

Alternative medicine is medicine that does not come through the medical establishment. It includes herbal remedies, acupuncture and vitamin supplements. Alternative medicine is usually untested and its use is based on anecdotal evidence; however, because even if a remedy has not been proven scientifically, it may still be effective. Alternative medicines are particularly attractive when patients have terminal illness or severe pain that cannot be treated through proven methods. However, being unproven is a problem because the human body is complicated and unknown or harmful effects may arise. Drugs usually have more than one function and some effects may take many years before the effect is realised (this is particularly true of treatments that cause cancer or damage internal organs). Thalidomide is probably the best example of an inadequately tested drug and was used to treat morning sickness but also caused birth defects resulting in children being born without arms and legs. A further problem with alternative medicines is that they can be used to cheat vulnerable people because exaggerated claims can be readily made about them.

Topic Vocabulary

Elective surgery – Surgery that is not urgent and can be delayed for some time is described as elective surgery.

Alternative medicine – Alternative medicines are medicines that are generally not accepted by the medical profession as having been shown to be effective.

Herbal remedies – Herbal remedies are products from plants that are believed to be useful for treating injuries or illness but have not been scientifically verified. Many Chinese medicines can be classified as herbal remedies.

Vitamin supplements – Vitamins taken as pills or tablets in order to make up for dietary problems.

Thalidomide – A drug invented in the 1950's to cure morning sickness and was later found to cause babies to be born handicapped. The use of thalidomide became a major scandal in Western medicine because when the manufacturer became aware that thalidomide caused birth defects, the drug company that manufactured the drug failed to stop selling it.

Sample Essay – Health Care Providers

Health is very important for everyone and healthcare should not be provided by private profit making companies. What is your opinion?

In order to ensure the highest overall quality level of healthcare, it is probably necessary to allow both profit and not-for-profit organisations to provide health services. Although it is critical for governments to provide quality health care for all members of society, private companies can remove some of the burden placed on the public system by providing high quality services to those who are able to pay for them. In this essay the role of both government and not-for-profit health care providers and companies in providing health care will be discussed.

Governments have a responsibility to provide quality health care to citizens and play a critical in ensuring that people have adequate health care. The role of government is to act as a safety net to ensure that those who cannot afford health care receive treatment when they need it. However, governments are also restricted in the amount of money that they can spend on health care and must prioritise their spending. This means that urgent cases are dealt with promptly while less urgent cases often involve long waiting periods, which may be unsatisfactory for patients.

The role of private companies is also important in providing a quality health care system because they often reduce stress on the public system by meeting the needs of wealthier patients. People usually place a high value on their health and many people are willing to pay higher prices for a better level of care. This comes in the form of access to better facilities and more comfortable surroundings such as private rooms and higher nurse to patient ratios as well as access to more expensive specialized treatment and faster access to elective surgery and treatments. The weakness of such a system is that wealthier patients will almost always receive better treatment compared to the general population creating a perception of unfairness. However, such a system leads to better overall levels of care for everyone.

In summary, private companies play a useful role in supplementing government health care systems and leads to better treatment for all patients. However, it also leads to more unequal treatment with wealthier patients receiving much better care than less wealthy patients.

Essay Notes

This topic provides challenges because students typically focus on what is best for people rather than whether it is practical to provide the services that people desire.

Affordability is a key question surrounding funding for all government programs. Most government spending is directed towards healthcare, education and infrastructure development and any increase in funding of these key areas will require governments to raise taxes. Therefore the government must balance the needs of public healthcare against the burden placed on taxpayers. The very best healthcare is extremely expensive and unaffordable and the challenge for governments is how to get the best healthcare for its citizens. In practice one of the ways that governments increase the level of healthcare provided is to allow private providers to offer premium services to those who are able to pay for them; however, this leads to issues of equality. In this essay two body paragraphs have been used. The first describes the role of government health organisations and the second describes the role of private health companies.

In this essay the opening sentence of the introduction lists the topic and why it is important (because people want the best level of healthcare they can get). The second sentence provides the structure and the key ideas of the essay by first stating government's responsibility to provide the best level of healthcare possible followed by the idea that government health systems can be supported by private companies. The third sentence of the introduction is a thesis statement and states that the purpose of the essay is to describe the different roles played by government and private healthcare providers.

The first body paragraph covers the role of government in providing healthcare. The key ideas are that the government has a responsibility to provide basic health care to all citizens, that governments are restricted in what they can do because of limited money and that these restrictions mean that non-urgent cases may be dealt with very slowly. It should be noted that this paragraph has three related ideas and is ideas focused. It has no examples.

The second body paragraph covers the role of private companies in healthcare systems and covers the ideas that private companies take stress off the private system and that some people are able to pay more for better treatment. This idea is supported with a number of simple examples including people paying for private rooms and faster access to non-urgent procedures. The second part of the paragraph explains the downside of having private companies provide medical care, which is that such a system leads to unequal treatment of people

within society. However, this is softened by the use of a further idea, which is that despite the unequalness that having private companies providing health services causes, it does lead to an overall improved level of service for all citizens.

The conclusion consists of a single sentence and covers the key ideas presented in the essay in a simple and direct fashion.

Essay Vocabulary

Not-for-profit organisation – A not-for-profit organisation is any organisation that exists solely to support the community and does not earn a profit over time.

Healthcare providers – A healthcare provide is any company or organisation that provides healthcare.

Elective surgery – Elective surgery is an operation that is not urgently required.

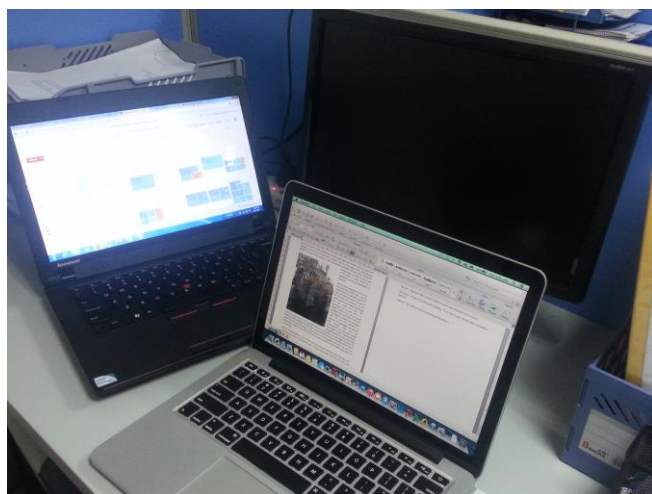
More comfortable surroundings – More comfortable surroundings refers to a better environment, particularly an indoor environment.

Adequate – Adequate refers to anything that meets basic standards but offers little beyond that standard.

Topic 7 – Science and Technology

General Topic Information

Technology has provided society with many new tools. Like all tools, the value of technological tools depends largely on how they are used and whether they make tasks faster or simpler. Technology can lead to problems such as devices that are unnecessarily complicated, that people may use technology inappropriately, safety issues (people focus on devices not and not their surroundings), and that excessive use leads to social isolation and health problems (lack of exercise). The advantages are that technology is portable, space saving, can hold vast amounts of information, can perform complex tasks



rapidly, and allow the best possible use of time – for example, while going for a walk it is possible to listen to music and learn a language at the same time.

The Internet and mobile phones are the most commonly discussed technology. Information on the Internet should be viewed in the same way as information in books, newspapers and magazines or

other sources. In the same way that anyone can add information to the Internet, anyone can also write a book and publish it. Neither online nor physical publications have controls over accuracy and therefore both may contain incorrect information. The main advantage of the Internet is that inaccuracies can be readily corrected. In addition, the Internet potentially allows many sources to be checked. This means that each source may be able to be compared with other sources for consistency. In the same way that publications are reputable due to internal standards such as editing and refereeing, the same is true for websites. Wikipedia is an example of a highly reputable source of information.

Long distance flights use significant amounts of energy but are probably insignificant in terms of the total energy used. However air travel provides many benefits including allowing people to travel easily and cheaply, which broadens experiences, enriches lives and educates people. It allows people to travel for business purposes and improves relationships and understanding between countries and allows access to cheaper goods.

Topic Vocabulary

Scientific breakthrough – A scientific breakthrough is a major discovery in science.

Innovation – Innovation refers to the creation of new ideas or products.

Sedentary lifestyle – A lifestyle that involves little physical activity such as working at a desk job and doing little exercise is referred to as a sedentary lifestyle.

Sample Essay – Mobile Phones

There are many problems caused by mobile phones. What are the advantages of mobile phones? What are the disadvantages?

It is clear that mobile phones have brought many advantages to people's lives because of their convenience. Mobile phones are not only a very useful communication tool they also serve many other purposes including storing information, providing learning tools and entertainment. However, mobile phones need to be used appropriately otherwise they can become intrusive. In this essay the importance of mobile phones will be discussed.

The original purpose of mobile phones was to offer people a convenient communication tool that allows them to be contactable wherever they are and aids communication. An important consequence of the ability to contact people is that mobile phones can also act as safety devices and are routinely given to children for safety reasons and also give a level of comfort to women who are out late at night.

However, the modern mobile phone or Smartphone has developed far beyond its original purpose and has many advantages. Phones are commonly used for entertainment and allow people to listen to music when they are performing other activities such as travelling on public transport, exercising or waiting for others. Mobile phones also play an important role in people's work lives and allow them to access e-mail and calendars irrespective of whether they are in the office or not. A further important feature of mobile phones is that they have the ability to run sophisticated software that can be used for learning. For example, language learners often have dictionaries, flashcard and other language learning applications on their phone. An important aspect of mobile phone usage is that they allow people to be entertained, to work or to learn when they have time that they could not previously use for productive purposes such as when they are waiting or travelling.

