

IELTS Academic Writing Task 1

The IELTS Writing Test should start at 11.45am, after the Reading Test. There are 2 parts to the Writing Test, and you have a total of 60 minutes to complete them.

You should spend 20 minutes doing IELTS Writing Task 1. You must write 150 words or more. You will have to describe a graph, chart, table, diagram or map.

The good news is that you can quickly learn how to write a Task 1 essay. I'll make sure you know exactly what to do in the exam.

We'll work on these areas:

- How to structure a good Task 1 essay.
- How to decide what information to include in your description.
- The words, phrases and grammatical structures for describing graphs, charts, tables, diagrams and maps.

By using the right techniques, you can write the kind of essay that examiners like.

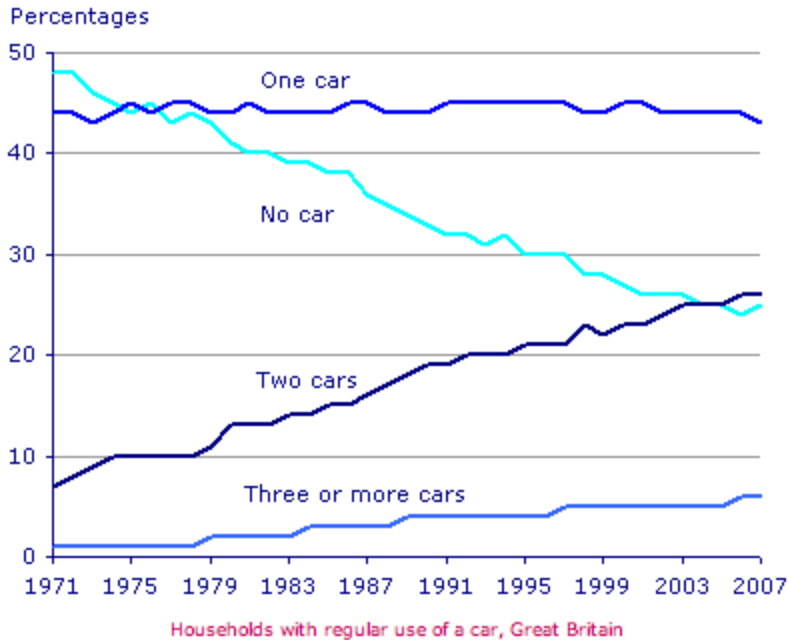
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IELTS Writing Task 1: general to specific

My IELTS Writing Task 1 essays follow a "general to specific" structure.

- The introduction is the most general part of the essay; it simply tells the reader what the graph is about.
- Then I write a paragraph about the main points or a general trend.
- Finally, I write 2 paragraphs describing specific facts or figures.
- I don't write a conclusion because I have already summarised the information in paragraph 2.

Look at the graph below. First, make sure you understand it. Then look for a general trend. Finally, select specific points on the graph to describe in detail.



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IELTS Writing Task 1: describe a map

According to some students, 'map' questions have been popular in recent IELTS exams. There are 2 types of map:

1. A map that shows a comparison (see [this lesson](#))
2. A map that shows development of an area.

For a good example of the second type of map, have a look at [this question](#) from Cambridge IELTS book 1 (go down to page 91), or look at the same map [here](#).

To help you think about how to describe the map, answer these questions:

1. How could you paraphrase "the map shows the development of the village"?
2. How many periods of development are shown, and which period saw the most development?
3. What is the relationship between transport and the growth of the village?
4. How could you group the information in order to write two 'specific details' paragraphs?

I'll give you my answers to these questions tomorrow, and I'll write the full essay for next week.

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IELTS Writing Task 1: how to write an introduction

The introduction to an IELTS writing task 1 essay should explain what the chart/graph shows. To do this, just paraphrase the question (rewrite it in your own words).

Here is an example description from an IELTS Task 1 question:

The graph below shows the proportion of the population aged 65 and over between 1940 and 2040 in three different countries.

By rewriting this description with a few changes, I can quickly create a good introduction:

The line graph compares the percentage of people aged 65 or more in three countries over a period of 100 years.

If you practise this technique, you will be able to write task 1 introductions very quickly. You will be able to start the writing test quickly and confidently.

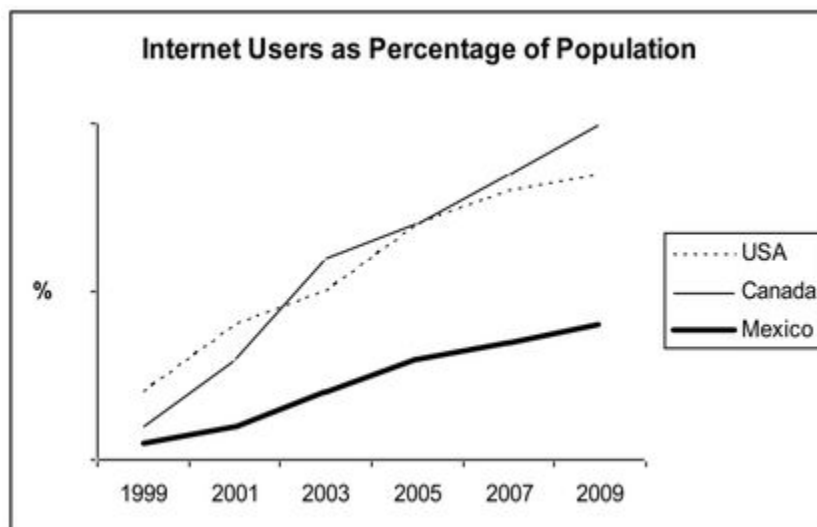
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IELTS Writing Task 1: graph trends

After your introduction (see last week's lesson), you should write a general summary of the information in the graph, chart etc.

For graphs that show time periods (years, months etc.):

- Look for the overall trend from left to right on the graph. Is there a change from the first year to the last year?
- Do the lines on the graph follow a similar trend, or can you see any differences?



In the paragraph below, I describe the overall trend for all 3 countries. Then I point out a clear difference in the trends for 2 countries.

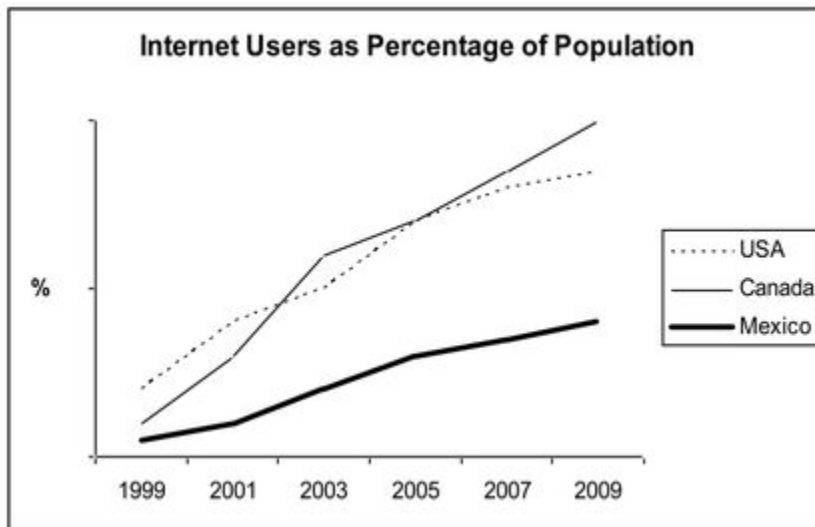
Summary of trends:

It is clear from the graph that the proportion of people who use the Internet increased in each country over the period shown. Overall, Mexico had the lowest percentage of Internet users, while Canada experienced the fastest growth in Internet usage.

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IELTS Writing Task 1: easy verbs

For IELTS writing task 1, don't worry about using "difficult" verbs or verb tenses. Forget about continuous and perfect tenses; just use present or past simple.



Fill the gaps in the graph description with the past simple verbs below.

In 1999, the proportion of people using the Internet in the USA _____ about 20%. The figures for Canada and Mexico _____ lower, at about 10% and 5% respectively. In 2005, Internet usage in both the USA and Canada _____ around 70% of the population, while the figure for Mexico _____ just over 25%.

By 2009, the percentage of Internet users _____ highest in Canada. Almost 100% of Canadians _____ the Internet, compared to about 80% of Americans and only 40% of Mexicans.

Verbs:

rose to, were, used, reached, was (x2)

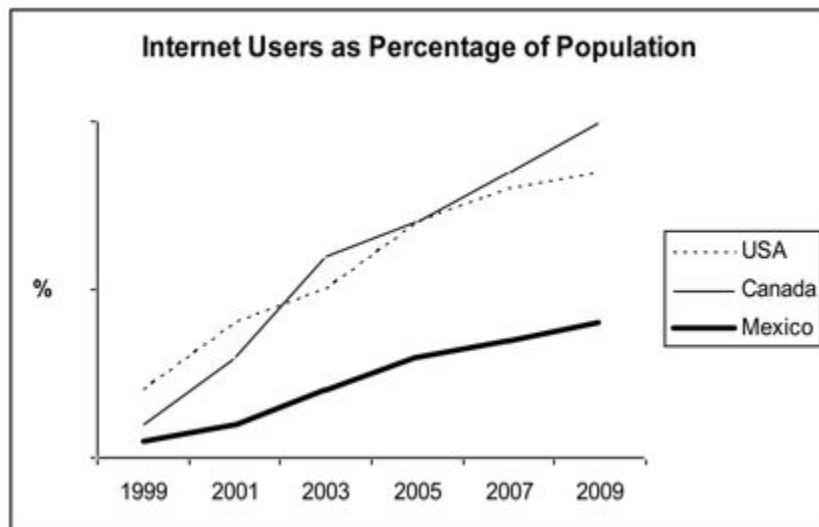
CORRECT ANSWERS:

1. was, 2. Were, 3. rose to, 4. Reached, 5. Was, 6. Used

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IELTS Writing Task 1: full essay

The essay below is 151 words long. I've tried to make it as simple as possible, but it's still good enough to get a band 9.



The line graph compares the percentage of people in three countries who used the Internet between 1999 and 2009.

It is clear that the proportion of the population who used the Internet increased in each country over the period shown. Overall, a much larger percentage of Canadians and Americans had access to the Internet in comparison with Mexicans, and Canada experienced the fastest growth in Internet usage.

In 1999, the proportion of people using the Internet in the USA was about 20%. The figures for Canada and Mexico were lower, at about 10% and 5% respectively. In 2005, Internet usage in both the USA and Canada rose to around 70% of the population, while the figure for Mexico reached just over 25%.

By 2009, the percentage of Internet users was highest in Canada. Almost 100% of Canadians used the Internet, compared to about 80% of Americans and only 40% of Mexicans.

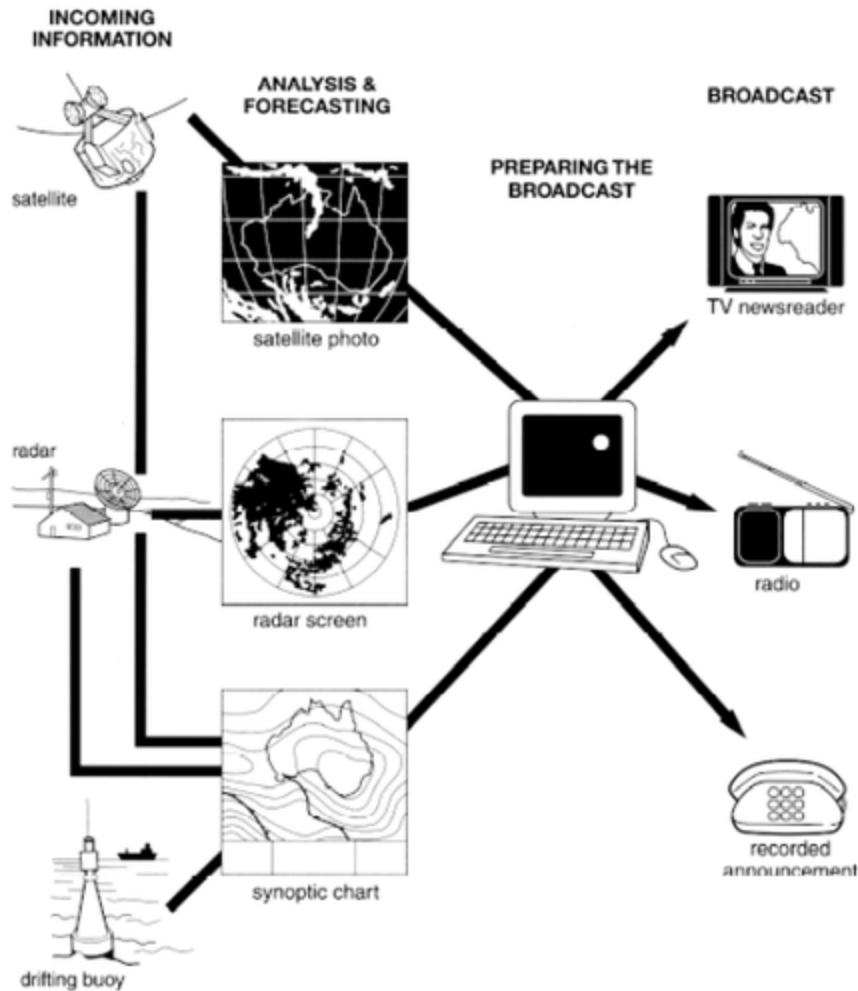
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IELTS Writing Task 1: process diagram

A 'process diagram' is any diagram that shows steps or stages in a process. Many students worry about this type of question, but they are really quite easy if you know what to do.

Look at the following example from Cambridge IELTS 1, page 51:

The diagram below shows how the Australian Bureau of Meteorology collects up-to-the-minute information on the weather in order to produce reliable forecasts.



Here are some tips for describing this diagram:

1. Introduction: rewrite the question in a different way
2. Summary: say that there are 4 steps, and briefly mention each one
3. Main body: describe steps 1 and 2
4. Main body: describe steps 3 and 4

I'll show you my full essay next week.

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IELTS Writing Task 1: process diagram essay

Last week I suggested an essay structure for the following question:

The diagram below shows how the Australian Bureau of Meteorology collects up-to-the-minute information on the weather in order to produce reliable forecasts.

Here is my full essay (170 words):

The figure illustrates the process used by the Australian Bureau of Meteorology to forecast the weather.

There are four stages in the process, beginning with the collection of information about the weather. This information is then analysed, prepared for presentation, and finally broadcast to the public.

Looking at the first and second stages of the process, there are three ways of collecting weather data and three ways of analysing it. Firstly, incoming information can be received by satellite and presented for analysis as a satellite photo. The same data can also be passed to a radar station and presented on a radar screen or synoptic chart. Secondly, incoming information may be collected directly by radar and analysed on a radar screen or synoptic chart. Finally, drifting buoys also receive data which can be shown on a synoptic chart.

At the third stage of the process, the weather broadcast is prepared on computers. Finally, it is delivered to the public on television, on the radio, or as a recorded telephone announcement.

Note:

I've also sent a full essay version of yesterday's task 2 lesson to everyone who has bought the [ebook](#).

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IELTS Writing Task 1: more than one chart

How do you answer a task 1 question that has more than one chart or graph?

Here's my advice:

Introduction

Write your introduction in the usual way: paraphrase the question. For this kind of question, it's easier to write 2 sentences e.g. "The first chart illustrates... The second chart shows..."

Summary

Write a paragraph describing the main points. If possible, try to summarise all of the information, rather than writing a separate summary for each chart. Look for a topic or trend that links the charts.

Details

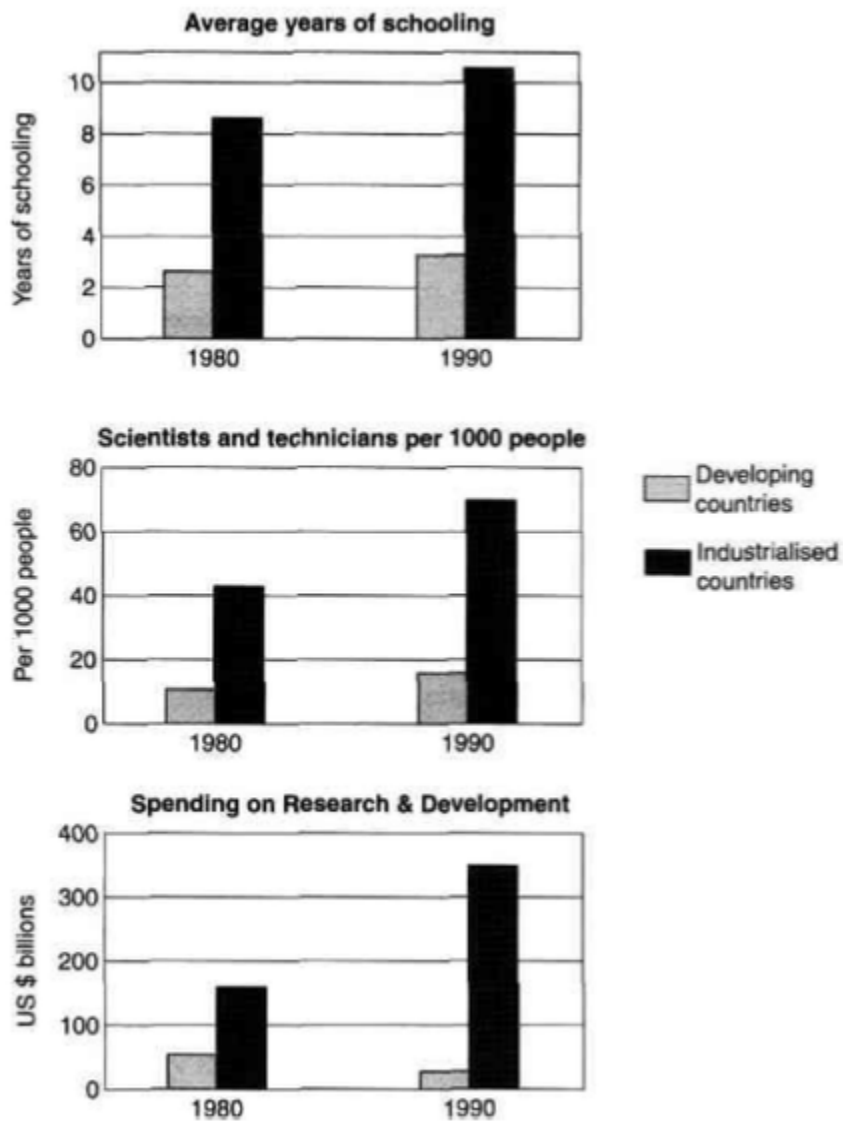
Describe each chart separately. Just write a short paragraph about each chart. Choose the most important information from each one.

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IELTS Writing Task 1: more than one chart

Look at the following bar charts, taken from Cambridge IELTS 3, page 73.

The charts below show the levels of participation in education and science in developing and industrialised countries in 1980 and 1990.



Advice for band 7 or higher:

You must give an overview of the information. This means that you need to find an overall trend that connects all 3 charts.

Can you find any overall trends? Feel free to discuss your ideas in the "comments" area. I'll tell you what I think tomorrow.

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IELTS Writing Task 1: bar charts essay

Here is my full essay for last week's bar chart question. Study the essay carefully to see which details I selected for each paragraph. Notice that I describe the two science bar charts in the same paragraph.

[Click here to see the question](#)

The three bar charts show average years of schooling, numbers of scientists and technicians, and research and development spending in developing and developed countries. Figures are given for 1980 and 1990.

It is clear from the charts that the figures for developed countries are much higher than those for developing nations. Also, the charts show an overall increase in participation in education and science from 1980 to 1990.

People in developing nations attended school for an average of around 3 years, with only a slight increase in years of schooling from 1980 to 1990. On the other hand, the figure for industrialised countries rose from nearly 9 years of schooling in 1980 to nearly 11 years in 1990.

From 1980 to 1990, the number of scientists and technicians in industrialised countries almost doubled to about 70 per 1000 people. Spending on research and development also saw rapid growth in these countries, reaching \$350 billion in 1990. By contrast, the number of science workers in developing countries remained below 20 per 1000 people, and research spending fell from about \$50 billion to only \$25 billion.

(187 words)

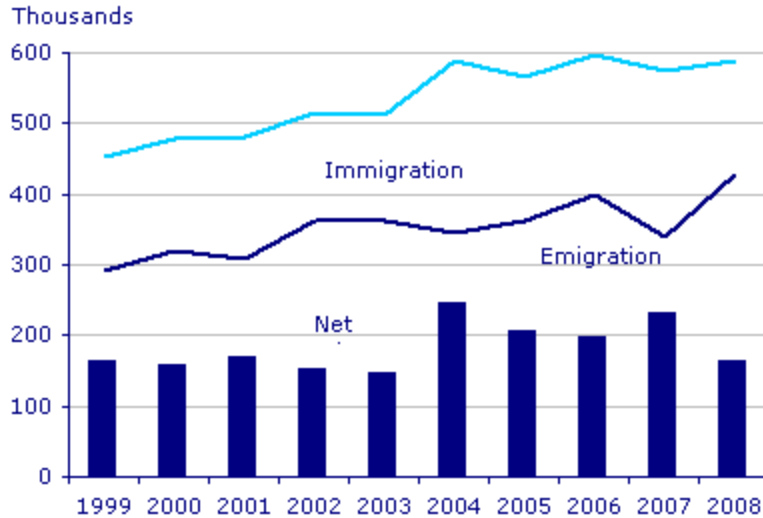
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IELTS Writing Task 1: look at the chart first

A good piece of advice for IELTS writing task 1: look at the chart/graph/picture **before** you read the question.

Sometimes the question contains words that you don't know, and this can cause you to panic. But you don't really need to understand the question if you already understand the chart.

If you understand the chart below, you will understand any IELTS chart, graph or picture! Feel free to explain this chart in the "comments" area.

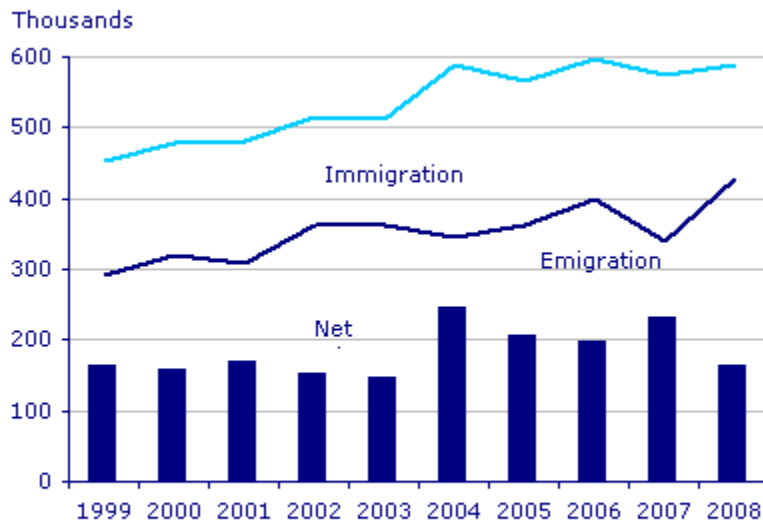


Long-Term International Migration, UK, 1999-2008

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IELTS Writing Task 1: sample essay (migration)

Read my full essay for the chart below. How have I organised the information? What language have I used to explain **changes** and to make **comparisons**?



Long-Term International Migration, UK, 1999-2008

Full essay (159 words):

The chart gives information about UK immigration, emigration and net migration between 1999 and 2008.

Both immigration and emigration rates rose over the period shown, but the figures for immigration were significantly higher. Net migration peaked in 2004 and 2007.

In 1999, over 450,000 people came to live in the UK, while the number of people who emigrated stood at just under 300,000. The figure for net migration was around 160,000, and it remained at a similar level until 2003. From 1999 to 2004, the immigration rate rose by nearly 150,000 people, but there was a much smaller rise in emigration. Net migration peaked at almost 250,000 people in 2004.

After 2004, the rate of immigration remained high, but the number of people emigrating fluctuated. Emigration fell suddenly in 2007, before peaking at about 420,000 people in 2008. As a result, the net migration figure rose to around 240,000 in 2007, but fell back to around 160,000 in 2008.

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IELTS Writing Task 1: two different charts

Sometimes you are given two different charts e.g. a line graph and a bar chart, or a bar chart and a pie chart.

How to describe two different charts in 4 paragraphs:

1. Mention each chart in the introduction. Sometimes it's easier to write a sentence for each.
2. Describe the main feature of each chart. If there is a connection between the charts, describe it.
3. Describe the first chart.
4. Describe the second chart.

Find Cambridge IELTS 4, page 54, which shows a line graph and a pie chart. [Click here](#) to see a website that has a copy of this question.

Here is my introduction and summary paragraph for the above question:

The line graph compares daily electricity consumption in England during the winter and summer, while the pie chart shows information about the different uses of this electricity in an average English household.

It is clear that English homes use around double the amount of electricity in the winter compared to the summer. Throughout the year, just over half of the electricity consumed by English households is used for heating rooms and water.

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IELTS Writing Task 1: pie charts are easy!

A lot of people seem to be worried about pie charts. Here are some questions to get you thinking about how to describe them:

1. What does a pie chart *always* show?
2. Are pie charts used for comparing?

3. Do pie charts show changes (increase, decrease)?

4. What verb tense would you use to describe pie charts?

Feel free to answer these questions in the "comments" area below. I'll add my answers tomorrow.

PS. There could be more than one answer to some of the questions.

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IELTS Writing Task 1: four pie charts essay

Here is my full essay for a question about 4 pie charts.

Cambridge IELTS book 7, page 101:

The pie charts compare the amount of electricity produced using five different sources of fuel in two countries over two separate years.

Total electricity production increased dramatically from 1980 to 2000 in both Australia and France. While the totals for both countries were similar, there were big differences in the fuel sources used.

Coal was used to produce 50 of the total 100 units of electricity in Australia in 1980, rising to 130 out of 170 units in 2000. By contrast, nuclear power became the most important fuel source in France in 2000, producing almost 75% of the country's electricity.

Australia depended on hydro power for just under 25% of its electricity in both years, but the amount of electricity produced using this type of power fell from 5 to only 2 units in France. Oil, on the other hand, remained a relatively important fuel source in France, but its use declined in Australia. Both countries relied on natural gas for electricity production significantly more in 1980 than in 2000.

(170 words)

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IELTS Writing Task 1: process diagrams

Here is some advice for describing a process diagram. The question I'm using comes from Cambridge IELTS 6. It's also on [this website](#) (go down the page to test 3).

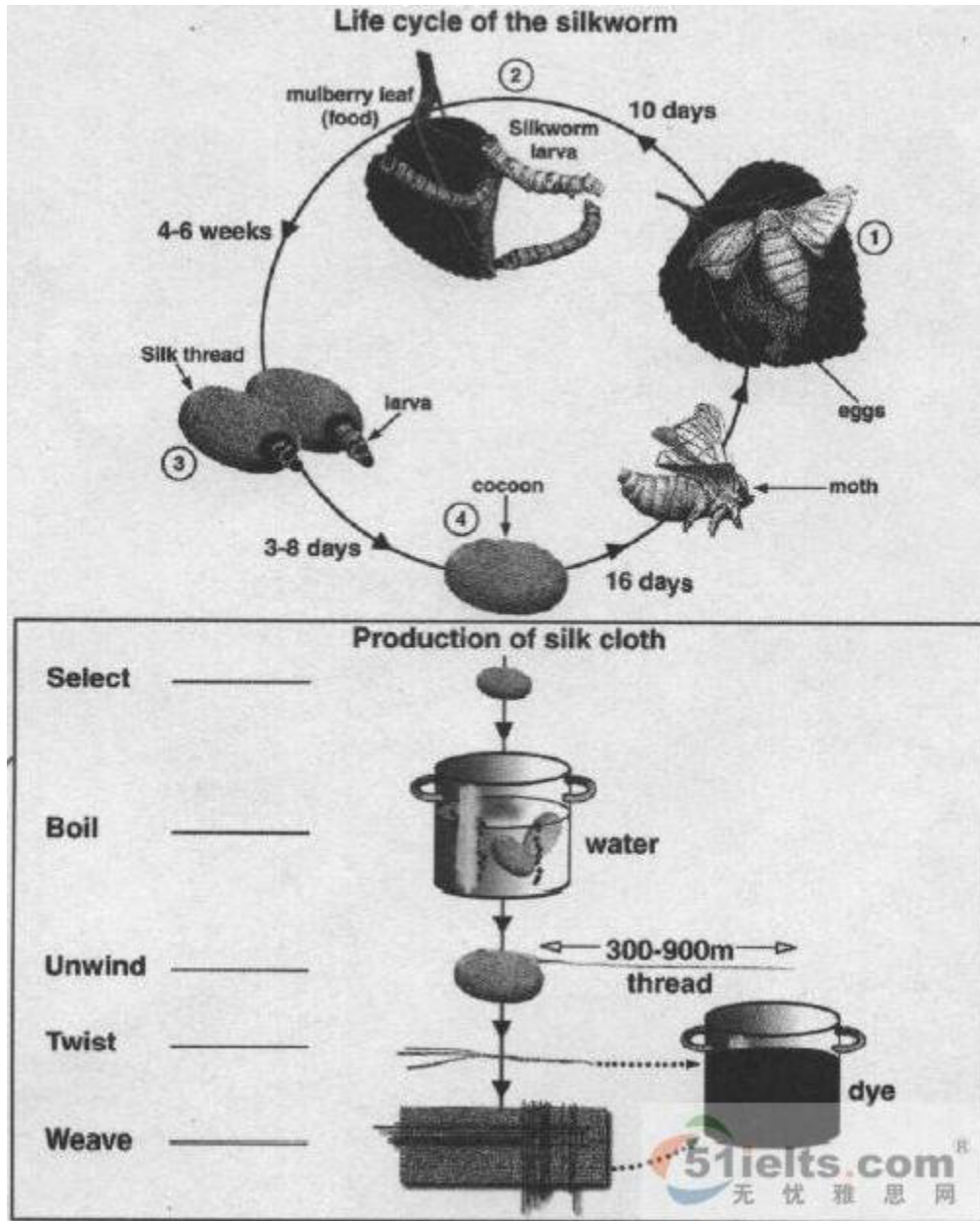
Advice:

1. Introduction: paraphrase the question (one sentence).
2. Summary paragraph: write how many steps there are. You could also mention the first step and the last step (two sentences).
3. Details: describe each step in the diagrams.

Introduction and summary paragraphs:

The figures illustrate the stages in the life of a silkworm and the process of producing silk cloth.

There are four main stages in the life cycle of the silkworm, from eggs to adult moth. The process of silk cloth production involves six steps, from silkworm cocoon to silk material.



IELTS Writing Task 1: describing steps

For process diagrams, you will need to describe each step in order.

[Click here](#) to see an example process diagram.

Here are my 2 main paragraphs describing the steps:

At the beginning of the process, clay is dug from the ground. The clay is put through a metal grid, and it passes onto a roller where it is mixed with sand and water. After that, the clay can be shaped into bricks in two ways: either it is put in a mould, or a wire cutter is used.

At the fourth stage in the process, the clay bricks are placed in a drying oven for one to two days. Next, the bricks are heated in a kiln at a moderate temperature (200 - 900 degrees Celsius) and then at a high temperature (up to 1300 degrees), before spending two to three days in a cooling chamber. Finally, the finished bricks are packaged and delivered.

Note:

Look at the use of passive verbs e.g. is dug, can be shaped, are placed. I divided the stages into 2 paragraphs to make the essay easier to read.