Although it is difficult to argue that mobile phones are not powerful and useful tools, it is important that they are used wisely. Being accessible means that people can be interrupted at any point in time and phones can become intrusive. For example, it is important that people have time away from the work environment but a mobile phone may mean that they can be contacted any time of the day or night. In addition, mobile phones may cause people to become anti-social and focus on phones rather than the people that they are with. Furthermore, phones can be distracting and unsafe if people are focusing on their phone rather than their surroundings.

In summary, mobile phones are an extraordinarily useful tool but it is important that people use them wisely and ensure that they have private time, interact with other people and remain safe at all times.

Essay Notes

This question is a routine and should not trouble students in terms of ideas because almost all students will be very familiar with the use of mobile phones. The main risk for students in this question is that they focus too much on examples rather than ideas.



The opening sentence of the essay outlines the topic and the importance of mobile phones in people's lives. The essay has two ideas sentences; the first outlines the advantages of mobile phones (useful for communication, have many other purposes), while the second lists the disadvantages (they can become intrusive). A thesis statement is used to give the aim of the essay, which is to describe the importance of mobile phones.

The first body paragraph is simple and covers the main purpose of mobile phones (allows easy communication) and their role in keeping people safe. The second body paragraph is unusually long and contains key ideas around the benefits of mobile phones in entertainment, business and education. This paragraph uses a number of examples (email, calendars, dictionaries and language learning tools) and all are very short as the purpose of examples is to support ideas and make them clearer to the reader. In this case it is sufficient to name examples rather than fully describe them, as all examples will be familiar to the reader. The third body paragraph is also long and describes the drawbacks of mobile phones (can be intrusive, can be anti-social and unsafe) and there are no examples.

The conclusion is short and very general because the essay is unusually long and the reader will already be sufficiently familiar with the topic.

Essay Vocabulary

Contactable – Can be contacted.

Intrusive – Intrusive is when a person or object interferes or gets uncomfortably close and disturbs or disrupts other people.

Sophisticated – Complicated and highly developed.

Applications – Application is another word for software.

Accessible – Can be easily accessed.

Anti-social – An anti-social person is somebody who does make an attempt to interact with others.

Topic 8 – Law

General Topic Information

Questions of law provide challenging problems as the role of the legal system is viewed differently in different cultures and this topic also has very complex vocabulary.

An important distinction between Western countries and developing countries



is that in the power structure of Western countries, the law is above the government. For example, the highest court in the land in most countries has the power to over-rule any law that is made if it violates the constitution (this occasionally occurs). In addition any person can challenge any law and there is no requirement that the person who challenges a law is a citizen. In addition, the constitution can only be changed if approved directly by the people through a referendum.

The courts in most countries are broken into two separate areas, criminal and civil cases. In criminal cases (involving crimes) the case against the accused must be proved beyond “reasonable doubt” and there is a long appeals process. The key concept behind this is the principle that it is better to allow guilty people to go free than convict the innocent – this is different for many developing countries. Possible verdicts in criminal cases are “guilty” and “not-guilty” – “innocent” is not a verdict. The role of a court is to decide whether there is enough evidence to convict the accused, a jury may believe that a person probably committed a crime but that there is not enough evidence to be sure, and the verdict in such cases will be “not-guilty”. As a consequence of this philosophy, the percentage of not-guilty verdicts is much higher in Western countries compared to developing countries. When people are sent to jail, education and rehabilitation are important considerations because convicted criminals will usually later be freed back into the community.

Civil cases are related to money matters such as compensation and contract disputes and are decided on “the balance of probabilities” which means that all legal decisions in these cases are based on what the judge or jury to believe to be the fairest or most likely outcome.

Any attempt at interference in the law is a very serious criminal offence, particularly if by a person holding high office. For example, if a judge commits a minor traffic offence or other minor matter and signs an untrue statement he or she can expect to spend time in jail.

Generally, in Western civil courts it is difficult to achieve justice for individuals because taking legal action is too expensive to be a reasonable option for most people. In addition, the court process is long and slow and causes a great deal of stress. The high cost of lawyers may also prevent people accused of crimes from getting proper legal representation. However, free legal representation (legal aid) is provided in some cases.

Most IELTS Task 2 questions will focus on topics such as capital punishment, sentencing and crimes committed by young people.

Capital punishment (with the exception of the United States) is no longer permitted in most Western countries. The key reasons for abolishing capital punishment are that the system is flawed and many people in the past have been proved to be innocent after being executed. It is also clearly not possible to correct an incorrect verdict after a person has been executed. Many societies regard capital punishment as inhumane because of cruelty and because no person should be asked to kill another in a just society. Capital punishment is a punishment not just also for the person who committed the crime but also for their families. In addition, if governments have the right to kill citizens, such laws could be used for political purposes.

The case for capital punishment centres on the idea that some crimes are so serious, that an individual may forfeit the right to live. Arguments that are listed on both sides are the cost of keeping prisoners in jail is very high and governments should not be forced to pay this money (the cost of executions is also very high because of protections and appeals for capital cases because they invariably face many legal challenges). In addition, capital punishment does/does not act as a deterrent for others committing serious crimes. The idea that capital punishment does not act as a deterrent is that people who commit capital crimes are usually uneducated and do not consider possible consequences including that they may be caught.

Another common question is whether there should be fixed punishments for each type of crime. The correct term for this is mandatory sentencing. The advantages of this approach are that it saves time and money and is suitable for minor offences such as speeding, running a red light and failing to vote in an election that attract standard fines (though these can be challenged in a court). For more significant crimes mandatory sentencing has the advantage that

people are aware of the potential consequences of committing a crime and that everyone will receive the same punishment for the same crime. However, mandatory sentencing does not allow for the circumstances of a crime to be considered, does not consider the age of the person and the possibility of rehabilitation and can lead to injustice.

Crimes committed by young people are also a common question. Most crimes committed by young people are committed because of lack of opportunity and education. Often they are the result of drug addiction and poor education. Supporting young people in these situations is important otherwise they will become lifelong criminals. For young people it is much more important to rehabilitate them rather than punish them. Sending young people to jail gives them negative role models and relationships and they usually become more likely rather than less likely to commit crimes once they have completed their sentence. It is important to remember that criminals will later be released from jail and that it is important that society creates an environment where people who are released from jail are less likely to reoffend by supporting their transition back into the community.

Topic Vocabulary

Veto – A veto is to override a decision.

Sentencing – Sentencing is the process of deciding the penalty for committing a crime.

Criminal offence/civil offence – An offence is a violation of the law.

Referendum – A referendum is an election that allows changes to be made to a country's constitution.

Reasonable doubt – A part of the law that states a person should be found not guilty of a crime if there is any reasonable possibility that they did not commit the crime.

Appeal – A formal legal process to challenge the findings of a court.

The accused – The accused is person who is charged with committing a crime.

Legal aid – Government money provided to people who are accused of a crime but do not have sufficient money to pay for a lawyer.

Pro bono – Pro bono (from Latin) is when a lawyer chooses to give free legal representation. This sometime occurs when people are unable to represent themselves adequately or if there is significant public interest in a case.

Capital punishment – Capital punishment is the death penalty.

Deterrent – Deterrent is the opposite of encouragement and means to discourage an activity by creating negative consequences for engaging in an activity.

Rehabilitation – The process of returning a person to a normal situation. Rehabilitation can occur after committing crimes or be medical such as after a serious accident.

Compensation – To compensate is to make up for a wrongdoing, sometimes with money.

Sample Essay – Mandatory Sentencing

Some people believe that there should be fixed punishments for each type of crime. Some people suggest that the circumstances of a crime, and the reasons for committing it should be taken into consideration when deciding on the punishment. Discuss both views and give your opinion.

Sentencing for those found guilty of crimes presents a difficult challenge because justice must be seen to be done for both victims and perpetrators. Mandatory sentencing ensures that the same sentence is handed out for the same crime; however, judges lose the ability to adjust sentences and cannot take into account factors such as age and the possibility of rehabilitation. In this essay, the consequences of mandatory sentencing will be discussed.

Mandatory sentencing has the advantage that everyone is aware of exactly the sentence they can expect if found guilty of a particular crime. However, since people who commit crimes are often poorly educated and may not consider the consequences of their actions when they commit a crime, this approach may offer little benefit.

Removing the ability of judges to adjust sentences on the basis of the circumstances of a crime may also lead to injustice as it assumes that any two people who commit the same crime have the same level of moral culpability. For example, someone who murders in order to prevent suffering is morally different to someone who murders a stranger at random. Applying the same sentences in such disparate cases clearly would not serve the interests of either justice or the wider community.

In addition, it may be appropriate to give a young person who has committed a crime a lighter sentence in order to give them the opportunity to change their behaviour and become a productive and law-abiding citizen. In contrast, a person who is older and has committed many crimes should receive a heavier penalty as they are more likely to reoffend in future and heavier sentences are needed to protect the community.

In summary, mandatory sentencing may lead to injustice because the same crime may be committed for very different reasons. In addition, a person's history and the opportunity for rehabilitation should also be taken into consideration when deciding sentences for those convicted of committing crimes.

Essay Notes

This question is difficult to answer as cultural views about appropriate sentencing for crimes differ widely. Many students will focus on the punishment aspect of sentencing and will not consider that people who are sent to prison typically re-enter society at a later point and therefore there is a need to rehabilitate people. This is a major factor in sentencing. A further difficulty is that there is a great deal of technical vocabulary needed for this topic that students may lack. In such cases it is usual for students to use alternate language to describe technical language.

The question itself asks about whether punishments should be fixed. It should be noted that the correct word to describe this is “mandatory sentencing”. In addition, the question refers to punishment – but this is often not the primary purpose of sending people to prison. For this reason the correct and more formal word is “sentencing” (applies to courts only).

The introduction contains three sentences. The first sentence tells the reader the topic and the reason why mandatory sentencing is important. The second sentence contains the main ideas, which are presented in the order that they appear in the body and define the high level structure of the essay. There are three main ideas - mandatory sentencing gives the same punishment for all offenders, it prevents judges from using discretion and does not take into account the need to rehabilitate offenders. These three ideas are the subject of the three body paragraphs of the essay. The third sentence of the essay is a thesis statement and tells the reader that the aim of the essay is to explain the consequences of introducing mandatory sentencing.

The first body paragraph is simple and contains just two sentences. The main idea is that mandatory sentencing leads to people knowing what the consequence of being found guilty of a crime is. This appears to be a solid argument for the introducing mandatory sentencing. However, the author clearly does not believe that mandatory sentencing is a good for society and negates this argument in the second sentence of the paragraph by stating that people who commit crimes rarely consider consequences. An important strategy is used here. Even if only one side of the argument is being considered, acknowledging the opposite position and highlighting its weaknesses can strengthen the argument. This shows the reader that the author has considered both sides objectively. It also means that irrespective of whether the question asks for one or both sides of an argument, it is important to point out important arguments from both sides to prevent the reader from wondering whether the author considered them or not.

The second body paragraph covers the idea that removing the ability of judges to adjust sentences can cause injustice and this is supported by the example of murders committed for different reasons. It is worth noting that the examples chosen are not uncommon and most educated readers would be familiar with cases of this kind – thus the writer is drawing from the reader's personal experiences.

The third paragraph is culturally the most challenging and explains that sentencing is not necessarily focused on punishment. The needs of both the victims of crime and the perpetrators of crime should be considered as well as the needs of society. The idea is also supported with an example of how the needs of society should be balanced.

The conclusion consists of a conclusion marker and restates the three key ideas presented in the essay. It is worth noting that these ideas are presented in the introduction, in the body (where they are developed) and again in the conclusion. Each time they are presented in the same order, which serves to give the essay a strong structure.

Key vocabulary

Mandatory sentencing – The question refers to fixed punishments. The best general word to describe this is mandatory sentencing.

Sentencing – A sentence is the penalty handed out by a court for being found guilty of a crime and should be used instead of punishment. The intention of courts is not necessarily to punish offenders but balances the various needs of the people involved and the wider community.

Victims of crime – People who suffer pain or loss due to crimes are described as victims of crime.

Perpetrators, offenders – Both of these words are very formal words for describing people who commit crimes.

Rehabilitation – Rehabilitation is the process by which people return to a normal life. It can be used for people who are recovering from serious injury or those who turn away from crime.

Presumption of innocence – This is a concept in Western legal systems that a person is considered to be not guilty of a charge until a verdict has been made by a court of law.

Beyond reasonable doubt – In criminal cases a person can only be convicted of a crime if the jury is sure "beyond reasonable doubt" that they are guilty. The test is much higher than in civil cases where the test is the "balance of probability".

Guilty/not guilty/not proved – Juries must be sure that a person is guilty of a crime "beyond reasonable doubt". This means if they think a person probably committed a crime but aren't very sure they are found "not guilty" or the charge is found "not proven". This is different from being found to be "innocent" as a not guilty verdict does not mean that a person is innocent, only that there was not enough evidence to prove their guilty. When a person is found guilty of a crime – the correct verb is to be "convicted".

Topic 9 – Women and Families

General Topic Information

Occasionally IELTS questions focus on women and their role in society. These questions often challenge students because Western views on the role of women are often different to those in more traditional cultures. The focus of all gender-based questions should be equality. It is culturally unacceptable to describe women as inferior, or weaker than men.



Questions that focus on the role of women in the home should focus on providing women with choices rather than suggesting that they should adopt a particular role. Many women will prefer to stay in the home while others will wish to re-join the workforce after having children. These are both valid choices and should be supported. Some questions focus on whether women choosing to be working

mothers negatively affect families. An important idea is that both women and men are responsible for a successful family, rather than just the mother. In Western society it is gradually becoming more common for men to stay at home to manage the home while women work. This is not the norm and risks isolation for stay-at-home fathers because they may not be comfortable or welcome in female-dominated groups.

Some questions focus on whether women should be given preferential treatment in selection for university placement or promotion. The advantage of such an approach is that it can help in achieve more equal representation of men and women in decision-making roles. However, such an approach involves selecting people based on gender rather than on merit and means that less qualified candidates are selected in preference to better quality candidates. There is also the risk that women who are promoted in a preferential environment may be seen as not having earned the position and may lose the respect of others.

An interesting question is whether women should be allowed to be involved in the armed forces. In this question students often fail to consider that within the armed forces there are both non-combat and combat roles. Clearly women should be permitted to perform non-combat roles. A more difficult question is whether women should be permitted undertake combat duties. Currently most countries (Israel is an exception) do not allow this to occur. The common

argument for allowing women to fight in combat is based on equality. The reasons for not allowing women in combat is that men will often act to protect women, even when this is not the most appropriate choice. In addition, women are usually not as physically strong as men and that if captured they are much more likely to subject to sexual abuse.

Topic Vocabulary

Affirmative action – Affirmative action is a process whereby preferential treatment is given to a minority group (usually women or a racial group) in order to balance power or numbers within an organisation (university, jobs, etc.).

Stay-at-home mothers/fathers – Stay-at-home mothers or fathers are parents who choose to look after children rather than work for money.

Gender – Gender means whether a person is male or female.

Sample Essay – University Quotas

Universities should enrol equal numbers of male and female students in all subjects. Do you agree or disagree?

Universities should not accept equal numbers of male and female students because this is likely to lead to lower overall levels of education. Although it is clearly important that society provides equal opportunity to all members of society, men and women often choose different paths and society is best served by selecting university students based solely on merit. In this essay, the advantages of selecting students based on merit will be discussed.

Providing equal opportunity to all people is a critical part of creating a fair society. It is highly desirable that all people within a society have the opportunity to achieve their personal goals and knowing that achievements are based on equal competition is very important for both those who achieve those goals as well as those who do not. Universities having gender quotas create the risk that people of both sexes may be excluded from their chosen course of study based on gender.

Women and men are different and therefore it is not surprising that they choose different courses based on their personal preferences. For example, women more commonly choose courses such as nursing and teaching while men often prefer courses such as engineering and physics. Imposing quotas based on gender may mean that some courses may not attract enough qualified candidates or that a highly suitable candidate of one gender is excluded for a much less suitable candidate of the opposite sex in order to meet gender quotas.

The effect of choosing lower quality candidates of one gender will ultimately lead to the lowering of the overall standard of courses. This could result in lower professional standards in some fields and is not beneficial to society as a whole. It is desirable to have a society that has roughly balanced numbers of educated people of both genders, but individual courses should not adopt quotas.

In summary, if quotas are to be introduced they should only be introduced at an overall level not at a course level and then only if there is a significant gap between the numbers of students of each gender as quotas serve to decrease the overall quality of some courses and are a form of discrimination.

Essay Notes

This topic presents a difficult challenge as it contains significant cultural elements, notably the roles of women in society and acceptable ways of discussing gender differences. It is culturally unacceptable to refer to women as inferior or in any way weaker than men in any context and should be avoided. It is culturally acceptable to refer to differences between women but should be done by referring to these differences as preferences. The second body paragraph is a good example of how to handle gender differences.

In this question it is asked whether universities should accept equal numbers of



male and female students. The correct word for placing restriction on male and female students is, “gender quotas”. Commonly students copy language from the question into their essays and in order test whether students know the correct vocabulary examiners will often avoid the correct word in the question and replace it with a

definition.

The introduction contains three sentences. The first sentence tells the reader the topic and the reason why it is important. The second sentence contains the three main ideas, which are presented in the order that they appear in the essay and defines the high level structure of the essay. The third sentence is a thesis statement that outlines the aim of the essay. It should be noted that all key elements of the essay are presented in the introduction, which prepares the reader for the content in the body. The reader is unlikely to become confused about the direction of the essay if the topic and ideas are fully introduced.

In the first body paragraph the first key point in the introduction is restated to provide the subject for the paragraph. The following sentences are used to provide reasons and explanations. This pattern is repeated in all of the body paragraphs. In this essay there are few examples but when they are used they are to make the points being made clearer.

Essay Vocabulary

Quota – The question refers to equal numbers of male and female students.

Gender – Gender is a noun and refers to people's sex. The word "sex" is often (but not always) associated with the act and it is safest to use as a verb only. Gender is never used as a verb and is always much safer to use unless referring to the act itself. Common collocations using the word "sex" include, "sexual acts", "sexual orientation", "sexual preference", "opposite sex" and "both sexes".

Discrimination – Discrimination means that something is deliberately treated differently to others of its kind. It is used mostly in a negative sense and is often used in the context of unfairness or mistreatment of people. It is used far more often in English because there is a higher emphasis placed on fairness (particularly with respect to race, gender and wealth) in Western culture compared to other cultures.

Topic 10 – Tourism

General Topic Information

Tourism plays an important role in building understanding between nations and individuals. Visiting other countries can lead to an appreciation of the local culture and helps build relationships between people leading to a better mutual understanding and a higher level of tolerance.

Tourism questions usually focus on two key areas, whether locals should allow



for cultural differences or whether tourists should conform to local customs or the impact that tourism has on the local culture and environment.