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IELTS Writing Task 1: comparisons

Yesterday I looked at [this question](#) with my students. When describing a line graph:

- Do not describe each line separately.
- You must compare the figures.

Here is an example of how to compare the 4 lines for the year 1990:

In 1990, almost 90% of 14 to 24 year olds went to the cinema at least once a year. Cinema attendance was about 30% lower than this among people aged 25 to 34 and 35 to 49, while the figure for those aged over 50 was the lowest, at only 40%.

If you can write comparisons like this, you will get a very high score. Try using my comparison as a model to help you compare the figures for 2010.

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IELTS Writing Task 1: 'consumer durables' table

Yesterday I looked at the following question with my students.

The table below shows the consumer durables owned in Britain from 1972 to 1983.

Consumer durables	1972	1974	1976	1978	1979	1981	1982	1983
Percentage of households with:								
central heating	39	43	48	52	55	59	60	64
television	93	95	96	96	97	97	97	98
video								18
vacuum cleaner	87	89	92	92	93	94	95	
refrigerator	73	81	88	91	92	93	93	94
washing machine	66	68	71	75	74	78	79	80
dishwasher				3	3	4	4	5
telephone	42	50	54	60	67	75	76	77

Here's our essay plan:

1. Introduction: paraphrase the question
2. Overview: highest = TV, biggest change = telephone and central heating
3. Describe figures for the 4 items with highest percentages
4. Describe figures for the 4 items with lowest percentages

We did paragraph 3 as an example:

In 1972, 93% of British homes had a television, and this increased to 98% in 1983. The majority of homes also had a vacuum cleaner and a refrigerator. These consumer durables were owned by over 90% of households by the end of the period. Washing machines were the fourth most common item, with 66% of households owning one in 1972, rising to 80% of households in 1983.

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IELTS Writing Task 1: active & passive for processes

When describing a process, verbs may be 'active' or 'passive'.

Active: A chicken lays an egg.

Passive: An egg is laid (by a chicken).

We often use the active to describe a natural process and the passive to describe a man-made process. The sentences below come from [this lesson](#). I've underlined the active and passive verbs.

Life cycle (natural process):

The adult moth lays its eggs.

The silkworm larva produces silk thread.

Production of silk cloth (man-made process):

The cocoon is boiled in water.

The silk thread is unwound, twisted and then dyed.

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IELTS Writing Task 1: describing percentages

Let's look at a few ways to write a sentence that describes a percentage.

Family type	Proportion of people living in poverty
single aged person	6%
aged couple	4%

You could either put the percentage at the beginning of the sentence (example 1), or put it at the end of the sentence (example 2):

- 1.6% of single aged people were living in poverty.
2. The level of poverty among single aged people stood at 6%.

You could also add a comparison:

- 1.6% of single aged people were living in poverty, compared to only 4% of aged couples.
2. The level of poverty among single aged people stood at 6%, whereas the figure for aged couples was only 4%.

Which sentence do you think is clearer? Also, why have I used "people" and "couples" in my sentences when the table says "person" and "couple"?

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IELTS Writing Task 1: 'table' essay

The table below gives information about the underground railway systems in six cities.

City	Date opened	Kilometres of route	Passengers per year (in millions)
London	1863	394	775
Paris	1900	199	1191
Tokyo	1927	155	1927
Washington DC	1976	126	144
Kyoto	1981	11	45
Los Angeles	2001	28	50

Full essay (band 9):

The table shows data about the underground rail networks in six major cities.

The table compares the six networks in terms of their age, size and the number of people who use them each year. It is clear that the three oldest underground systems are larger and serve significantly more passengers than the newer systems.

The London underground is the oldest system, having opened in 1863. It is also the largest system, with 394 kilometres of route. The second largest system, in Paris, is only about half the size of the London underground, with 199 kilometres of route. However, it serves more people per year. While only third in terms of size, the Tokyo system is easily the most used, with 1927 million passengers per year.

Of the three newer networks, the Washington DC underground is the most extensive, with 126 kilometres of route, compared to only 11 kilometres and 28 kilometres for the Kyoto and Los Angeles systems. The Los Angeles network is the newest, having opened in 2001, while the Kyoto network is the smallest and serves only 45 million passengers per year.

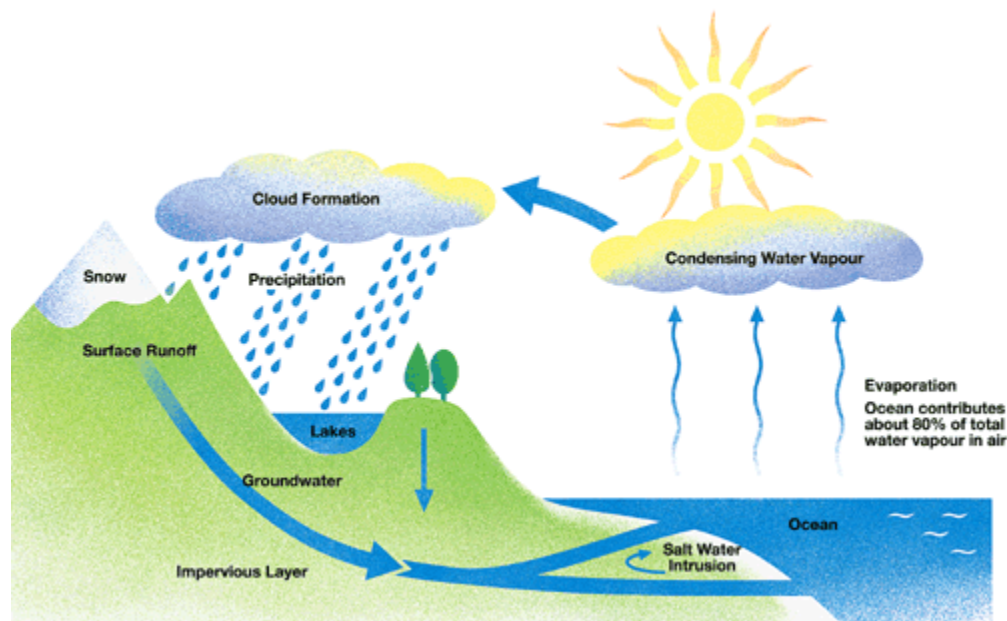
(185 words)

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IELTS Writing Task 1: 'natural process' diagram

Some of my students are working on the following question:

The diagram below shows the water cycle, which is the continuous movement of water on, above and below the surface of the Earth.



Here are some tips:

1. **Introduction:** Paraphrase the question. You could use the words 'natural process'.
2. **Summary:** Say how many steps there are, and mention the first and last steps. You can choose where the cycle begins, but I'd start from the ocean.
3. **Details (2 paragraphs):** Describe the process step by step. You don't have to mention every word shown on the diagram, so don't worry if you don't understand 'salt water intrusion'.
4. **No conclusion:** It's a description, so there is nothing to conclude.

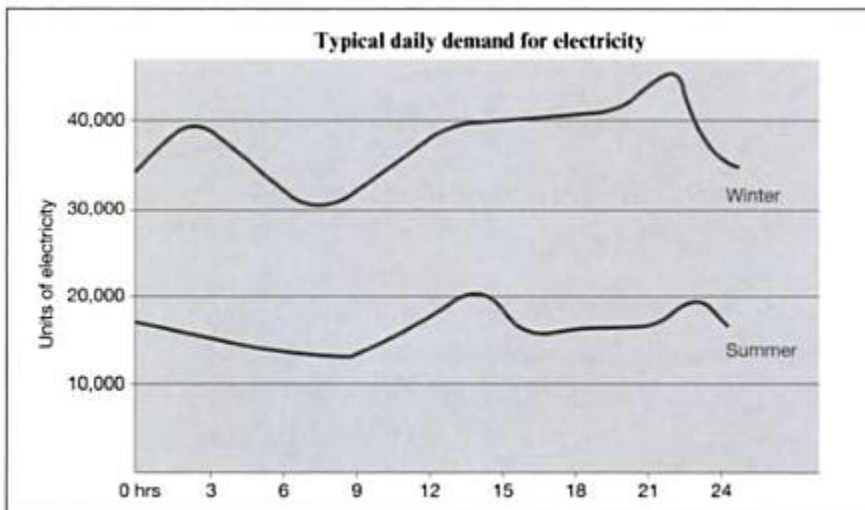
Note:

Verbs will be active, not passive e.g. "water evaporates", not "water is evaporated".

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IELTS Writing Task 1: line graph

The graph below shows the demand for electricity in England during typical days in winter and summer. (Cambridge IELTS 4, page 54)



Fill the gaps below using words from the following list:

- demand (x2)
- lowest
- at (x2)
- in
- highest
- consumption (x2)
- peaks
- twice

1. The daily _____ of electricity in England is about _____ as high in the winter compared to the summer.

2. During the winter, _____ for electricity _____ around 45,000 units between 9 p.m. and 10 p.m.

3. During the summer, _____ of electricity is at its _____, at about 20,000 units, between 1 p.m. and 2 p.m.

4. _____ for electricity is _____ its _____ between 6 a.m. and 9 a.m. _____ both seasons.

CORRECT ANSWERS FROM SIMON:

1. consumption, twice

2. demand, peaks at

3. consumption, highest

4. demand, at, lowest, in

Note: "demand FOR", "consumption OF"

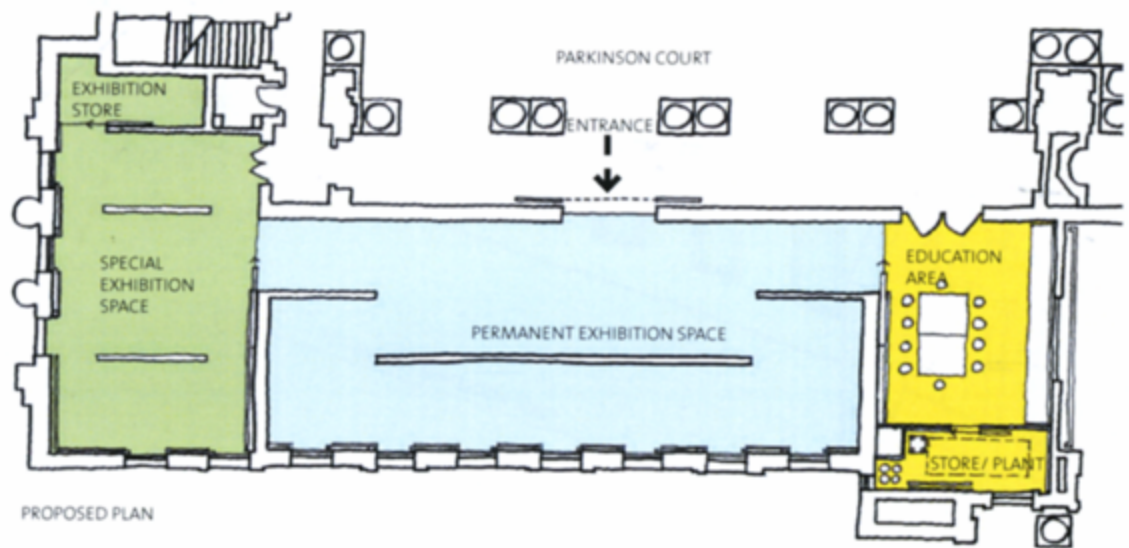
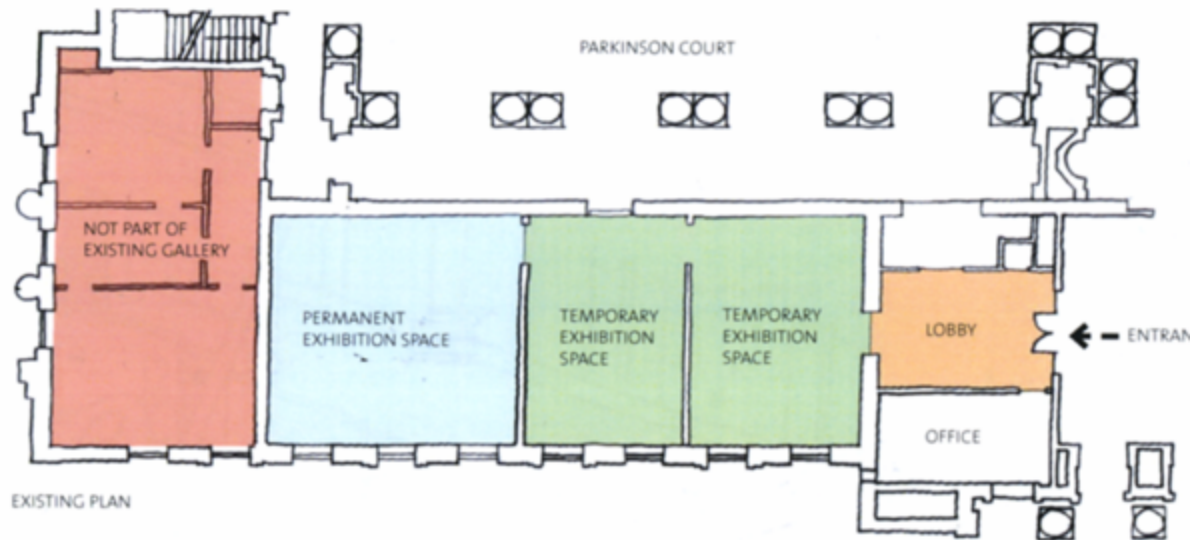
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IELTS Writing Task 1: 'before and after' diagram

Several students have asked for help with the following type of question.

The diagrams below are existing and proposed floor plans for the redevelopment of an art gallery.

(click on the diagram to enlarge it)



Here's my advice:

1. Introduction: paraphrase the question
2. Summary: the main changes to the gallery (entrance and use of space)
3. Paragraph comparing entrance, lobby, office, education area
4. Paragraph comparing use of space for exhibitions

I'll show you my full essay for this diagram next week.

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IELTS Writing Task 1: 'building plans' essay

Here is my full essay for last week's question.

[Click here to see the question](#)

The first picture shows the layout of an art gallery, and the second shows some proposed changes to the gallery space.

It is clear that significant changes will be made in terms of the use of floor space in the gallery. There will be a completely new entrance and more space for exhibitions.

At present, visitors enter the gallery through doors which lead into a lobby. However, the plan is to move the entrance to the Parkinson Court side of the building, and visitors will walk straight into the exhibition area. In place of the lobby and office areas, which are shown on the existing plan, the new gallery plan shows an education area and a small storage area.

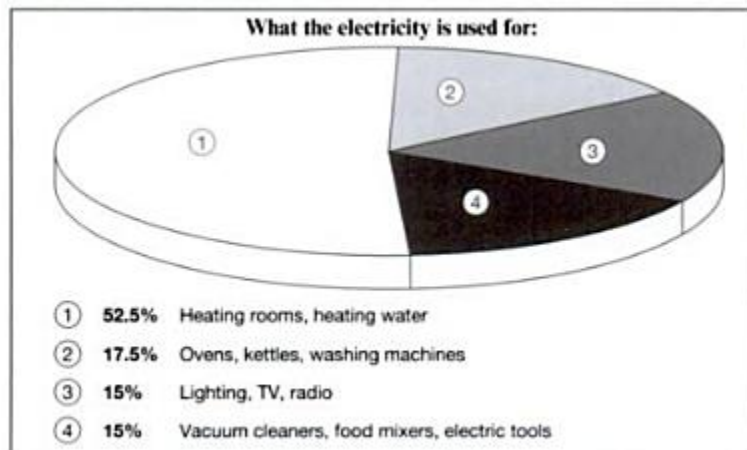
The permanent exhibition space in the redeveloped gallery will be about twice as large as it is now because it will occupy the area that is now used for temporary exhibitions. There will also be a new room for special exhibitions. This room is shown in red on the existing plan and is not currently part of the gallery.

(178 words, band 9)

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IELTS Writing Task 1: pie chart

The pie chart below shows how electricity is used in an average English home.
(Cambridge IELTS 4, page 54)



Fill the gaps using words from the following list.

appliances
remaining
account

proportion
for
largest
household

In an average English home, the _____ of electricity, 52.5%, is used for heating rooms and water.

Three kitchen _____, namely ovens, kettles and washing machines, _____ 17.5% of _____ electricity use.

The _____ 30% of electricity is used for lighting, televisions and radios (15%), and vacuum cleaners, food mixers and electric tools (15%).

CORRECT ANSWERS FROM SIMON:

largest proportion

appliances, account for, household

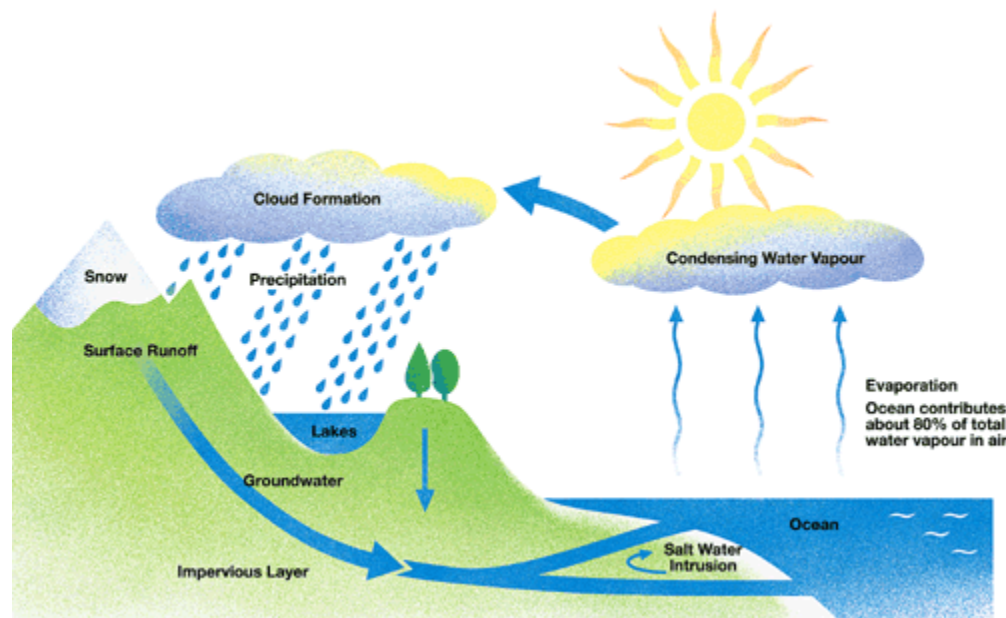
remaining

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IELTS Writing Task 1: 'water cycle' essay

Several people have asked me for the full essay for this question, so here it is!

The diagram below shows the water cycle, which is the continuous movement of water on, above and below the surface of the Earth.



The picture illustrates the way in which water passes from ocean to air to land during the natural process known as the water cycle.

Three main stages are shown on the diagram. Ocean water evaporates, falls as rain, and eventually runs back into the oceans again.

Beginning at the evaporation stage, we can see that 80% of water vapour in the air comes from the oceans. Heat from the sun causes water to evaporate, and water vapour condenses to form clouds. At the second stage, labelled 'precipitation' on the diagram, water falls as rain or snow.

At the third stage in the cycle, rainwater may take various paths. Some of it may fall into lakes or return to the oceans via 'surface runoff'. Otherwise, rainwater may filter through the ground, reaching the impervious layer of the earth. Salt water intrusion is shown to take place just before groundwater passes into the oceans to complete the cycle.

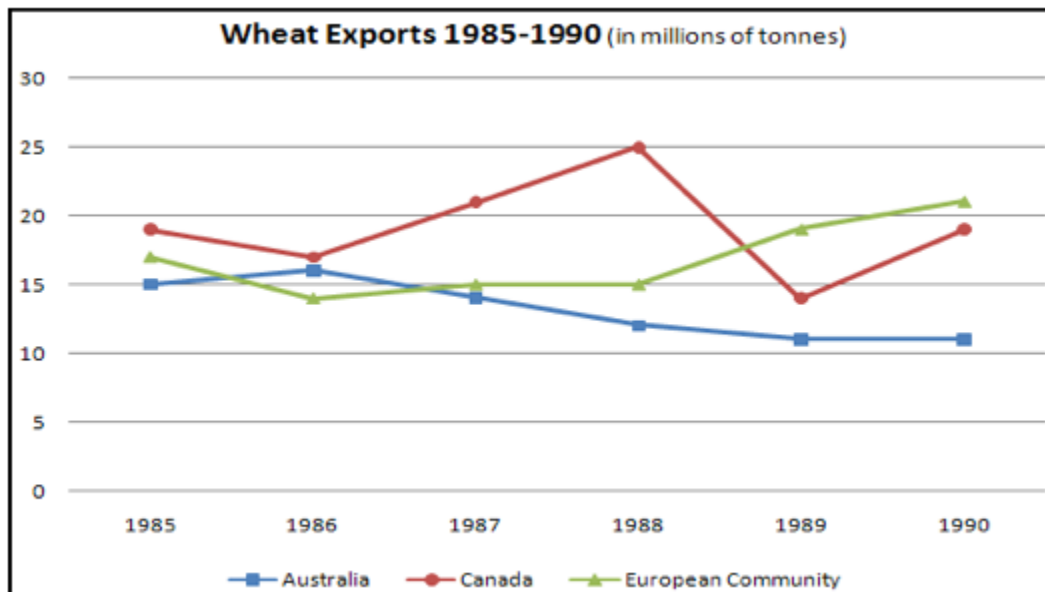
(156 words, band 9)

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IELTS Writing Task 1: common mistakes

Many students make the same mistakes when describing numbers. You must express numbers correctly if you want to get a high score.

Look at the graph below (thanks to Magi for sending it to me).



What is wrong with these sentences?

1. In 1985, Canada was about 19 million tonnes.
2. Australia was lower, at 15 million tonnes of wheat exports.
3. In 1988, Canada increased by about 5 million tonnes of wheat exports.
4. Australia exported about 11 millions of tonnes of wheat in 1990.

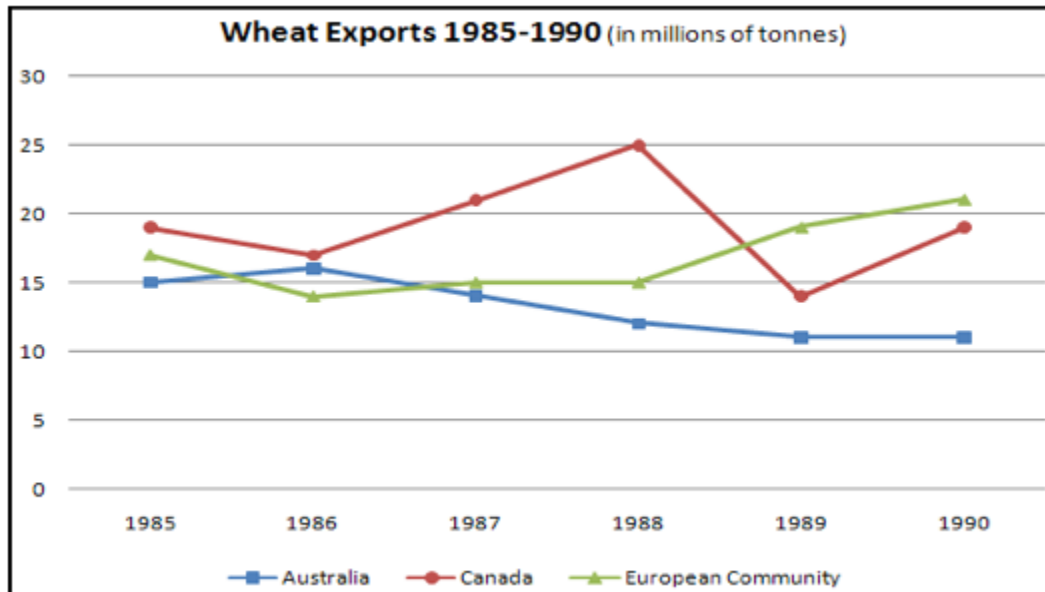
What big mistake in the first 3 sentences has not been made in the 4th sentence?

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: the 'overview'

If you want to get a high score for task 1, you must write an 'overview' of the information. An overview is a summary of the main points or general trends.

How would you write an overview for this graph?



I try to write two sentences for my overview, so I look for two main points or trends. I don't usually mention any numbers because I save them for my 'details' paragraphs.

Example overview:

It is clear that Canada exported more wheat than Australia and the European Community for most of the period shown. However, while Canada's wheat exports fluctuated and Australia's fell, wheat exports from the European Community rose steadily.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: to, by, with, at

Several people have asked me to explain how to use **to**, **by**, **with** and **at** when describing numbers. Here are some examples to give you a basic idea of the differences:

1) Use **to** when describing what happened to the number:

In 2008, the rate of unemployment rose to 10%.

2) Use **by** when describing the amount of change between two numbers:

In 2009, the rate of unemployment fell by 2% (from 10% to 8%).

3) Use **with** to give the idea of 'having' the number:

Obama won the election with 52% of the vote.

4) Use **at** to add the number on the end of a sentence:

Unemployment reached its highest level in 2008, at 10%.

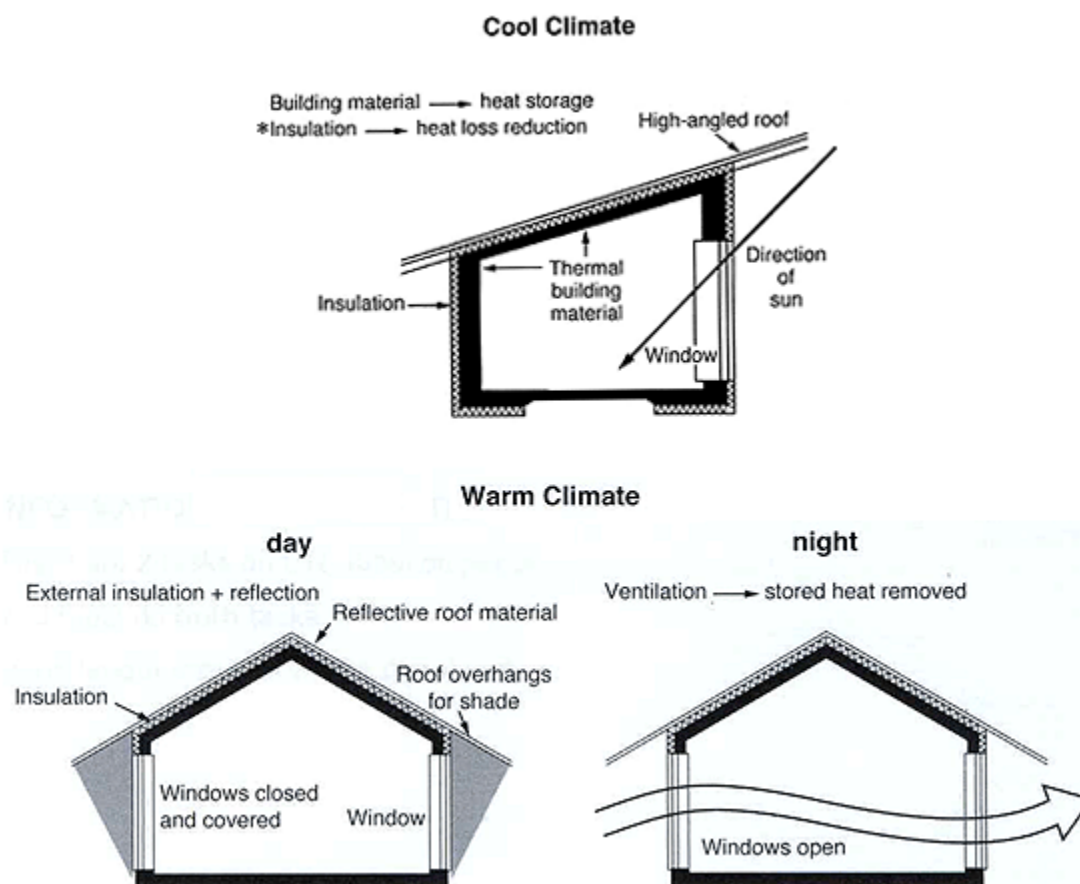
--

IELTS Writing Task 1: always the same method

Students worry about how to describe diagrams, but the basic method is always the same: introduction, summary of main points, specific details.

Look at the following question for example:

The diagrams below show some principles of house design for cool and for warm climates.



Although this question is different from the normal graph/chart questions, you should structure your answer in the same way. Try to write 4 paragraphs:

1. **Introduction:** paraphrase the question.
2. **Summary:** describe the main differences - the design of the roof and windows, and the use of insulation.
3. **Details:** compare the roof design and use of insulation.
4. **Details:** compare the window design and how windows are used during the day and at night.

I'll write the full essay for next week's lesson.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: house design essay

Here is my full essay for [last week's question](#):

The diagrams show how house designs differ according to climate.

The most noticeable difference between houses designed for cool and warm climates is in the shape of the roof. The designs also differ with regard to the windows and the use of insulation.

We can see that the cool climate house has a high-angled roof, which allows sunlight to enter through the window. By contrast, the roof of the warm climate house has a peak in the middle and roof overhangs to shade the windows. Insulation and thermal building materials are used in cool climates to reduce heat loss, whereas insulation and reflective materials are used to keep the heat out in warm climates.

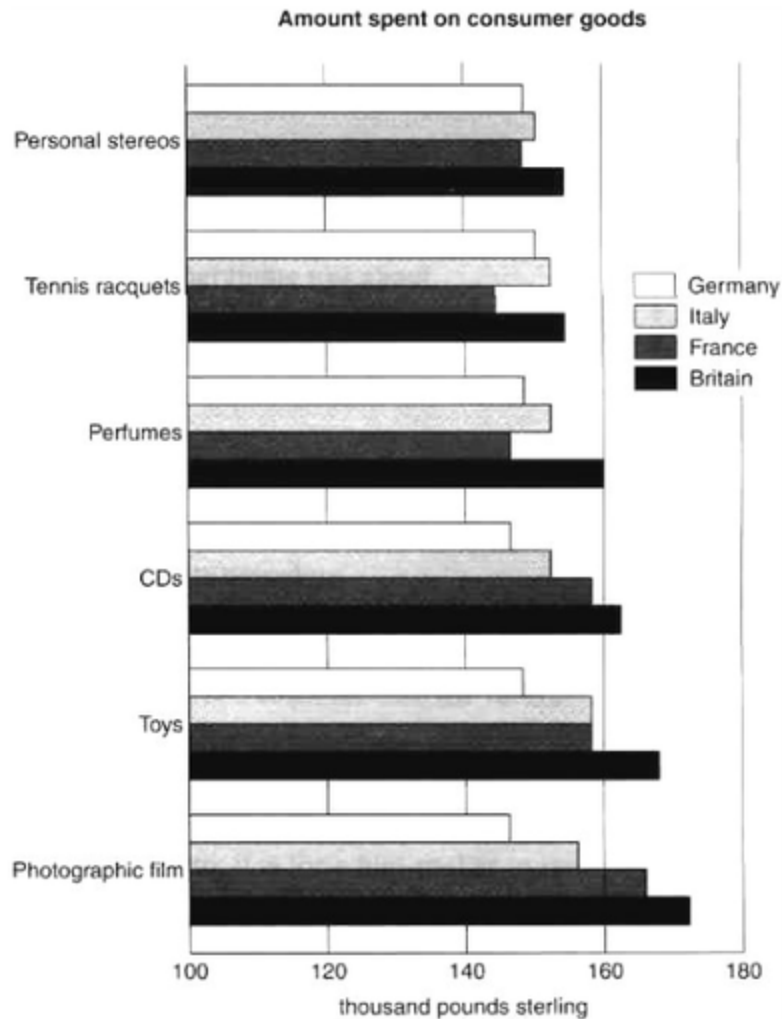
Finally, the cool climate house has one window which faces the direction of the sun, while the warm climate house has windows on two sides which are shaded from the sun. By opening the two windows at night, the house designed for warm climates can be ventilated.