Tourism is important for many countries because it is a key industry that provides a great deal of income and supports many businesses. When questions around whether locals should adjust to tourists and show greater tolerance to tourists or

whether tourists should conform to local customs arise, it is clear that both locals and tourists need to make adjustments. Tourists may not understand all aspects of the culture of countries that they visit but need to ensure that they understand that they are guests and should behave accordingly. They need to ensure that they understand and comply with laws. Locals need to make sure that they are also tolerant of tourist's misunderstandings and need to make allowances for them.

Further questions focus on the impact of tourism on local culture. Tourism has the potential to damage important cultural sites and the environment. It is important that historical and scenic sites are protected for future generations, but at the same time tourists should be given access to sites to support local economies.

Tourism also has a role to play in helping counties develop. It is a major industry that often plays a critical role in providing income to poorer nations. Tourism also supports local culture because visitors to other countries are often interested in local culture. This interest supports local handicrafts, performance and architecture and can lead to its preservation.

Topic Vocabulary

Tolerant – Tolerant describes a person who shows understanding towards other people.

Historical and Scenic Sites – These are sites of natural beauty or cultural or historical importance.

Sample Essay – Tourist Behaviour

Some people think that visitors to other countries should obey local customs and behaviours. While other people disagree and think that the host country should welcome cultural differences.

Discuss both these views and give your opinion.

In order to better understand the people of other countries it is important that both tourists and locals should show respect and tolerance for each other. It is very important that tourists respect local cultures as they are representatives of their nation, are guests and could face legal consequences if they breach local laws. However, it is also important that locals are tolerant of tourists in order to develop good relationships and because they support the local economy. In this essay the importance of showing respect for other people and cultures will be discussed.

When tourists travel overseas they are freed from the normal restraints of home and may behave in a manner that is offensive to locals. Tourists are both representatives of their country and guests. Poor behaviour will often reflect poorly on both themselves as individuals and their nation as a whole. It is also important that all people show respect for others at all times.

Failure to show at least a minimum level of respect to others can also have legal consequences and result in heavy punishment. It is prudent to show a higher level of care when travelling overseas as laws may be very different and tourists may not understand the full implications of their actions. As far as possible, it is probably a good idea to stay within cultural norms when visiting other countries as doing so also means showing a high level of respect and is likely to lead to a positive experience for everyone.

However, local citizens should also remember they are hosts and should show some tolerance towards a lack of cultural understanding and local knowledge. Tourists support the local economy and assisting them and providing a friendly and respectful environment, including respecting their culture, is also important in supporting the relationship between people as well as the tourist industry.

In summary, showing respect and tolerance towards all people is the best way of maintaining a friendly and positive environment for all.

Essay Notes

The question invites the reader to choose that the responsibility for good relations reside only with one side. This is a common trap for students because



they do not have to choose one side or the other. If they do the quality of their answer is likely to be negatively affected. The question also refers to visitors from other countries and these should be referred to as tourists. It is common that questions contain a definition of a word rather than the correct word. The question presents no particular difficulty from a cultural or ideas perspective.

The introduction contains four sentences. The first sentence tells the reader the topic and the reason why it is important. In this instance the reason is given before the topic rather than the other way around. The second and third sentences contain the main ideas, which are presented in the order that they appear in the introduction and define the high level structure of the essay. There are two ideas sentences because the argument has been broken into two logical parts, tourists and locals. The fourth sentence is a thesis statement, which outlines the aim of the essay. It should be noted that all key elements of the essay are presented in the introduction, which prepares the reader for the content in the body. As a result, the reader is not likely to become confused about the direction of the essay.

The body contains three paragraphs. The first two describe the manner in which tourists should behave towards the host country and citizens. The third describes the way in which locals should treat tourists.

This essay is unusual in that it contains no examples. There is no difficulty with this approach as academic essays are focused on ideas and can stand alone without examples.

The conclusion is a single sentences that covers the only the main theme of the essay, which is that all people should show respect for others.

Essay Vocabulary

Tourists – The question refers to people who visit other countries.

Tolerance – Tolerance is a very formal word and refers to the ability to show understanding to others and to allow for differences. It is a positive quality

often associated with people who are highly educated and cultured who appreciate diversity.

Implications – A useful formal word that refers to the consequences of an event.

Prudent – Prudent refers to being both careful and wise in choices and approaches to problems.

11. Additional Essays

1. Essay – Gap Years

In some developed countries young people are encouraged to work or travel for a year at the end of high school and before starting university.

What are the pros and cons for young people who choose to do this.

In some countries young people are encouraged to take a gap year before starting university in order to give them more exposure to the wider world. Taking a gap year has the advantage that it allows students to experience more of the world and better understand the opportunity that university provides. However, discontinuing study means that students may not return to study as intended and are a year older when they graduate. In this essay the risks and benefits of taking a gap year will be discussed.

A gap year can be a rare life experience for young people as they are free of responsibility and can work or travel to give them more experience before they attend university. Working for a year before attending university helps young people to better understand that the work environment is competitive and that they must work hard to achieve their goals. Similarly, travel can give people the opportunity to see how others live and better appreciate the opportunities in their lives. Both working and travelling allow students to better understand the opportunity that going to university represents and may lead them to make much better use of their time at university.

However, a gap year also presents risks for students including that they may never return to university as their life's path has now headed in a different direction. In addition, they are a year older during their time at university and when they graduate. This means that they are separated from their peer group and upon graduation have less time to establish careers before they take important life steps such as buying a home and building a family.

In summary, taking a gap year is an important life decision as it may have long term impacts on students lives. It is important that students who choose to have a break from study are clear about the reasons for doing so and have a plan for returning to university.

Essay Notes

The question refers to students working or travelling for a year before continuing their studies. This is a good example of the question replacing the

correct vocabulary, “gap year”, with a definition of the word to test whether students know the correct language. The ideas surrounding this question are often not familiar to students because in many developing countries gap years are very uncommon. The key advantage of gap years are related to building the experience of young people; however, there is the risk that they may not return to their studies.

The opening sentence of the introduction allows the reader to understand the topic (gap years) and a reason why the topic is important (gives students wider exposure). The essay has two ideas sentences, the first of which describes the key advantage of gap years (allows students to experience something of the world and allow them to better understand the opportunities that university provides). The second ideas sentence covers the problems associated with gap years, namely that students may not return to study. Each of the ideas in these sentences is explored in the two body paragraphs of the essay.

The first body paragraph focuses on the experience that students gain, and the opportunities that gap years present to them. The opening sentence introduces the two different paths that students take during this time (travel and work). The different experiences that people have are so wide that it is possible to write a very well developed paragraph with many ideas. In this case the paragraph is divided into two logical parts. The first part of the paragraph (sentence 2) describes the advantages of joining the workforce before attending university such as understanding the work environment and the need to work hard if they are to succeed. The second part (sentence 3) describes the advantages that students gain through travel such as independence, seeing how other people live and gaining a greater understanding of the opportunities that they have in their lives. The final sentence of the paragraph unites the two paths that people take in a gap year and states that both can lead to students having a greater appreciation of university life.

The second body paragraph is much simpler and explains the risks associated with taking a gap year. There are two key ideas in the paragraph, which are that students might never return to study in the future and that they lose their friendship group.

The conclusion for the essay is short and unusual in that it does not restate many of the key ideas because they are long.

Essay Vocabulary

Gap year – A gap year refers to a year in which students defer studying to work or travel.

Peer group – People of the same social standing – it can refer to age, financial status, educational level, etc.

Exposure – Here exposure refers to giving people experience.

2. Essay – Artistic Freedom

Creative artists should always have the freedom to express their ideas (in paintings, books, films and songs) in anyway they wish. The government should not restrict what they do. To what extent do you agree with this opinion?

It is important that artists have the freedom to express new ideas without too many restrictions from governments so they can challenge the views of society. If too many restrictions are in place, writers and other artists will not be able to express their views publicly and will no longer question societies values limiting the development of society. However, some restrictions may be necessary to protect people and to avoid unreasonable offence. In this essay the importance of artists being able to express their views freely will be discussed.

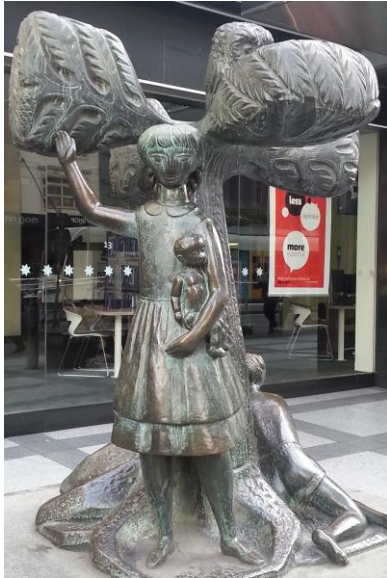
Individuals have the right to express themselves, and artists are no exception to this. If artist's rights are restricted, they may no longer be able to publicly express their views. This means that the public would receive few new ideas and that society's current thinking is less often challenged. As a result, people may not become aware of some of the problems in society and therefore important problems may not be addressed. Ultimately, this leads to a society that does not develop as well as it could. For example, the restrictions placed on artists and society in China in the early part of the Ming dynasty led to a more insular society and the decline of Chinese civilisation. Restricting artists also means that artists stop producing material such as interesting fashion, pop music and abstract art and that the overall quality of art is reduced. A further problem of reducing freedom for artists is that art becomes less interesting and less relevant to people and a potential flourishing industry that benefits society could be damaged.

However, sometimes it is necessary to place restrictions on what artists can exhibit in order to protect society. For example, society needs to protect children from harmful images and in some cases ideas could be so unacceptable that it may be appropriate to restrict them. In this case it may be necessary for government to take action to limit some of these works of art. For example, in the UK a portrait of child murderer Myra Hindley that was made from handprints of young children was considered by many to have breached decency standards in that country.