(162 words, band 9)

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: selecting

The following bar chart has a total of 24 bars. It's impossible to describe 24 pieces of information in only 20 minutes, so you need to *select*.



A simple rule is to select at least one key thing about each country. Here are some examples:

Britain: highest spending on all 6 products, give the figure for photographic film.

France: second highest for 3 products, but lowest for the other 3.

Italy: Italians spent more money on toys than on any other product.

Germany: lowest spending overall, similar figures for all 6 products.

I'll write a full essay about this chart for next week.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: bar chart essay

Here's my full band 9 essay for [last week's question](#):

The bar chart compares consumer spending on six different items in Germany, Italy, France and Britain.

It is clear that British people spent significantly more money than people in the other three countries on all six goods. Of the six items, consumers spent the most money on photographic film.

People in Britain spent just over £170,000 on photographic film, which is the highest figure shown on the chart. By contrast, Germans were the lowest overall spenders, with roughly the same figures (just under £150,000) for each of the six products.

The figures for spending on toys were the same in both France and Italy, at nearly £160,000. However, while French people spent more than Italians on photographic film and CDs, Italians paid out more for personal stereos, tennis racquets and perfumes. The amount spent by French people on tennis racquets, around £145,000, is the lowest figure shown on the chart.

Note:

- I tried to keep the essay short (154 words) by selecting carefully.
- It's difficult to change *spend*, but I used *spending*, *spenders* and *paid out*.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: comparisons

You can use "compared to", "compared with" and "in comparison with" in the same way. For example:

- Prices in the UK are high compared to / with / in comparison with (prices in) Canada and Australia.
- Compared to / with / in comparison with (prices in) Canada and Australia, prices in the UK are high.

When writing about numbers or changes, I find it easier to use "while" or "whereas":

- There are 5 million smokers in the UK, while / whereas only 2 million Canadians and 1 million Australians smoke.
- Between 1990 and 2000, the number of smokers in the UK decreased dramatically, while / whereas the figures for Canada and Australia remained the same.

Please note:

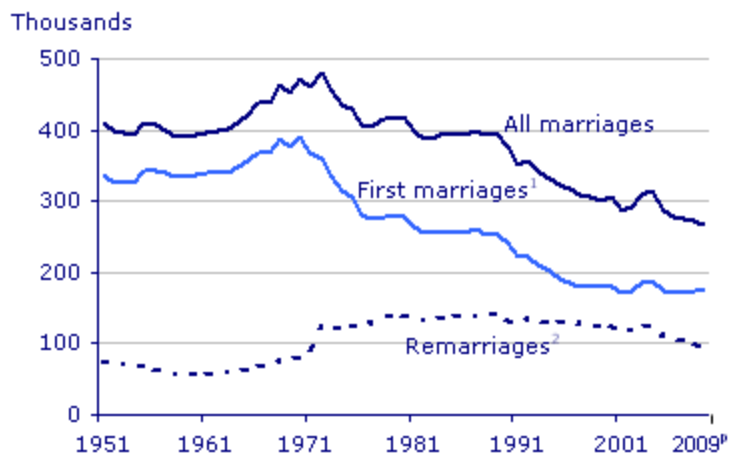
We don't say "comparing to".

We say "2 million" not "2 millions".

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: describing numbers

A good exercise is to choose one piece of information (a number) from a graph or chart, and try to describe it in several different ways.



UK marriages, 1951 - 2009

Here are 5 different sentences describing the 'all marriages' figure for the year 1951 (from the graph above):

- Around 400,000 couples got married in the UK in 1951.
- Around 400,000 weddings took place in the UK in the year 1951.
- In 1951, there were around 400,000 marriages in the UK.
- In 1951, the number of UK marriages stood at about 400,000.
- In 1951, the figure for marriages in the UK was approximately 400,000.

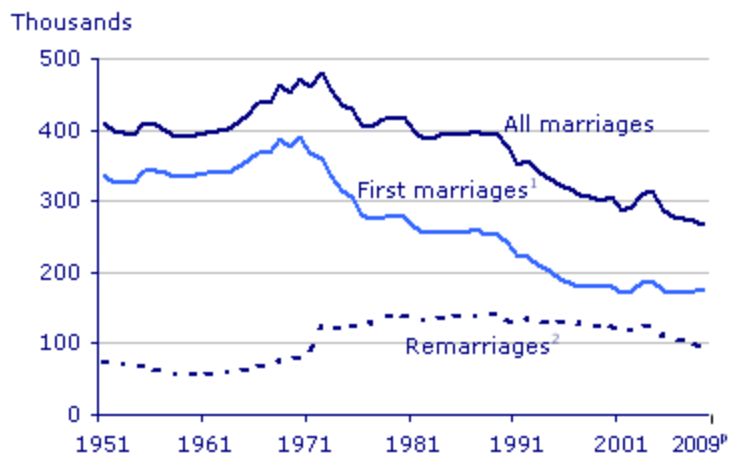
Don't spend all your time writing full essays; do some focused exercises too.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: the summary paragraph

As part of your task 1 essay, you need to write a general summary of the information (examiners call this the 'overview'). I usually write my summary straight after the introduction, but you can also put it at the end of the essay.

To summarise graphs, I look for the overall change from the first year to the last year shown. I also look for the main trends or the highest and lowest numbers.



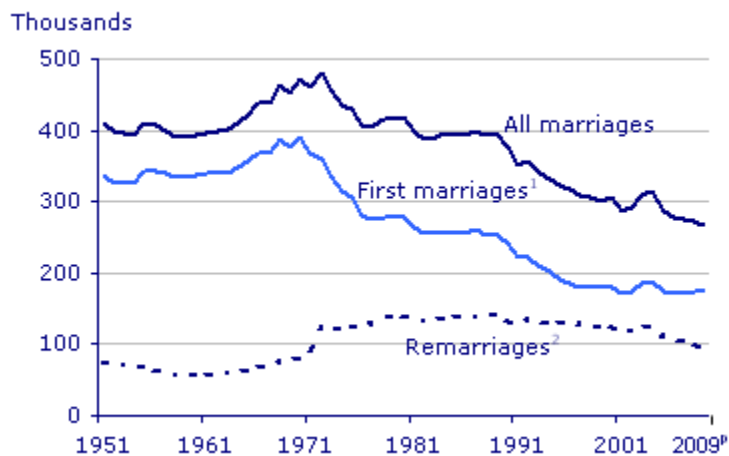
Here's my 2-sentence summary for the graph above:

It is clear that the total number of marriages per year fell between 1951 and 2009. While the number of first marriages fell dramatically from the end of the 1960s, the figure for remarriages remained stable.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: describing details

Last week I wrote a lesson about summarising the information on a graph. After your summary, you then need to describe specific details. It's important to include numbers and make some comparisons.



Try to write 2 paragraphs describing details. It looks more organised if you divide the information into 2 parts.

For line graphs, I always use the following approach:

1st detail paragraph: compare the numbers for the first year (e.g. 1951), then describe the changes up to a key point on the graph (e.g. peak numbers in 1971).

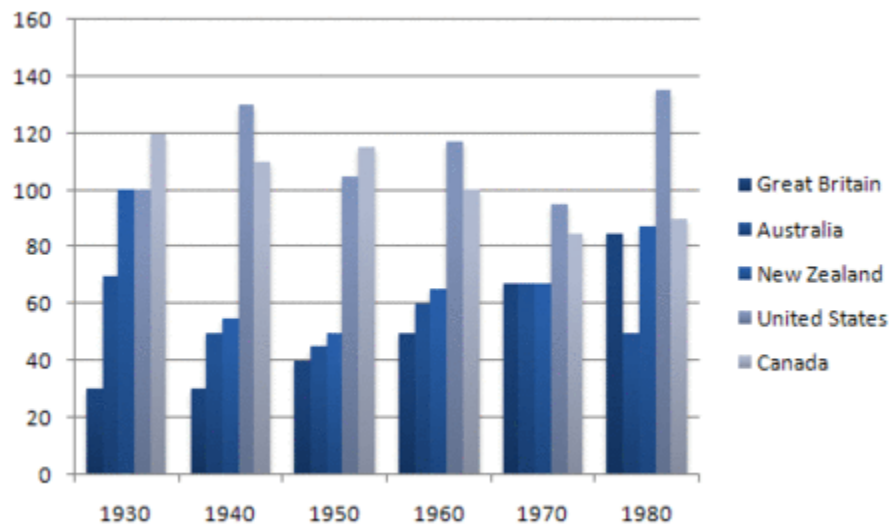
2nd detail paragraph: explain the general trend for each line after the key point (1971), then compare the numbers for the last year shown (2009).

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: how to select main points

After a short introduction, I always try to write a paragraph which summarises the main points. When there is a lot of information (like in the bar chart below), it can be difficult to select the main points.

The table below shows the figures for imprisonment in five countries between 1930 and 1980. (The y axis shows numbers of prisoners in thousands)



(Cambridge IELTS 2)

Usually I look for a change from the beginning to the end of the period. However, there is no overall trend because the figures fluctuate. So, I'll talk about the highest and lowest figures instead.

Here is my summary of the main points:

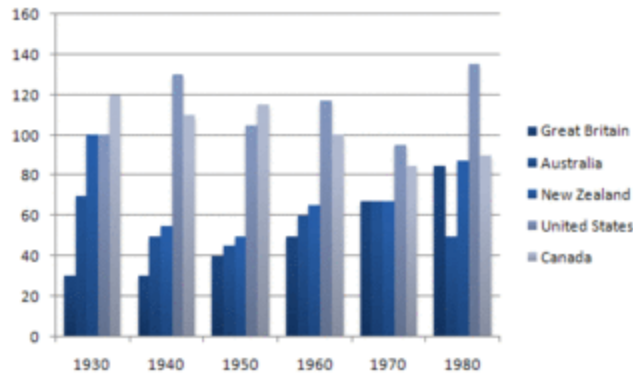
While the figures for imprisonment fluctuated over the period shown, it is clear that the United States had the highest number of prisoners overall. Great Britain, on the other hand, had the lowest number of prisoners for the majority of the period.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: selecting details

[Last week's lesson](#) was about selecting the main points. After that you need to describe specific details.

The bar chart we saw last week contains a lot of information, so you will not be able to include everything.



Make sure that you write something about each country. Select the most relevant point for each country, and don't forget to mention some figures. I've written an example sentence about each country below.

United States

The United States had the highest number of prisoners in four out of the six years shown on the chart, and in 1980 the figure for this country peaked at nearly 140,000 prisoners.

Canada

Canada had the highest figures for imprisonment in 1930 and 1950, with about 120,000 prisoners in both years.

New Zealand and Australia

The figures for New Zealand and Australia fluctuated between 40,000 and 100,000 prisoners, although New Zealand's prison population tended to be the higher of the two.

Great Britain

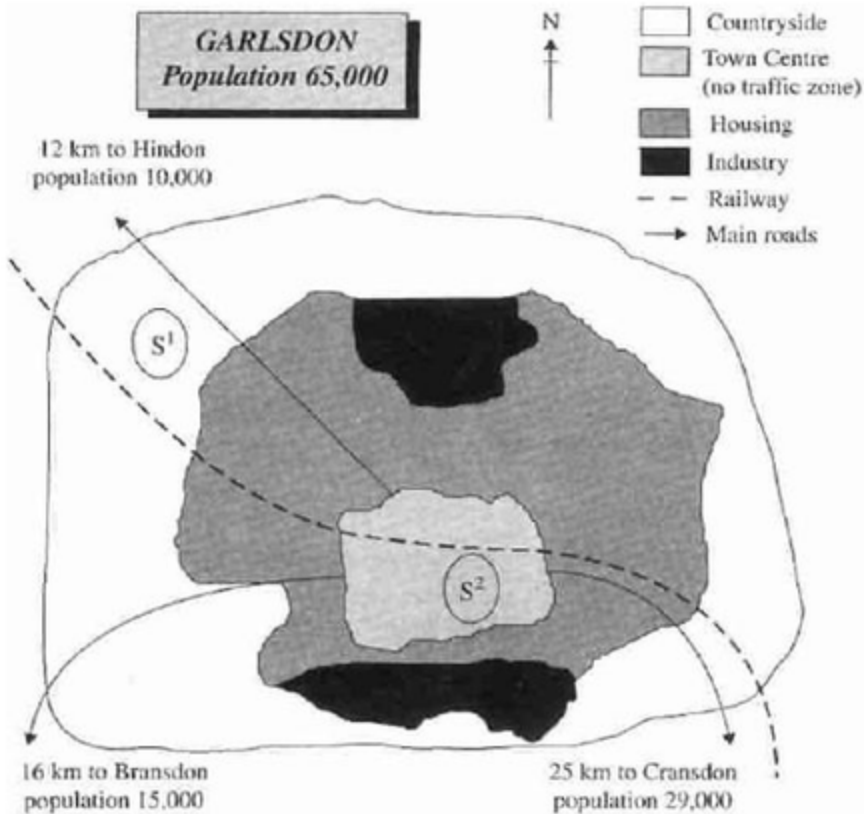
In contrast to the figures for the other countries, the number of prisoners in Great Britain rose steadily between 1930 and 1980, reaching a peak of about 80,000 at the end of the period.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: describe a map

Sometimes (quite rarely) you have to describe a map for IELTS Writing Task 1. Today I'll explain how I would answer this type of question.

The map below is of the town of Garlsdon. A new supermarket (S) is planned for the town. The map shows two possible sites for the supermarket.



(From Cambridge IELTS 5)

Here is some advice:

1. **Introduction** - Just paraphrase the question (instead of 'two possible sites' you could write 'two potential locations').
2. **Summary** - The main point is that the first site (S1) is outside the town, whereas the second site is in the town centre. Also, you could mention that the map shows the position of both sites relative to a railway and three roads which lead to three smaller towns.
3. **Details (2 paragraphs)** - Don't write a separate paragraph about each site; it's much better to compare the sites. I'd write one paragraph comparing the position of each site relative to Garlsdon (mention the different areas of the town), and another paragraph about the positions relative to transport links with the other three towns.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: full essay (describe a map)

In [last week's lesson](#) we looked at a 'describe a map' question. If you wrote an essay for this question, compare it with my essay below.

Here's my band 9 essay. I focused on describing similarities and differences.

The map shows two potential locations (S1 and S2) for a new supermarket in a town called Garlsdon.

The main difference between the two sites is that S1 is outside the town, whereas S2 is in the town centre. The sites can also be compared in terms of access by road or rail, and their positions relative to three smaller towns.

Looking at the information in more detail, S1 is in the countryside to the north west of Garlsdon, but it is close to the residential area of the town. S2 is also close to the housing area, which surrounds the town centre.

There are main roads from Hindon, Bransdon and Cransdon to Garlsdon town centre, but this is a no traffic zone, so there would be no access to S2 by car. By contrast, S1 lies on the main road to Hindon, but it would be more difficult to reach from Bransdon and Cransdon. Both supermarket sites are close to the railway that runs through Garlsdon from Hindon to Cransdon.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: full essay

The table below shows the proportion of different categories of families living in poverty in Australia in 1999.

Family type	Proportion of people from each household type living in poverty
single aged person	6% (54,000)
aged couple	4% (48,000)
single, no children	19% (359,000)
couple, no children	7% (211,000)
sole parent	21% (232,000)
couple with children	12% (933,000)
all households	11% (1,837,000)

The table gives information about poverty rates among six types of household in Australia in the year 1999.

It is noticeable that levels of poverty were higher for single people than for couples, and people with children were more likely to be poor than those without. Poverty rates were considerably lower among elderly people.