In summary, it is important that artists have the right to express themselves through their art and governments should not restrict this right unless there are strong public interest reasons to do so.

Essay Notes

This topic presents a difficult challenge as it asks about a topic that rarely arises in the media or general conversation. This means that students will often struggle for ideas. A key idea is that art (particularly literature and cinema) is often about challenging the views of society and when art flourishes so does society as a whole. Chinese history presents many examples of this include the



Song and Tang dynasties and during the reign of the early Qing emperors, notably Qian Long and Kang Xi.

This essay is relatively short (but exceeds the word limit) as there are only two body paragraphs.

The introduction contains four sentences. The first sentence tells the reader the topic and the reason why it is important. The second and third sentences contain the two main ideas that are presented in the order that they appear in the introduction and define the high level structure of the essay. There are two ideas sentences because both sides of the argument are considered. The fourth sentence is a

thesis statement, which outlines the aim of the essay. It should be noted that all key elements of the essay are presented in the introduction and prepares the reader for the content in the body. As a result, the reader is not likely to become confused about the direction of the essay.

In the first body paragraph the first key point in the introduction is restated to provide the subject for the paragraph. The following sentences are used to provide reasons and explanations. An example is used to support the idea that restricting artistic freedom (particularly in literature) impacts on thinking within a society. This is followed by further sub-ideas. This pattern is repeated the second body paragraph. In this essay there are two examples and both the examples support the points being made. It also should be noted that the examples are very different from each other and serve to give the impression that the writer is educated and has wide experience.

Essay Vocabulary

Artistic freedom – The question refers to the ability of artists to express themselves freely. The best word to describe this is artistic freedom.

Harmful images – Harmful images refers to pictures that may harm people psychologically and often refers images that are degrading, pornographic or violent. This phrase is commonly used when referring to the protection of children and is very formal language.

Unacceptable – This word is used widely in formal language to show that something is not morally correct, illegal or fails to meet basic standards. Useful collocations are “unacceptable behaviour”, “unacceptable result”, “unacceptable performance” and “morally unacceptable”.

3. Essay – Moral Teaching for Children

Some people think that it is parents who are responsible for teaching children to be good members of society. However, some people believe that it is the responsibility of schools and teachers. Who's responsibility do you believe it is?

Teaching children to become good members of society is extremely important because children will become adults that influence our society in future. Initially, the responsibility for teaching children falls primarily on parents as they spend a great deal of time with children and are important role models. As children grow older and attend school the influence of parents diminishes and schools become an important part of children's learning not just in academic areas, but also in social behaviour. In this essay, the role of parents and teachers in teaching children will be discussed.

The influence of parents on their children should not be underestimated. Children spend the first years of their life almost exclusively with parents and therefore parents have a profound influence on the development of children. Throughout our lives people learn mostly by observing and listening to others, so time spent with a child and influence are dependent. This teaching extends across many areas including basic manners, showing respect and care for others, teaching culture and convention and teaching skills including those that are not taught in schools but are essential to succeeding in society such as managing time, personal finances, using tools and even driving cars. Although the influence of parents diminishes over time (this is a good thing as children must eventually become independent) it is profound and is reflected in the fact that people can often see mannerisms and behaviours in themselves that they observe in their parents or children.

Teachers also play an important role in teaching children because children also spend many hours in the care of teachers. The role of teaching children extends far beyond teaching them subject material because school is the beginning of independence and teachers guide students through that process. School can be viewed as a small society, where students must navigate relationships without the oversight of parents, and teachers, other students and the school environment support this process. A key part of schooling is that students are not just exposed to their parents but many teachers with different experiences and views and this helps children broaden their worldview and become better members of society. The influence of teachers can be measured by the large number of people who can reflect upon their school days and remember a teacher who helped change their lives for the better.

In summary, although in most cases parents exert the greatest influence on children in becoming good members of society, teachers also play an extremely important role. In fact, it is the responsibility of all members of society to support the learning and care of children as they represent our future.

Essay Notes

The question invites the reader to choose who is responsible for educating children, teachers or parents. The question is presented as binary (either/or); however, both play roles in educating children and a good response must describe the different roles that parents and teachers play in educating children. This essay is divided into two logical parts and is supported by two long body paragraphs describing the roles of parents and teachers, respectively.

The opening sentence of the essay describes both the topic and the reason that



it is important to teach children to become good members of society (today's children will influence society in future). The introduction has two ideas sentences; the first focuses on the role of parents. The role of parents is described in the first ideas sentence because they are the most important influence on a child and by doing so also allows the ideas to be presented in chronological (time) order as a child grows. It points out that very young children spend their time in the care of

their family who provide their early education. The second ideas sentence focuses on the role of teachers and their role in teaching behaviour and academic subjects. The thesis statement states that the aim of the essay is to describe the different roles that teachers and parents play.

The first paragraph focuses on the role that parents play and focuses heavily on early childhood learning. The first part of the paragraph states that very young children learn from observation and experience. This idea is developed further to explain that the role of parents is very broad because children must learn many different skills outside of school to succeed in society. The influence of parents is also supported at the end of the paragraph with a simple example regarding behaviour patterns.

The second body paragraph focuses on the ways in which teachers play important roles in children's education. The paragraph is broken into two logical parts that cover the two main roles that teachers play. The first part covers the role that teachers play in teaching various subjects, while the second part covers the role of teachers and schools in providing a social learning environment. The paragraph is also supported by an example of teachers that were influential in people's lives.

The conclusion is two sentences and gives the opinion that although both parents and teachers play important roles in children's lives, it is parents that have the greatest influence. In the conclusion the key ideas are not restated.

Essay Vocabulary

Primarily – This is a more formal way of saying main.

Diminishes – Diminishes is a very more formal way of saying reduces or become smaller. It is usually used with people's character or influence. It can be used with "amounts" or "numbers" but sometimes this is inappropriate and should only be used if the user is confident that the usage is correct. For example, it is standard to write that "the number of animals in the wild has diminished" but it is not standard to write that "the number of cars on the road has diminished" in this case use "reduced". The general way that diminished should be used with numbers is with objects that are rare such as endangered animals, historical sites, indigenous languages etc.

Profound – Profound means very deep or very important and is mainly used to describe ideas or influences.

Navigate – Navigate usually refers to finding a suitable for path for a vehicle but can also be used as a metaphor. People can navigate their way through problems, the education system and life. It can be used for any process that has a long path.

Oversight – Oversight has two meanings, the first is an "oversight" is something that is neglected or forgotten to be included. For example, "It was a serious oversight for the student not to study physics as well as chemistry." The second meaning, which is used in this is essay, is that someone who has responsibility for something "oversees" it. "Oversight" is a noun and is the name of the process of overseeing something.

4. Essay - Memorisation

The rote learning of information by memorisation plays the most important role in educating people. Do you agree with this opinion?

Memorising information is an important part of learning as this is the means by which people obtain the fundamental knowledge that is needed to understand and solve problems. Although, memorising information is a necessary and important part of learning, developing thinking, skills and creativity is at least as important as these skills are necessary to solve problems. In this essay, the role of memory in education will be discussed.

Memorisation is a key process in learning and is needed to provide the basic information needed for any given subject. For example, in mathematics students need to remember formulas and processes, while memorising vocabulary is a critical part of language learning. However, remembering information provides only the basic tools, but not the understanding to use those tools effectively. For example, a student who has a wide vocabulary will not write high quality essays unless they have the thinking and creativity to develop good ideas. For this reason, obtaining knowledge through memorisation should be viewed as being the first step in becoming educated.

Students must develop higher-level skills and must be able to apply the knowledge they have gained and combine it with good thinking to solve problems if they are to be considered educated. It is only when students begin to be able to apply their knowledge that they become useful to those around them and to potential employers. Most university graduates reach this level of development. Although having such skills allows most problems to be solved, it does not lead to the creation of new methods. Therefore, the highest level in a person's development is to have the ability to challenge existing thinking and create new methods or technologies. The greatest minds are characterised not by their knowledge or ability to solve problems, but their creativity and imagination.

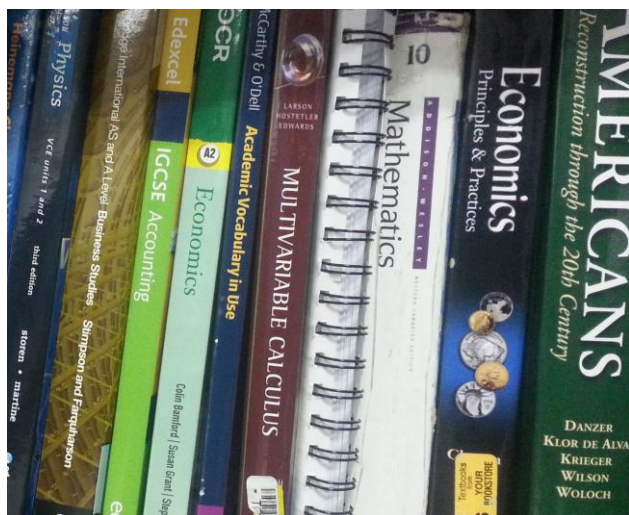
In summary, memorising information is a critical step in developing knowledge but is only the first of three critical steps in becoming truly educated.

Essay Notes

Questions regarding education tend to be challenging for students because in many cultures formal education is seen as primarily a route to a good job and the focus is often on gaining knowledge. Although knowledge is the

fundamental requirement for learning, a culturally aware student will focus on higher-level skills such as problem solving, thinking skills and creativity. The response presented here provides a great deal of cultural information regarding how educated Western thinkers view education, which is much more focused on critical thinking than acquiring knowledge.

The question also uses two terms to describe the process of gaining knowledge, memorisation and rote learning. These two terms have broadly similar meanings, however, rote learning is a much less common term, which many students will be unfamiliar with and often has a negative meaning as it implies that students learn without thinking. Many students will use these two terms interchangeably as a means of creating variation in their essay and in most cases will show examiners that they do not how to use the term “rote learning” correctly. It is worth noting that the author does not use the term “rote learning” at all in this essay but refers to memory or memorisation many times.



The reason for this is that the language in academic essays should be both precise and neutral.

The introduction contains three sentences. The first sentence tells the reader the topic and the reason why it is important. The second sentence contains the main ideas, which are presented in the order that they appear in the introduction and define the high level structure

of the essay. The key ideas are that there are three levels of learning: knowledge, problem solving and creativity, and these are explained in the body of the essay. The third sentence is a thesis statement that describes the aim of the essay.

The body contains only two paragraphs. The first describes the importance and limitations of memory as a learning method and includes short examples. It is worth noting that the examples are short and restricted to no more than one sentence and both illustrate the idea presented in the previous sentence.

The second paragraph describes higher level learning strategies and their strengths. These ideas are presented in a logical order and are presented in the same order as the introduction.

In this case the conclusion is a single sentence and begins with a conclusion marker. It is worth noting that despite the question asking whether the author

agrees or disagrees, the author has not used either of these words or “In my opinion”. The author states their ideas and an intelligent reader can infer the opinion of the author from the ideas presented.

Essay Vocabulary

Rote learning – Rote learning refers to learning by memory and usually has a negative meaning. It is a process by which memorising is done not as a product of attempting to understand something and gaining experience with a subject, but by a deliberate attempt to remember information without regard to understanding. An example of this would be learning new words from a dictionary, or memorising facts. The negative meaning associated with “rote learning” comes from the lack of thought involved in the process.

Knowledge/learning/thinking/skills/creativity – As the essay states, knowledge is the lowest form of learning and should be avoided in favour of higher-level skills when discussing education. Learning, thinking, skills and creativity is much better language to use as it better reflects the idea that education is not about remembering facts but using information effectively through good thinking and creativity.

Development – A useful formal word that refers to the improvement of a person. It is common to refer to a person as developing rather than gaining knowledge.

5. Essay – Music

There are many different types of music today. Is the traditional music of a country more important than the International music that is heard everywhere nowadays?

The distinction between “traditional” and “modern” music is essentially meaningless as music is a continuing tradition that cannot be neatly divided into two simple categories. Traditional music is usually defined as music from long ago that contains historic and cultural information and it is commonly believed that modern music does not possess these characteristics and will not possess them in future. In this essay the differences of what is commonly called traditional and modern music will be discussed.

Typically, when we think of traditional music we think of classical music or music that has its origins in ancient cultures. Cultures change over time and this music is familiar to us because it is part of our roots but different because culture changes. It is a reminder of how people thought and behaved in the past and particularly what was important to people at that time and therefore resonates with us in the present. However, much of the music of past times has disappeared out of common knowledge and what remains tends to be only the finest examples of music from past periods. This can give the incorrect impression that music of the past is superior to what is produced today.

Modern music is often viewed as containing little aesthetic or historic value. However, much of modern music will disappear leaving only a small number of pieces that will be considered reflective of the current time. It is extremely difficult to predict which pieces will survive but possible examples include Ruby Tuesday by the Rolling Stones which tells of a young woman, whose freedoms were never enjoyed by previous generations and I Don't Like Monday's by the Boomtown Rats that tells of the terrible consequences of America's gun culture.

In summary, the distinction between classical and modern music is a hazy one and of little importance. Music is a significant part of our culture and is part of a living history that continues in an unbroken line.

Essay Notes

The question provides a challenge for students because the question itself has unsound logic and requires students to think carefully about how they are going to respond. It is not possible to logically separate music into traditional music and International music because a piece may fall into both of these categories (e.g. classical Beethoven's Ode to Joy – it is both International and



classical) or neither (e.g. rock music that has local but not international appeal). For this reason students must either deal with each part of the question and ignore the logical problems or redefine the question in a more logical fashion. The later is the better choice as it allows the writer to present a more coherent response. This question is a reminder why students should carefully analyse questions and filter information from the question and is a reminder that writing a good essay is as much about good thinking as good language.

The logical problem in the question can be avoided by making different comparisons to those that are offered in the question. There are two obvious comparisons that can be made – between local and international music and between traditional and modern music. It is worth noticing that the first of these logically breaks down music by geography while the second breaks down music by time. The question itself fails to do either and this is done to avoid giving students the correct language.

In this essay the author has chosen to discuss differences between traditional and modern music as modern music is closest to international music in meaning but ensures that a logical answer can be provided. The opening sentence states the topic and frames the essay very clearly by stating that although it is possible to logically divide music in categories music gradually changes over time and it is not easy to divide the topic in simplistic forms. As a result of this the response is really about the nature of music but the topic continues to be referenced in the text to ensure a strong link to the question (traditional vs. modern music). The second sentence provides a definition of traditional music because different people will have very different definitions of what traditional music is. This sentence also presents the idea that the value of traditional music is that it contains cultural information and is the subject of the first body paragraph. In addition, the second sentence also presents the

topic of the second body paragraph, which questions the commonly held belief that modern music does not contain cultural information. The thesis statement outlines the aim of the essay, which is to describe the differences between these two types of music.

The first body paragraph focuses on classical music and the generally accepted idea that traditional music contains a great deal of cultural information. The paragraph is developed by adding the key point that it is only the best examples of music that survive over long periods of time and gives the impression that traditional music is of higher quality than modern music. This idea is very important as it provides cohesion to the essay and links the two body paragraphs together with the similarities between the two types of music – they both form an important cultural function but modern music has not yet had weaker examples filtered out over time.

The second body paragraph focuses on modern music and the idea that there are many examples of high quality modern music that are mixed with lower quality pieces. Two examples of pieces that are reflective of our time are provided at the end of the paragraph.

The conclusion to the essay is focused on the explanation of the main point of the essay, which is that music is a continuing tradition.

This essay is a particularly strong example of an IELTS essay because of the quality of its ideas and the links that are made between the ideas.

Essay Vocabulary

Distinction – To make a distinction is to clearly define a difference between two or more ideas or objects.

Resonates – Resonates originally refers to sound or vibration. It refers to the continuing vibration after the cause of vibration has stopped. It is commonly used as a metaphor for an event that is no longer occurring but for which the consequences are still being felt.

Aesthetic – Aesthetic refers to beauty. It is difficult to use because it is not an acceptable substitute for beauty. It is most commonly used to describe something “aesthetically pleasing” or as referring to the general attractiveness of a place or an object. For example, “The architect failed to pay attention to the aesthetics of the design and therefore designed a building that most people think is ugly”. Aesthetics is also the study of beauty.

Hazy – Hazy originally refers to the sky and describes when it is not possible to see long distances because of smoke, heat, pollution, etc. It can also refer to ideas that are not clear.

6. Essay – Purpose of Universities

The main purpose of a university is to provide graduates with the knowledge and skills needed for students to get a good job. To what extent do you agree?

Universities are centres of learning and the function of a university extends far beyond the role of merely providing graduates with skills needed in the workplace. Although, universities play an important role in training graduates in areas that require specialist skills such as law, medicine, engineering and finance, they also play a much broader role in developing individuals thinking and creative skills. In addition, universities contribute to a better understanding of the world through research and providing a community of educated people that discuss important cultural and political ideas.

Universities play a key role in training graduates in the workplace by providing key skills in fields that support the needs of the community, including medicine and education. In addition, universities also play a key role in liaising with other key organisations in society such as hospitals, courts, schools and professional bodies to ensure that students are adequately trained to undertake important roles in society.

However, universities offer a much more diverse range of courses than those that have clearly defined career paths. Courses such as in fine art, philosophy, languages and many of the sciences do not lead directly to specific jobs but are also a critical part of what universities provide. These courses provide much more general skills to the community, and their worth is in developing people who have a wide range of general skills, including thinking skills that are needed in a diverse society. Often the people who complete degrees in these areas do not work in the fields in which they are trained. Such people are adaptable and have good learning skills and can meet the many changing demands of the workforce and society in general. In addition, the thinking skills of all highly educated people are broadly beneficial to society because they are generally more understanding and have a more tolerant view of the world which helps create a better, more caring society.

A further key role of universities is as centres of research. Universities are one of the few organisations that attempt to understand the world without the need to create profits. University research often focuses on important fundamental problems that increase understanding of the world and later lead to great benefits. For example the structure of DNA and the first computers were created in universities but it was only decades later that these brought great benefits to society and profits to companies, but no company would invest in these sciences in the early stages of their development.

In summary, universities play a role in society that extends far beyond providing skilled jobs for the work force. The best examples of universities develop excellent thinkers. They are great centres of learning that have a very long-term view and provide research that continually changes the world for the better.

Essay Notes

Although students are generally familiar with some of the functions of a university, this question often provides challenges because students often fail



to consider the function of universities beyond training graduates with specific skills. The training in specific functions that universities undertake is not the primary reason for their existence; universities are centres of learning and research. It is worth noting that the world wide ranking system for universities is based on the quality of a universities research, not the teaching that it does. Even within the sphere of undergraduate teaching there are many courses that do not lead to a career path (many areas in the arts and science fit into

this category) and a good response should consider these areas. In addition, the work force is varied and rapidly changing and universities have little ability to keep up with workplace changes. Their role is to help people develop better thinking skills and a broad understanding of the area that is being studied.