Overall, 11% of Australians, or 1,837,000 people, were living in poverty in 1999. Aged people were the least likely to be poor, with poverty levels of 6% and 4% for single aged people and aged couples respectively.

Just over one fifth of single parents were living in poverty, whereas only 12% of parents living with a partner were classed as poor. The same pattern can be seen for people with no children: while 19% of single people in this group were living below the poverty line, the figure for couples was much lower, at only 7%.

(150 words, band 9)

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: line graphs

Line graphs always show changes over time. Here's some advice about how to describe them:

- Try to write 4 paragraphs - introduction, summary of main points, 2 detail paragraphs.
- For your summary paragraph, look at the "big picture" - what changes happened to all of the lines from the beginning to the end of the period shown (i.e. from the first year to the last). Is there a trend that all of the lines follow (e.g. an overall increase)?
- You don't need to give numbers in your summary paragraph. Numbers are specific details. Just mention general things like 'overall change', 'highest' and 'lowest', without giving specific figures.
- Never describe each line separately. The examiner wants to see comparisons.
- If the graph shows years, you won't have time to mention all of them. The key years to describe are the first year and the last year. You should also mention any 'special' years (e.g. a peak or a significant rise/fall).
- Start describing details (paragraph 3) with a comparison of the lines for the first year shown on the graph (e.g. In 1990, the number of...).
- Use the past simple (increased, fell) for past years, and 'will' or 'is expected/predicted to' for future years.
- Don't use the passive (e.g. the number was increased), continuous (e.g. the number was increasing), or perfect tenses (e.g. the number has increased).

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: process diagrams

Process diagrams show how something is done or made. They always show steps/stages. Here's some advice about how to describe them:

- Try to write 4 paragraphs - introduction, summary of main points, 2 detail paragraphs.
- Write the introduction by paraphrasing the question (rewrite it by changing some of the words).

- For your summary, first say how many steps there are in the process. Then say where/how the process begins and ends (look at the first and last stages).
- In paragraphs 3 and 4, describe the process step by step. Include the first and last steps that you mentioned in the summary, but try to describe them in more detail or in a different way.
- You could describe the steps in one paragraph, but it looks more organised if you break the description into two paragraphs. Just start paragraph 4 somewhere in the middle of the process.
- Mention every stage in the process.
- Use 'sequencing' language e.g. at the first / second / following / final stage of the process, next, after that, then, finally etc.
- Times (e.g. past dates) are not usually shown, so use the present simple tense.
- It's usually a good idea to use the passive e.g. 'At the final stage, the product is delivered to shops' (because we don't need to know who delivered the product).

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: house prices

If you want to learn how to describe trends (increase, decrease etc.), search for some news about house prices.

Here's part of a news article I found about UK house prices:

There was seemingly good news for UK home owners when Halifax announced house prices had risen by 0.3% in July 2011, boosting the average value of a property to £163,981. Halifax also noted that prices were 0.5% higher over the three months from May to July than in the previous three months.

But is it time to celebrate the renaissance of the housing market? Even Halifax's index shows that over the preceding 12-month period, prices actually fell by 2.6%. Despite the price increases seen in recent months, we are finding that the average price of a property remains just under 13% below its peak in 2007.

Try to answer the questions below. Write a full sentence for each answer.

1. What happened to UK house prices in July 2011?
2. What do the figures 0.5% and 2.6% refer to?
3. Compare the 2011 average UK house price with the 2007 average.

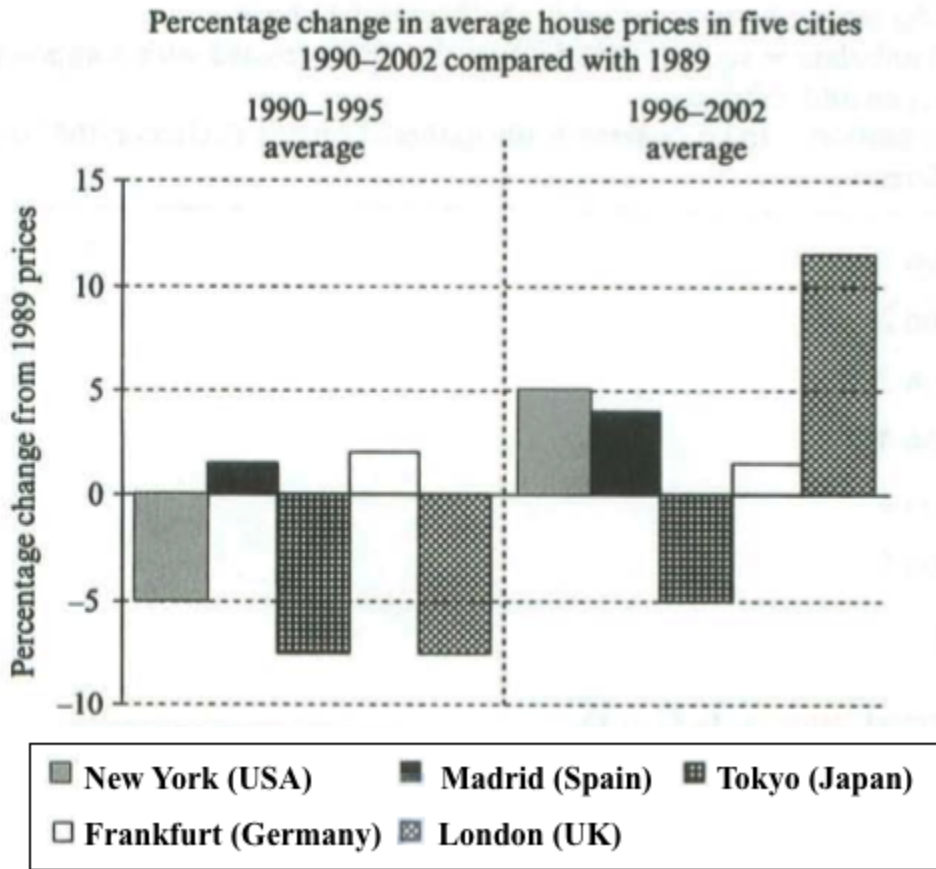
I'll share my answers in the "comments" area tomorrow, and we'll look at an IELTS question about house prices next week (Cambridge 7, test 3).

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: 'house prices' chart

The question below comes from Cambridge IELTS book 7. Students tend to find this question difficult, but last week's lesson about house prices might help.

The chart below shows information about changes in average house prices in five different cities between 1990 and 2002 compared with the average house prices in 1989.



Some advice:

- Introduction: paraphrase the question.
- Summary: compare the two periods (prices fell overall from 1990-95, but rose from 1996-2002), and mention that London prices changed the most.
- Details: write one paragraph about each period.
- Note: don't write -5%, write "fell by 5%".

I'm afraid I can't give feedback for essays that people share in the "comments" area, but I'll share my own full essay next week.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: house prices (full essay)

Here's my full essay (band 9) for [last week's question](#):

The bar chart compares the cost of an average house in five major cities over a period of 13 years from 1989.

We can see that house prices fell overall between 1990 and 1995, but most of the cities saw rising prices between 1996 and 2002. London experienced by far the greatest changes in house prices over the 13-year period.

Over the 5 years after 1989, the cost of average homes in Tokyo and London dropped by around 7%, while New York house prices went down by 5%. By contrast, prices rose by approximately 2% in both Madrid and Frankfurt.

Between 1996 and 2002, London house prices jumped to around 12% above the 1989 average. Homebuyers in New York also had to pay significantly more, with prices rising to 5% above the 1989 average, but homes in Tokyo remained cheaper than they were in 1989. The cost of an average home in Madrid rose by a further 2%, while prices in Frankfurt remained stable.

(165 words)

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IELTS Writing Task 1: general to specific

If you read any of my example essays, you will see that I always write 4 paragraphs, and I use a "general to specific" essay structure.

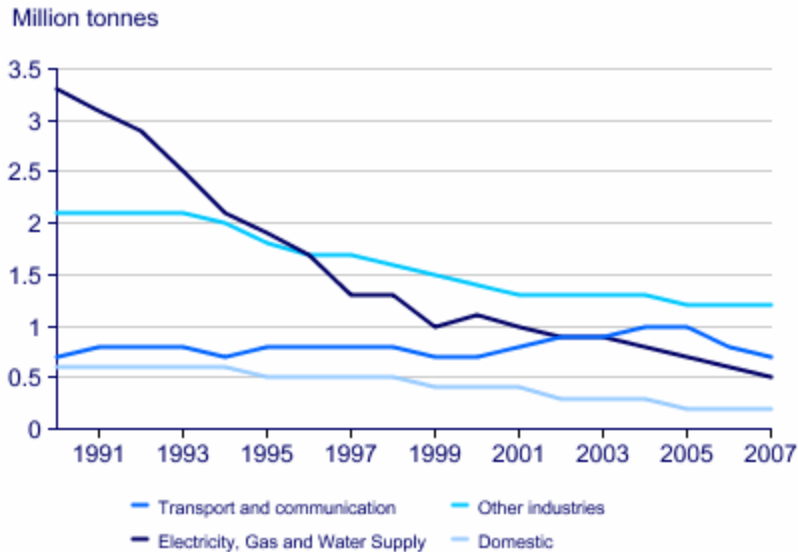
- The introduction is the most general part of the essay; it tells the reader what the chart is about.
- Then I write a paragraph about the main points or the most general points.
- Finally, I write 2 paragraphs describing specific facts or figures.
- I don't write a conclusion because I have already summarised the information in paragraph 2.

One reason I put the summary near the beginning (rather than at the end) is because I think it's easier to describe general things first, then specific things later.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: line graph exercise

The graph below shows UK acid rain emissions, measured in millions of tonnes, from four different sectors between 1990 and 2007.



I've made the following essay into a gap-fill exercise.

The line graph compares four sectors in _____ of the amount of acid rain emissions that they produced over a period of 17 years in the UK.

It is clear that the total amount of acid rain emissions in the UK _____ between 1990 and 2007. The most _____ decrease was seen in the electricity, gas and water supply sector.

In 1990, around 3.3 million tonnes of acid rain emissions came from the electricity, gas and water sector. The transport and communication sector was _____ for about 0.7 million tonnes of emissions, while the domestic sector _____ around 0.6 million tonnes. Just over 2 million tonnes of acid rain gases came from other industries.

Emissions from electricity, gas and water supply fell dramatically to only 0.5 million tonnes in 2007, a _____ of almost 3 million tonnes. While acid rain gases from the domestic sector and other industries fell gradually, the transport sector _____ a small increase in emissions, _____ a peak of 1 million tonnes in 2005.

Fill the gaps using these words:

produced, reaching, fell, responsible, saw, considerably, terms, drop, dramatic

CORRECT ANSWERS FROM SIMON:

- terms
- fell considerably
- dramatic
- responsible
- produced
- drop
- saw
- reaching

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: tables

Tables seem difficult when they contain a lot of numbers. Here's some advice:

- Try to write 4 paragraphs - introduction, summary of main points, 2 detail paragraphs.
- Before you start writing, highlight some key numbers. Choose the biggest number in each category in the table (i.e. in each column and row). If the table shows years, look for the biggest changes in numbers over the time period. You could also mention the smallest numbers, but you can ignore 'middle' numbers (neither biggest nor smallest).
- For your summary paragraph, try to compare whole categories (columns or rows) rather than individual 'cells' in the table. If you can't compare whole categories, compare the biggest and smallest number. Write 2 sentences for the summary.
- In your two 'details' paragraphs, never describe each category (column or row) separately. The examiner wants to see comparisons. Try to organise the numbers you highlighted into 2 groups - one for each paragraph (e.g. highest numbers for all categories together, and lowest numbers together).
- Describe / compare the numbers you highlighted - include at least 3 numbers in each paragraph.
- Use the past simple for past years, and 'will' or 'is expected/predicted to' for future years. If no time is shown, use the present simple.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: table exercise

The chart below shows average hours and minutes spent by UK males and females on different daily activities.

Hours and minutes per day		
	Males	Females
Sleep	8.04	8.18
Resting	0.43	0.48
Personal care	0.40	0.48
Eating and drinking	1.25	1.19
Leisure		
Watching TV/DVD and listen to radio/music	2.50	2.25
Social life and entertainment/culture	1.22	1.32
Hobbies and games	0.37	0.23
Sport	0.13	0.07
Reading	0.23	0.26
All leisure	5.25	4.53
Employment and study	3.45	2.26
Housework	1.41	3.00
Childcare	0.15	0.32
Voluntary work and meetings	0.15	0.20
Travel	1.32	1.22
Other	0.13	0.15

I've made the following essay into a gap-fill exercise.

The table compares the average _____ of time per day that men and women in the UK spend _____ different activities.

It is clear that people in the UK spend more time _____ than doing any other daily activity. Also, there are significant differences between the time _____ by men and women on employment/study and housework.

On average, men and women in the UK _____ for about 8 hours per day. Leisure _____ the second largest proportion of their time. Men spend 5 hours and 25 minutes doing various leisure activities, such as watching TV or doing sport, _____ women have 4 hours and 53 minutes of leisure time.

It is noticeable that men work or study for an average of 79 minutes more than women every day. By contrast, women spend 79 minutes more than men doing housework, and they spend _____ as much time looking after children.

Fill the gaps using these words:

doing, up, over, spent, while, sleeping, sleep, twice, amount, takes

CORRECT ANSWERS FROM SIMON:

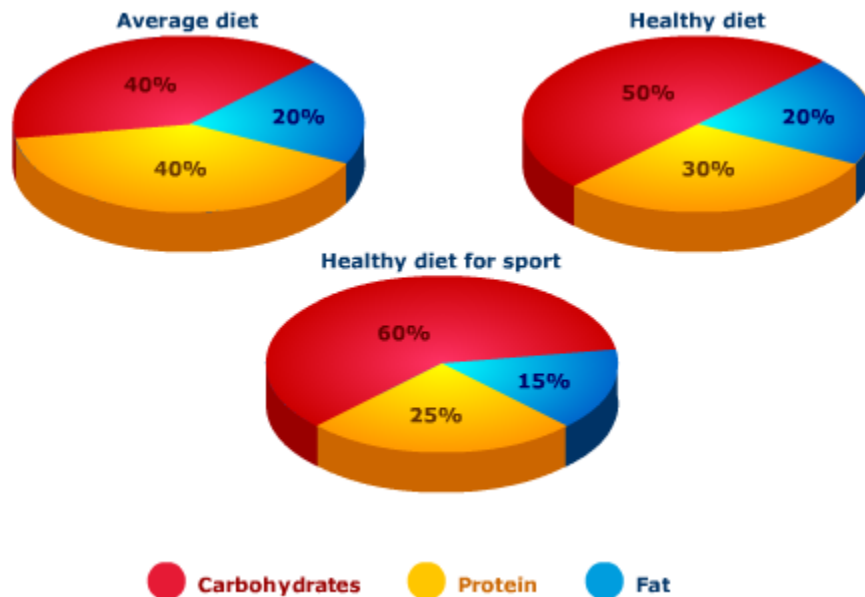
1. amount
2. doing
3. sleeping
4. spent
5. sleep

- 6. takes
- 7. up
- 8. while
- 9. over
- 10. twice

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: pie chart practice

Try doing a Google image search for 'pie charts' and you'll find plenty of charts that you could practise describing. Here's one I found:



To write an essay, you need to do 3 things:

1. Introduce the chart by saying what it shows.
2. Summarise the information by describing the main/general points.
3. Describe the charts in detail, comparing the figures (2 paragraphs).

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: introduction and summary

Last week I said that you need to do 3 things to write a task 1 essay: introduce, summarise, and describe details. Today I'll look at the introduction and summary for the pie charts below.

Introduction - just say what the pie charts show:

The pie charts compare the proportion of carbohydrates, protein and fat in three different diets, namely an average diet, a healthy diet, and a healthy diet for sport.