The opening sentence of the introduction introduces the topic and the idea that the view of universities as training centres is very narrow. The essay has two ideas sentences that split the function of universities into two components, teaching and research. The first ideas sentence focuses on the teaching function because it is often what people first think of when they think of universities and is divided into two key areas, training for professions (law,

medicine, engineering etc.), and specific fields of learning (arts, sciences, mathematics etc.) that do not have obvious career paths. The second ideas sentence focuses on the research that universities do and the community of knowledge that they provide. Because of the length of the introduction, no thesis statement is used in this essay.

The first body paragraph describing the professional training that universities provide is deliberately short because it offers few ideas and the ideas are already familiar to most readers.

The second body paragraph covers the second idea presented in the introduction, which is the courses that universities offer extend far beyond training for specific professions. The idea is extended to suggest that the workforce requires people that can learn new skills and think well and that people who are educated benefit society in many different ways.

The third body paragraph covers the idea presented in the second ideas sentence in the introduction. Research is a critical part of the function of universities and plays a unique role in society because universities do not need to make a profit and can therefore study important problems that companies will not spend money on. This idea is supported by two relevant examples.

The conclusion provides a decisive opinion about the role of universities. The key ideas from the introduction are restated.

Essay Vocabulary

Diverse – Diverse/diversity refers to the amount of difference in a group of people or objects. This word has a very positive meaning as having different views, ways of life and choices is considered desirable because it broadens people's ideas and experiences. Diversity is often used in phrases such as "cultural diversity", "genetic diversity" and "a diverse range of ... people, ideas, ages, interests, subjects, etc."

Clearly defined career path – Clearly defined career paths are found where there is a common path that most students follow. For example, medicine, law, dentistry, accounting and engineering all have clearly defined career paths as most people who study these fields at university finish up working in these areas. Arts and many sciences do not have clearly defined career paths.

Adaptable – Adaptable describes people who have the ability to change according to current needs.

7. Essay – Financial Management for Children

To become financially responsible adults, children should learn to handle their money from a young age. Discuss.

Managing money is a key life skill and it is critical that children should learn this skill at a young age. Developing financial management skills plays a key role in providing a secure environment for individuals and future generations. In this essay the strategies for educating children in financial management will be discussed.

In general, people mostly learn from experience. For this reason it is very important to give children the opportunity to handle money from a young age in order to give them experience and to encourage independence and learning. It is also important that children can do this in a safe environment, free from the consequences of serious errors.

Usually, children first obtain access to money from pocket money that is provided by their parents. This gives parents a great deal of control over what children can buy. The challenge for parents is to choose the most appropriate amount of money to give children. In most instances, the most appropriate amount of money is enough to meet children's basic costs (for example bus fares or lunches) plus a little more to give them freedom to make choices about how they spend money. This approach is very important for children as they must make decisions regarding whether they want to save money for future and perhaps larger purchases or whether to enjoy their money today. They learn key skills such as self-discipline and planning. However, perhaps the most important skill that children learn is the value of money. The scarcity of money means that they learn that money is valuable and hard to obtain.

Too little pocket money denies children the opportunity to make choices and learn, while too much can be disastrous for a child's future. Providing children with too much money means that they do not have to make any difficult decisions and there are no consequences for purchasing mistakes. They are also taught that money is readily obtainable and does not have to be valued. Of further concern is that having access to too much money means that children are open to exploitation and could leave them with questioning whether their friendships are based on money or on genuine like or respect. Excess money also gives children the opportunity to involve themselves in activities such as smoking, drug taking or alcohol abuse. Furthermore, giving people a great deal of money at a young age denies them the opportunity to become successful in their own right.

The challenge for parents becomes greater as children become older. Young people may have part-time jobs and earn their own money. When this occurs it is important that good habits are established because this is a time in peoples' life where their income may exceed their needs. If good habits are well established there is the opportunity for young people to build up money and gain personal experience with investments such as fixed deposits and shares. There is also the opportunity to start building towards future needs such as purchasing a house.

In summary, it is of critical importance to teach children about finances as this can give them important skills and habits for the future. It can also help them to establish a financial base and provide security for themselves and future generations.

Essay Notes

Financial management for children is an interesting topic as in some cultures people will be given large sums of money at a young age while in others access to money is tightly controlled. There are no particular difficulties in terms of the wording of the question and most students should be familiar with the key



ideas surrounding this topic.

In the opening sentence of the introduction both the topic (financial management) and a reason why it is important (it is an important life skill) are clearly stated. The second sentence

contains the key idea of the essay, which is that learning to manage money allows people to become secure in their own lives. The ideas sentence is unusual in that it mentions only one key idea (important for people's future security), but this idea is central to the essay and all other ideas presented are explanations of different parts of this key point. The thesis statement outlines the aim of the essay, which is to provide strategies for educating children about money management.

The first body paragraph provides background information. In this case the general principle that children must be given opportunities to learn in a safe environment and that this idea also applies to money management.

The second body paragraph focuses on the idea that controlling the amount of money given to children is very important in determining how effective the

giving of pocket money is in teaching children how to use money wisely and that it is broadly beneficial in teaching self-discipline.

The third paragraph focuses on the potential consequences of parents making poor choices about the amount of pocket money to give children. It is long and contains a number of ideas and explanations. Paragraphs that are rich in ideas are usually of high quality.

The fourth paragraph focuses on the later stages of childhood when children may start to earn money independently of their parents and the explanation that even at this stage parents also have a role to play in teaching older children or young adults the importance of saving money and planning for the future.

A two-sentence conclusion is used in this essay. The first restates the idea that giving children pocket money helps them to develop a number of key life skills, while the second describes the benefits of these skills, which are that they can provide security for themselves and their families by managing money well.

Essay Vocabulary

Critical – Critical means of very high importance.

Secure – Secure refers to being in a safe position. It usually refers to jobs, financial position etc. rather than physical safety.

Handle money – Handling money refers to someone who physically touches money. It can be someone who accepts money in a shop or a child who spends money.

Self-discipline – Self-discipline is the ability of self-control and to do what should be done rather than giving in to immediate desires.

Exploitation – Exploitation is to take advantage of others.

8. Essay Topic – Advertising

Today, the expensive price of popular consumer products is because of the power of advertising and not the real needs of people. Do you agree or disagree?

There is little doubt that the price of consumer goods is strongly influenced by advertising. Many advertisements seek to increase people's desire for a product by emotional appeals that have little to do with the true cost of producing a product or its impact on quality of life and are driven by companies' self-interest. In this essay the impact of the advertising of high-end goods on people's lives will be discussed.

Emotional appeals are a key component of advertising and can have an enormous impact on purchasing habits. For example, leather handbags vary in price from tens of dollars to tens of thousands of dollars. The extraordinarily large price range is clearly not justifiable based on variations in labour, materials or function, therefore the purchase of extremely expensive fashion items is either not rational, or driven by thinking that is not related to the product and its function. The key reason that individuals make such purchases is typically related to the way that advertising suggests that others will perceive them. Consumers may hope that they are seen as being cleverer, more beautiful or more successful. These are reasons with limited merit as most people spend their energy focusing on themselves rather than the possessions of those around them. The belief that owning high status products will change how others view them or how they view themselves may lead to inappropriate purchases because consumers are not making decisions based on what is in their best interest, but in the often mistaken belief that these products will impress other people.

Advertising is driven by companies' self-interest rather than in the interests of consumers or society as a whole, and can be very divisive. It is sometimes used as a tool to convince people to pay unnecessarily high prices to distinguish themselves through wealth. It preys on unattractive qualities including the need to prove that people are somehow better than other people. In extreme cases, such purchases should be viewed as vulgar rather than a sign of success – it is highly undesirable that sometimes individuals value an expensive trinket over the satisfaction of creating meaningful and lasting change in the lives of others.

In summary, advertising can have a pervasive effect on thinking and it is critical that before making significant purchases that the underlying reason for those

purchases is examined. Every person has limited resources and should consider carefully the most appropriate way of allocating those resources.

Essay Notes

The topic of advertising is usually challenging as the role of advertising is often



seen as being to inform people about products or discounting. It is rare that the psychological manipulation that advertisers use is considered. Much of advertising is directed at people's need to be seen as beautiful, successful and as having a desirable lifestyle. It should be noted that many advertisements say little about the product and appeal to our emotions in order to convince consumers to pay high prices for goods (particularly fashion goods) whose price is many times higher than the cost of

production. In this question this idea is central to producing a very strong essay.

The opening sentence of the essay states clearly that the price of goods is affected by advertising. The second sentence outlines the two key ideas of the essay which is that advertisers regularly use emotional appeals to convince people to buy products and that they are acting out of self-interest. The thesis statement includes the aim of the essay, which is to explain how advertising impacts peoples' lives.

The first body paragraph focuses on the idea that purchases are often not based on rational decision-making and that advertising often focuses on taking advantage of peoples' emotional need to be accepted by others. The idea is supported by the example of the variation of prices for handbags. The remainder of the paragraph is focused on explanations of why people choose to pay extreme prices for some goods and explaining that these choices are largely the result of manipulation by advertisers.

The second body paragraph conveys the strong belief that advertisers (companies) do not have the interests of consumers in mind. It is important that students take ownership for their beliefs and do not attribute ideas to others. In this case the author leaves readers in no doubt to their view that advertisers are not the friends of consumers. However, strong views must be supported with strong justifications. In this case the argument presented is

very strong – that changing the life of others is far more important than owning an object.



The conclusion is framed as a warning to people to be careful of the choices that they make and ensure that they understand the true motives for their purchases because money is an important resource that should be

valued. This essay is very strong because of strong convictions and justifications.

Essay Vocabulary

Emotional appeal – An emotional appeal is when emotion is used in order to influence others.

High-end – High-end refers to anything that is of very high quality and can be used for high-end products or high-end students. It is slightly informal.

Purchasing habits – This phrase is commonly used by economists or companies and usually refers to consumers.

Justifiable – Justifiable refers to actions for which some justification can be made. It is similar in meaning to reasonable but is slightly more formal.

Unattractive – Unattractive has several meanings and can be used in a number of different contexts. It can be used to describe a person. It should be noted that often, when describing a negative attribute of another person it is much more polite to use the negative form of a positive than a negative word (i.e. unattractive is much better than ugly). Unattractive can also refer to ideas or objects that are unlikely to be of interest.

Trinket – A trinket is a small object of little value. Examples include inexpensive jewellery, or small toys given to children.

Vulgar – Vulgar usually refers to actions or people that lack culture, refinement or good taste.

9. Essay Topic – Rewards or Discipline?

Some people believe that children will have a bright future if they are always rewarded by their parents and teachers when they behave well. However, other people argue that if the children misbehave, they should receive punishment so that they can become qualified citizens. Discuss both views and give your opinion.

Teaching children to behave well through rewards and discipline is an important part of their education as all people are judged by their actions. In order to effectively teach children it is important to balance rewards with discipline as rewards can be used to encourage positive behaviour while discipline can be used to discourage undesirable behaviour. In this essay the role of rewards and discipline in teaching children will be discussed.

Rewards are an important tool that is used by parents to reinforce positive behaviour in children. Children who are rewarded for positive actions are more likely to repeat the behaviour and therefore rewards can be a powerful way of encouraging children. However, it is critical that rewards are proportionate to the action otherwise rewards may distort children's behaviour. For example, performing a simple task such as not engaging in previously discouraged behaviour should be encouraged through praise and acknowledgement rather than by gifts. However, when children perform significant acts that require patience and discipline such as passing an exam or achieving to their potential at school it may be appropriate to reward them with a gift. In this way children can be taught that the greater the effort and achievement the greater the reward.

Discipline plays a similarly important role by discouraging undesirable behaviour in children. However, as for rewards, discipline must be proportionate to the behaviour. Children should generally receive warnings for minor and first time poor behaviour. However, more significant discipline should result from more serious or repeated misbehaviour.

A further important consideration for both rewards and discipline is that parents must apply a consistent approach. If they do this, children will quickly understand the consequences of any action and can quickly decide whether they wish to accept the consequences of that action.

In summary, rewarding and disciplining is important for children in developing positive habits and becoming productive adults. However, discipline and rewards must be applied consistently and appropriately in order to achieve the best results.

Essay Notes

This question uses many of the common devices used in IELTS questions to test students, and critical analysis of the question is required if students are to avoid traps. The question asks about how best to encourage children to behave



well and invites students to choose between rewarding good behaviour or disciplining poor behaviour; however, clearly both approaches are appropriate. The question also uses “some people believe...other people argue” phrasing and students who copy this language will distance themselves from the ideas being presented and will give the impression that they are unthinking and have no ideas of their own. The third feature of this question is the misuse of both grammar and vocabulary. The grammar error is that “could be qualified citizens” should be

“will be qualified citizens”. In addition, there are also two vocabulary errors – “discipline” is the correct word for children, not “punishment” as “punishment” implies a desire to cause suffering to another person, “discipline” implies a desire to teach them. A more serious error is the phrase “qualified citizen” which is non-standard English because “qualified” implies that a person has the necessary skills, experience or certification to perform a task. However, being a citizen of a country usually occurs at birth and is automatic and therefore no qualifications are required, so the phrase “qualified citizen” is logically incorrect and is never used by native speakers. This question is a fine example of the misleading nature of many IELTS questions and the need for students to think carefully about what is really being asked and to avoid borrowing language from questions unless they are sure that the language given is correct.

The introduction to this essay is very simple and comprises three sentences. The opening sentence covers the topic (teaching children through discipline and rewards) and the reason that it is important (people are judged by their actions). The ideas sentence covers the key theme of the essay, which is that rewards are needed to encourage positive behaviour and discipline is needed to discourage negative behaviour. The third sentence is a thesis statement that provides the aim of the essay.

The first body paragraph focuses on rewards and the key idea that rewards can be used to reinforce positive behaviour. This idea is clarified by stating that the rewards for good behaviour must be proportional to the behaviour and that small achievements should be accompanied by small rewards and vice versa, otherwise children may behave in a certain way for the sole reason of receiving a reward.

The second body paragraph is focused on the role that discipline plays in making children understand the consequences of negative behaviour and the need for consequences to be proportional to the seriousness of the behaviour.

The third paragraph focuses on the ideas that are common to both rewarding and disciplining and in particular the idea that consistency in both is very important as it allows children to understand beforehand what the consequences of their behaviour will be and decide whether it is worth undertaking the action.

The conclusion is very simple and covers the key idea that both discipline and rewards are important and that it is important to adopt a consistent approach when implementing discipline and rewards.

Essay Vocabulary

Reinforce positive behaviour – Reinforce usually refers to strengthening material by adding additional support but can also be used to describe encouraging people's behaviour.

Distort – To distort something is to change its original shape or meaning.

Acknowledgement – An acknowledgement is a reward, often in the form of praise for someone who has made a positive contribution to something.

Proportionate responses – A proportionate response is a reaction to an event that is appropriate for the original action. This phrase can be used for children, criminals or countries when they take undesirable actions.

Productive adult – A productive adult is an adult who provides benefits to their family and society through the work that they do. This is the correct alternative for a “qualified citizen”.

10. Essay Topic – Developing Countries

In developing countries, some people believe that governments should give people access to new technology in order to improve their lives, while others think governments should offer free education. Discuss both ideas and give your own opinion.

Developing countries have many challenges that make it difficult to improve the quality of people's lives. Probably the largest barrier to improving the quality of people's lives is the political and legal systems in developing countries. Only if fair political and legal systems are in place will governments focus on improving people's quality of life through education and technology because this will ensure that money is used to benefit the country rather than those in power. In this essay the methods of assisting countries will be discussed.

One of the major problems facing developing countries is their political and legal system. The political system in these countries is often above the law resulting in leaders being unaccountable for their actions. As a consequence leaders of developing countries are often corrupt and use the countries money to build their personal wealth rather than assist the population. This problem is widespread and leaders in countries as diverse as Libya, Zimbabwe and the Philippines all have current or previous leaders that have made themselves exceptionally wealthy at the expense of the wellbeing of their citizens. Corruption also limits the aid that can be provided from outside the country by governments and individuals as there is a risk that any money that is provided will ultimately finish up in the hands of the countries' leaders and not benefit the general population.

If issues of corruption can be overcome then education is one of the best methods of improving the economic situation of a country as well as the wellbeing of a country's citizens. Education not only gives people access to information but also helps develop thinking and creativity allowing people in poorer countries to develop better solutions to their problems and more efficient methods of producing goods. There are also further benefits in that people's lives are generally improved by education because through education people generally become more tolerant, have access to ideas through books and learn to better appreciate the world.

In the initial stages of a countries development, providing technology is an ineffective way of developing countries as widespread use of technology is expensive and unaffordable. It is only as a country develops through education

and begins to become wealthier that technology becomes available to many people.

In summary, a country's political and legal systems are the most critical factors in ensuring that it can develop. Once these are in place, money is much more likely to be spent on education which can help countries to improve. As a country develops and becomes wealthier, it will gradually be able to access better technology.

Essay Notes

This essay is challenging because it will be unfamiliar to most students and



requires an understanding of factors that prevent or allow countries to develop. As is often the case, IELTS examiners do not want provide students with too much information and provide students with examples in the question that are secondary ideas rather than the critical idea. Very often students focus on the specific examples in the question rather than the more general

underlying question. In this case the question is not about the role of education or technology in developing a country – it is what factors are critical for a countries development?

The answer to that question is that they require good political and legal frameworks, which in turn lead to a fairer society and ensure that resources go to the right places. Few students will recognize that this is the key idea required to write a very high quality response to the question. Those that do and can communicate this idea effectively are likely to score highly on this question.

The opening sentence of the essay covers the key topic, which is how to improve the quality of developing countries. The focus of this essay is the idea that countries can only develop when they have adequate political and legal systems and is listed in the first of two ideas sentences. The second ideas sentence suggests that education and technology can improve the quality of people's lives in developing countries, but this will only occur if a satisfactory political and legal framework is in place. The introduction concludes with the aim of the essay, which is to describe methods of assisting countries that are developing.

The opening body paragraph covers the critical point of the essay, which is that without a strong legal and political framework countries invariably have significant amounts of corruption and this prevents resources being directed towards critical programs. Examples of countries where this is an issue are also provided. The main point is further supported by the idea that countries that having corrupt leaders also hinders effective foreign aid. It is the key ideas in this paragraph that make this essay very strong.

The second body paragraph begins to deal with the issues raised in the question and focuses on education. The essay states that education can only become an effective tool if there is a stable political environment. However, it states that if such conditions are met, then education is an effective method of developing a country as it leads to improved methods of producing goods. The importance of education is further supported with the idea that it improves people's understanding of other people and the world.

The final body paragraph deals with the suggestion in the question that technology may be critical in developing a country. This paragraph is short because only a single idea is presented which is that the cost of technology is too great for countries in the earliest stages of development and only becomes a viable option as a country has already begun to develop.

The conclusion simply restates the three key ideas of the essay and includes a sentence for each.

Essay Vocabulary

Assisting – Assisting is a more formal equivalent of helping.

Unaccountable – In Western society it is expected that people in positions of authority are answerable to those who they represent. A person in authority who does not have to consider the feelings or needs of others is said to be unaccountable.

Widespread – Widespread is a more formal alternative from common.

Ineffective – A plan or action is ineffective when it fails to produce the results that were hoped for.

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