Note: Don't try to 'show off' in your introduction. Just use 'show', 'compare' or 'illustrate'; don't use words like 'depict' or 'indicate'.

Summary - write 2 sentences about the main/general points:

It is noticeable that sportspeople require a diet comprising a significantly higher proportion of carbohydrates than an average diet or a healthy diet. The average diet contains the lowest percentage of carbohydrates but the highest proportion of protein.

Note: There is no 'right' way to choose your main/general points. Just choose the two things that you notice first. I try to avoid specific numbers in my summaries - save numbers for the 'details' paragraphs. We'll look at those next week.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: pie chart essay

Here's my full essay for the pie charts in last week's lesson. I've made the last two paragraphs into a gap-fill exercise to focus your attention on some good ways to describe numbers.

Fill the gaps with these words:

constitutes, drops, amount, fifth, higher, make, one, relative, figure, up

The pie charts compare the proportion of carbohydrates, protein and fat in three different diets, namely an average diet, a healthy diet, and a healthy diet for sport.

It is noticeable that sportspeople require a diet comprising a significantly higher proportion of carbohydrates than an average diet or a healthy diet. The average diet contains the lowest percentage of carbohydrates but the highest proportion of protein.

Carbohydrates _____ 60% of the healthy diet for sport. This is 10% _____ than the proportion of carbohydrates in a normal healthy diet, and 20% more than the proportion in an average diet. On the other hand, people who eat an average diet consume a greater _____ of protein (40%) than those who eat a healthy diet (30%) and sportspeople (25%).

The third compound shown in the charts is fat. Fat _____ exactly _____ of both the average diet and the healthy diet, but the _____ to only 15% for the healthy sports diet.

CORRECT ANSWERS FROM SIMON:

1. make
2. up
3. higher
4. relative
5. amount

6. constitutes
7. one
8. fifth
9. figure
10. drops

--

IELTS Grammar: using 'see' in writing task 1

A few people have asked me about using 'see' to describe numbers on a graph or chart. Look at the following sentence:

- In Britain, CD sales increased dramatically in the 1980s.

We can write the same sentence in various ways using 'see':

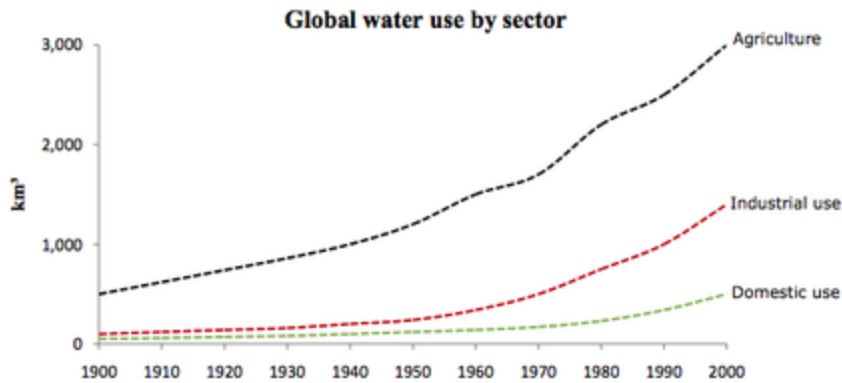
- Britain saw a dramatic increase in CD sales in the 1980s.
- The 1980s saw a dramatic increase in CD sales in Britain.
- British shops saw CD sales increase dramatically in the 1980s.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: 'water use' graph and table

The following question comes from Cambridge IELTS book 6, page 30.

The graph and table below give information about water use worldwide and water consumption in two different countries.



Water consumption in Brazil and Congo in 2000

Country	Population	Irrigated land	Water consumption per person
Brazil	176 million	26,500 km ²	359 m ³
Democratic Republic of Congo	5.2 million	100 km ²	8 m ³

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

1. Introduction - rewrite the question in a different way.
2. Summary - write one sentence summarising the trend shown on the graph, and one sentence summarising the table.
3. Details paragraph - describe the graph in detail (maybe 3 sentences).
4. Details paragraph - describe the table in detail (maybe 3 sentences).

Remember: we don't write a conclusion because a conclusion means a final decision or opinion. However, you can put the summary at the end (instead of second) if you want.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: graph and table essay

Last week I wrote a plan for this question. Now I've added my full essay below.

The graph and table below give information about water use worldwide and water consumption in two different countries.

The charts compare the amount of water used for agriculture, industry and homes around the world, and water use in Brazil and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

It is clear that global water needs rose significantly between 1900 and 2000, and that agriculture accounted for the largest proportion of water used. We can also see that water consumption was considerably higher in Brazil than in the Congo.

In 1900, around 500km³ of water was used by the agriculture sector worldwide. The figures for industrial and domestic water consumption stood at around one fifth of that amount. By 2000, global water use for agriculture had increased to around 3000km³, industrial water use had risen to just under half that amount, and domestic consumption had reached approximately 500km³.

In the year 2000, the populations of Brazil and the Congo were 176 million and 5.2 million respectively. Water consumption per person in Brazil, at 359m³, was much higher than that in the Congo, at only 8m³, and this could be explained by the fact that Brazil had 265 times more irrigated land.

(184 words, band 9)

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: my thinking steps

Today I'm going to explain my thinking process when I answer an IELTS Writing Task 1 question. We'll use this question (Cambridge IELTS 7, page 30):

The table below gives information on consumer spending on different items in five different countries in 2002.

Percentage of national consumer expenditure by category - 2002

Country	Food/Drinks/ Tobacco	Clothing/ Footwear	Leisure/ Education
Ireland	28.91%	6.43%	2.21%
Italy	16.36%	9.00%	3.20%
Spain	18.80%	6.51%	1.98%
Sweden	15.77%	5.40%	3.22%
Turkey	32.14%	6.63%	4.35%

Before I worry about what language to use, it's really important to understand the information, and decide how to organise it. This is what I'm thinking:

1. I know that I can write a short introduction by paraphrasing the question.
2. I look for an overall trend. I can see that the food/drinks/tobacco category has the highest percentages, and leisure/education has the lowest.

3. Now I want to write two main body paragraphs. I need to select something to say about each country. Remember, there is no rule about what information you select; everyone will do this differently.
4. I look for the highest figures in each category: I can see that Turkey has the highest figure for food/drinks/tobacco AND for education/leisure. Italy has the highest figure for clothing/footwear.
5. So, I'll write a paragraph about Turkey and Italy.
6. My final paragraph needs to talk about Ireland, Spain and Sweden.
7. Maybe I'll point out that Ireland has a high figure for the first category, Spain has the lowest figure for education/leisure, and Sweden has the lowest figures for the first AND second categories.
8. I don't need a conclusion because I have already mentioned a general trend in point 2.

Try writing an essay following these steps. You can compare your essay with mine next week.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: 'table' essay

Here's my band 9 essay following the steps in [last week's lesson](#):

The table below gives information on consumer spending on different items in five different countries in 2002.

Percentage of national consumer expenditure by category - 2002

The table shows percentages of consumer expenditure for three categories of products and services in five countries in 2002.

It is clear that the largest proportion of consumer spending in each country went on food, drinks and tobacco. On the other hand, the leisure/education category has the lowest percentages in the table.

Out of the five countries, consumer spending on food, drinks and tobacco was noticeably higher in Turkey, at 32.14%, and Ireland, at nearly 29%. The proportion of spending on leisure and education was also highest in Turkey, at 4.35%, while expenditure on clothing and footwear was significantly higher in Italy, at 9%, than in any of the other countries.

It can be seen that Sweden had the lowest percentages of national consumer expenditure for food/drinks/tobacco and for clothing/footwear, at nearly 16% and just over 5% respectively. Spain had slightly higher figures for these categories, but the lowest figure for leisure/education, at only 1.98%.

Note:

- Which information did I choose to include in my 'summary' paragraph?
- Why did I use past and present tenses in paragraph 2?
- How did I group the information for paragraphs 3 and 4?

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: accuracy

The gap-fill exercise below should test whether you can describe numbers accurately. I'll put the correct answers in the 'comments' area tomorrow.

UK Household Expenditure in 2009

Household _____ highest in the transport category, _____ £63 a week. This included £21.10 per week _____ purchase of vehicles, £31.80 on the operation of personal transport (such as petrol, diesel, repairs and servicing) and £10.50 on transport services such as rail, tube and bus fares.

Food and non-alcoholic drink purchases _____ £51 to weekly household expenditure - £13.10 of which _____ on meat and fish, £3.70 on fresh vegetables, and £3.00 on fresh fruit. Non-alcoholic drinks _____ £4.00 _____ weekly expenditure, and £2.10 per week was spent on chocolate and confectionery.

Fill the gaps with the following words:

spent, spending, for, on, at, of, accounted, contributed, was (x2)

CORRECT ANSWERS FROM SIMON:

spending was
at
on
contributed
was spent
accounted for
of

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: describing 2 charts

Here are some tips for writing about 2 charts, graphs or tables:

1. Introduction

Write one sentence, but introduce each chart separately e.g. "The first bar chart shows..., and the second chart illustrates..."

2. Summary of main points

Write 2 sentences. If the information in the charts is not connected, find one main point or general trend for each chart. If the charts are connected, try to make comparisons.

3. Main body paragraphs

If the 2 charts are completely different (e.g. a graph and a table), write a separate paragraph about each.

If the charts are the same, and show the same information (e.g. 2 pie charts), don't describe them separately; the examiner will want to see comparisons. In this case, you could write one paragraph describing all of the information, but I still prefer to write 2 paragraphs because it makes the essay look more organised.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: comparing numbers

Fill the gaps in the following text using the words below it. If you find any of the gaps difficult, miss them and come back to them after doing the easier ones.

Emigration from the UK

The number of people leaving the UK for 12 months or more _____ record _____ in 2008, _____ an estimated 427,000 people emigrating. This _____ from 341,000 in 2007.

There has been a large _____ the number of people emigrating for work related reasons, particularly those with a definite job to go to. In 2008 an estimated 136,000 people emigrated from the UK to take up a definite job, _____ 100,000 in 2007.

- in
- high
- increase
- up
- reached
- with (x2)
- a
- compared
- was

CORRECT ANSWERS FROM SIMON:

- REACHED A record HIGH... WITH
- This WAS UP from
- a large INCREASE IN
- COMPARED WITH

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: how to describe future years

Several people have asked me how to write about future years on a graph or chart. For example, what tense should you use if the graph shows the year 2025?

Try this exercise: take a description of past years, and rewrite it with future years.

Past:

In 1999, the proportion of people using the Internet in the USA was about 20%. The figures for Canada and Mexico were lower, at about 10% and 5% respectively. In 2005, Internet usage in both the USA and Canada rose to around 70% of the population, while the figure for Mexico reached just over 25%.

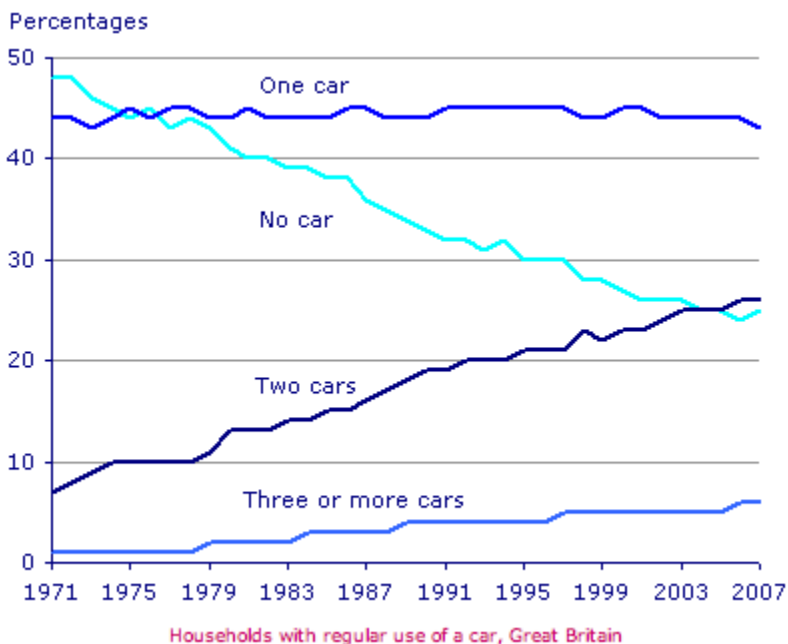
Future (I've changed the years and the verbs):

In 2015, the proportion of people using the Internet in the USA is expected to be about 20%. The figures for Canada and Mexico are likely to be lower, at about 10% and 5% respectively. In 2025, it is predicted that Internet usage in both the USA and Canada will rise to around 70% of the population, while the figure for Mexico should reach just over 25%.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: line graph exercise

The graph below gives information about car ownership in Britain from 1971 to 2007.



The graph shows changes in the number of cars _____ household in Great Britain _____ a period of 36 years.

Overall, car ownership in Britain increased _____ 1971 and 2007. In particular, the number of households with two cars rose, while the number of households _____ a car fell.

In 1971, _____ half of all British households did not have regular use of a car. Around 44% of households had one car, but only about 7% had two cars. It was uncommon for families to own three or more cars, _____ around 2% of households falling into this category.

The one-car household was the most common type from the late 1970's _____, although there was little change in the _____ for this category. The biggest change was seen in the proportion of households without a car, which fell steadily over the 36-year period _____ around 25% in 2007. In contrast, the proportion of two-car families rose steadily, reaching about 26% in 2007, and the proportion of households with more than two cars rose _____ around 5%.

Fill the gaps in the essay with the following words:

almost, to, figures, per, between, by, over, with, without, onwards

CORRECT ANSWERS FROM SIMON:

1. per
2. over
3. between
4. without
5. almost
6. with
7. onwards
8. figures
9. to
10. by

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: grammar mistakes

Can you find the mistakes in the following sentences?

1. The first table shows us the rate of marriage and divorce between 1970 - 2000.
2. While the divorce rate increased from 1 million to 1.5 million during the same period.
3. As from 1990 to 2000 marriage rate has decreased relatively from 2.5 to 2 million.
4. As shown in table 1 that the total number of marriages were high in 1970.
5. Finally few people got divorced in 1970 than 2000.

CORRECT ANSWERS FROM SIMON:

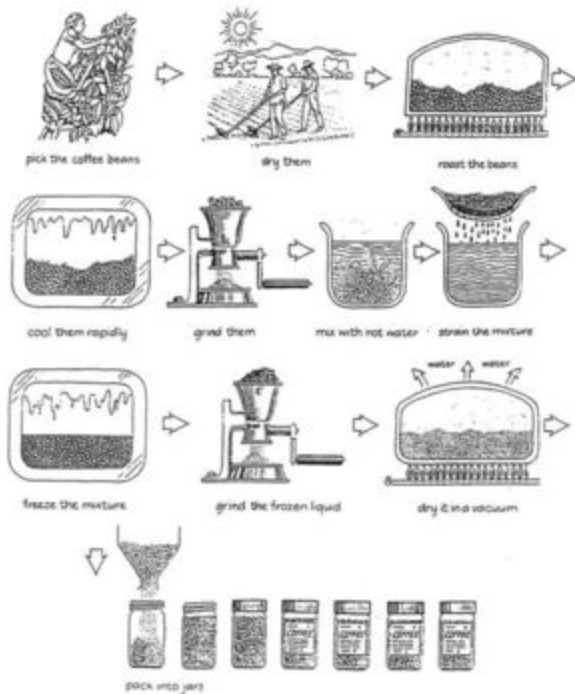
1. The first table shows us the rate of marriage and divorce between 1970 - 2000.
 - delete 'us'
 - make 'marriage' and 'divorce' plural
 - write '1970 and 2000'
2. While the divorce rate increased from 1 million to 1.5 million during the same period.
 - delete 'while' because there is no contrast in this sentence
3. As from 1990 to 2000 marriage rate has decreased relatively from 2.5 to 2 million.
 - delete 'as'
 - write 'the marriage rate'
 - use the past simple 'decreased', not 'has decreased'
 - delete 'relatively'
4. As shown in table 1 that the total number of marriages were high in 1970.
 - write 'the first table shows that' instead of 'as shown in table 1 that'
 - 'was' instead of 'were' because 'the total number' is singular
 - I think the student means 'highest' instead of 'high'
5. Finally few people got divorced in 1970 than 2000.
 - put a comma after 'Finally'
 - 'fewer' instead of 'few' because this is a comparison

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: process diagram summary

When describing a process diagram, most students have no problem describing the stages in the process step by step. However, not many students are able to write a good summary (or 'overview') of the process as a whole.

Think about how you would summarise this process:



(Click on picture to make it bigger. Source: 'Meanings into Words Upper-Intermediate')

Here are my tips for summarising process diagrams:

Write 2 sentences:

- First say how many stages there are in the whole process.
- Then say how/where the process begins and ends.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: 'process' introduction and overview

Last week I gave some advice about how to write an overview (summary) for process diagram questions. Here's the question again:

The diagram below shows how coffee is produced and prepared for sale in supermarkets and shops.

Here's my introduction and overview:

The picture illustrates the process of coffee manufacture and preparation for sale on the market.

It is clear that there are 11 stages in the production of coffee. The process begins with the picking of coffee beans, and ends at the packing stage.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: 'process diagram' details

Here are my 'details' paragraphs to finish the essay I started [last week](#):

Looking at the coffee production process in detail, coffee beans must first be picked in the fields. These beans are then dried, roasted, and cooled before being put in a grinding machine, which turns the beans into coffee granules.

At the sixth stage in the process, the ground coffee is mixed with hot water, and the resulting mixture is strained. Next, the mixture is frozen and then passed once again through the grinder. After that, the ground, frozen liquid is dried in a vacuum so that the water evaporates, leaving the coffee granules. Finally, these granules are packed into coffee jars for delivery to shops.

Did you notice the passives and sequencing phrases?

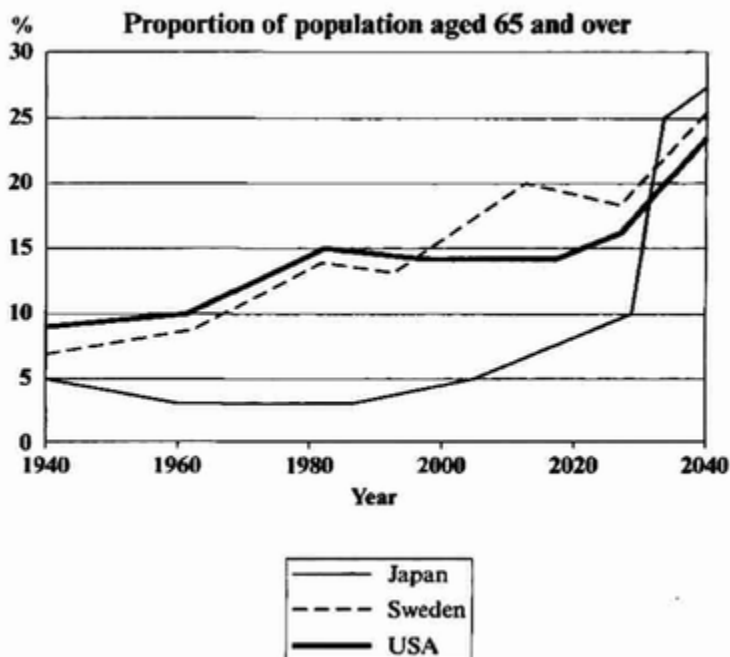
- Passives: must be picked; are dried, roasted and cooled; is mixed...
- Sequencing: then; and; at the sixth stage; next; after that; finally...

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: graph showing future years

Several students have asked me about the following question from Cambridge IELTS book 5 (page 29).

The graph below shows the proportion of the population aged 65 and over between 1940 and 2040 in three different countries.



Here are the steps I would follow to write my essay:

1. **Introduction:** write one sentence to introduce what the graph shows. Just paraphrase the question statement (i.e. change a few words).
2. **Summary:** describe 2 main things e.g. the overall trend for all 3 countries, and the biggest change that you can see.
3. **Details:** compare all 3 countries in 1940, then in 1990.
4. **Details:** describe the dramatic increase predicted for Japan, and compare all 3 countries in 2040.

Note:

Try writing some essay plans like the one above. Planning makes you think about selecting and organising, so it's a useful skill to practise (even if you don't do a plan in your exam).

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: full essay

Here's my full essay for last week's [line graph question](#):

The line graph compares the percentage of people aged 65 or more in three countries over a period of 100 years.

It is clear that the proportion of elderly people increases in each country between 1940 and 2040. Japan is expected to see the most dramatic changes in its elderly population.

In 1940, around 9% of Americans were aged 65 or over, compared to about 7% of Swedish people and 5% of Japanese people. The proportions of elderly people in the USA and Sweden rose gradually over the next 50 years, reaching just under 15% in 1990. By contrast, the figures for Japan remained below 5% until the early 2000s.

Looking into the future, a sudden increase in the percentage of elderly people is predicted for Japan, with a jump of over 15% in just 10 years from 2030 to 2040. By 2040, it is thought that around 27% of the Japanese population will be 65 years old or more, while the figures for Sweden and the USA will be slightly lower, at about 25% and 23% respectively.

(178 words, band 9)

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: analyse model essays

Maybe you read my [line graph essay](#) last week, but did you *really* study it?

Here's some example analysis of last week's essay:

- **Structure** - 4 paragraphs: introduction, overview, 2 specific details
- **Paraphrasing** - proportion of the population = percentage of people (find more examples)

- **Overview** - overall trend, then biggest change
- **Selecting key information** - first year (1940), middle years (1990, early 2000s), end of period (2030 to 2040)
- **Comparing** - in each country, most dramatic, and, compared to, by contrast, while, slightly lower, respectively (analyse my sentences to learn how to use these words correctly)
- **Verbs** - compares, increases, is expected to see, were, rose, remained... (look carefully at the use of tenses)

It's possible to read model essays quickly and learn a little. It's also possible to spend a long time studying them carefully and learn a lot!

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: introduction for 2 charts

You might find it easier to introduce two different charts by writing two separate sentences.

Here is an example question about a graph and bar chart:

The charts below give information about travel to and from the UK, and about the most popular countries for UK residents to visit.

Here is my 2-sentence introduction:

The graph shows numbers of visits to the UK and trips abroad by UK residents. The bar chart shows the five most popular destinations for UK travellers.

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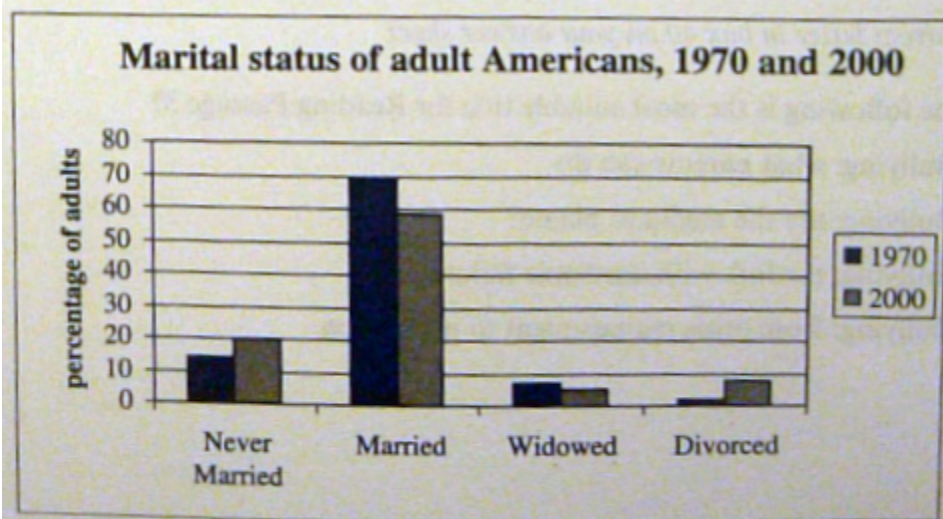
IELTS Writing Task 1: essay about 2 bar charts

Last week I suggested a way of writing introductions for 2 charts.

Today I'm attaching a full sample essay for this type of question. Click the following link to open my essay: [download bar charts essay](#)

The charts below give information about USA marriage and divorce rates between 1970 and 2000, and the marital status of adult Americans in two of the years.

Summarise the information by selecting and reporting the main features, and make comparisons where relevant.



The first bar chart shows changes in the number of marriages and divorces in the USA, and the second chart shows figures for the marital status of American adults in 1970 and 2000.

It is clear that there was a fall in the number of marriages in the USA between 1970 and 2000. The majority of adult Americans were married in both years, but the proportion of single adults was higher in 2000.

In 1970, there were 2.5 million marriages in the USA and 1 million divorces. The marriage rate remained stable in 1980, but fell to 2 million by the year 2000. In contrast, the divorce rate peaked in 1980, at nearly 1.5 million divorces, before falling back to 1 million at the end of the period.

Around 70% of American adults were married in 1970, but this figure dropped to just under 60% by 2000. At the same time, the proportion of unmarried people and divorcees rose by about 10% in total. The proportion of widowed Americans was slightly lower in 2000.

Cambridge IELTS 6, page 98

(174 words)

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: singular or plural?

Students often make simple mistakes with singular and plural forms, especially in Writing Task 1. The problem is that the words used on graphs, charts and tables are usually singular.

So, the labels on a chart could be:

- single parent
- graduate
- only child
- laptop computer

But when you write a sentence, you might need to use a plural:

- The number of single parents increased.
- In 1999 nearly 55% of graduates were female.
- The UK has the highest number of only children.
- More laptop computers were sold in the UK than any other country.

Don't just copy the words from the graph or chart. Think first about how to use them correctly.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: table about waste

A student sent me the following question from a recent IELTS test:

The table below shows the amount of waste production (in millions of tonnes) in six different countries in three different years over a twenty-year period.

	1980	1990	2000
Ireland	0.6	*	5
Japan	28	32	53
Korea	*	31	19
Poland	4	5	6.6
Portugal	2	3	5
US	131	151	192

*Figure not available

A few things to consider before you write your essay:

1. Can you think of a few alternative ways to write "waste production"?
2. What is the most noticeable feature of the table?
3. Is there a general trend over the period of time shown?
4. How can you separate the information into 2 groups (in order to write 2 paragraphs about specific details)?

I'll share my answers to these questions next week.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: 'waste' table

Last week we looked at the following question:

The table below shows the amount of waste production (in millions of tonnes) in six different countries in three different years over a twenty-year period.

Here are my answers to last week's questions:

1. It's fine to repeat the word 'waste' because there isn't really an ideal synonym ('rubbish' and 'garbage' have a more limited meaning). However, we can vary our sentences by writing things like 'waste output', 'waste materials' or 'the waste that was produced'.
2. The most noticeable feature must be that the US produced by far the most waste in all 3 years. Use this idea in your 'overview' paragraph.
3. The general trend is that waste production rose in every country apart from Korea. This could be your second 'overview' idea.
4. I would write one main paragraph comparing the 3 countries with the highest figures (US, Japan, Korea), and a separate paragraph about Ireland, Poland and Portugal. Try to use some 'comparing' language when describing the countries (e.g. while, whereas, by contrast) and some 'trend' language when describing the years (e.g. increased, rose, fell).

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: verbs exercise

I've missed out the verbs in the following description. Choose them from the list to fill the gaps. For some of the gaps, more than one verb is possible.

Missing words:

risen, created, recorded, is, produced (x2), managed, given, had (x2), stood, were, increased

The US, Japan and Korea _____ by far the most waste. In 1980, the US _____ 131 million tonnes of waste, while the figure for Japan _____ at 28 million tonnes. No figure _____ for Korea in 1980, but in 1990, 31 million tonnes of waste _____ in that country. By 2000, waste production in the USA _____ to 192 million tonnes, while Japan's figure _____ to 53 million tonnes. However, Korea _____ to reduce its output to 19 million tonnes. Ireland, Poland and Portugal only _____ a total of around 30 million tonnes of waste between them, adding the figures for all three years together.

Note:

The above description is not a full essay.

CORRECT ANSWERS FROM SIMON:

produced (or created)

created (or produced)

stood

is given

were recorded

had increased (or risen)

had risen (or increased)

managed

produced (or created)

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: find the mistakes

Can you find the mistakes in the paragraph below?

In 1980, the US produced 131 millions of tonnes of waste. Japan was in second place with 28 millions, while the figures for Poland, Portugal and Ireland were less than 5 millions. In 1990, the US was 151, and in 2000 it rose to 192 millions.

Note:

Some of the mistakes are not related to grammar.

CORRECT ANSWERS FROM SIMON:

Mistakes:

1. When there is a number we say "131 million tonnes". Only use "millions of tonnes" when there is no number.

2. Don't write "in first/second place". It's not a competition!

3. Don't write "the US was + number"

So, here's my corrected paragraph:

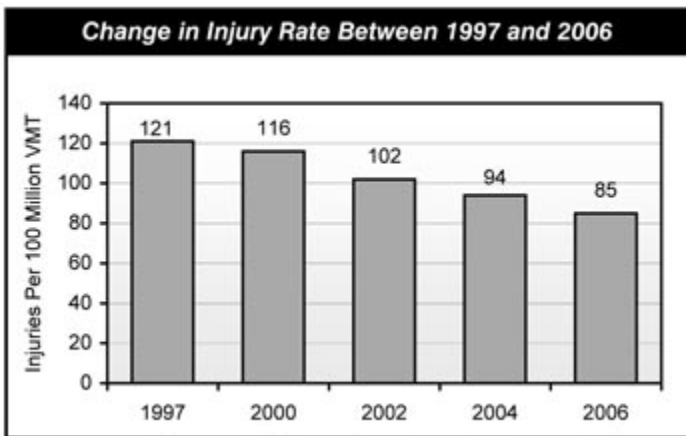
In 1980, the US produced 131 million tonnes of waste. Japan produced the second largest amount, with 28 million tonnes, while the figures for Poland, Portugal and Ireland were less than 5 million. In 1990, the US created 151 million tonnes of waste, and in 2000 this rose to 192 million tonnes.

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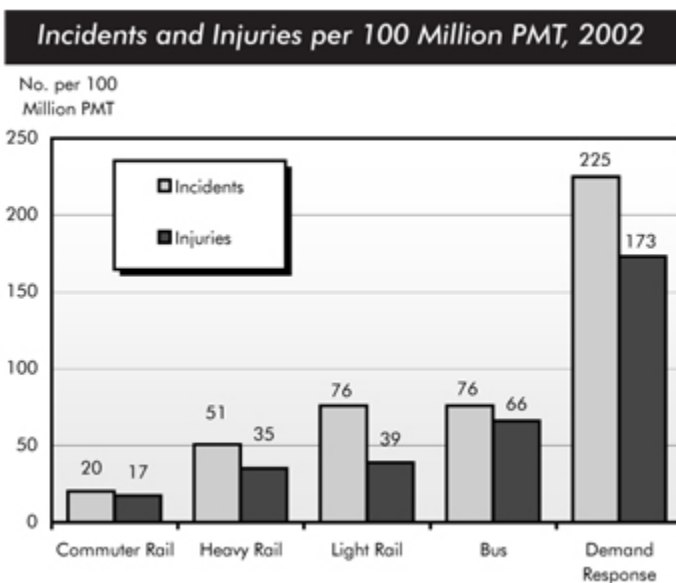
IELTS Writing Task 1: change or comparison?

While line graphs always show changes or trends (increase, decrease etc.), this is not always true for bar charts, pie charts and tables.

Here is a bar chart that does show 'change':



And here is a bar chart that shows 'comparison' rather than change:



Can you see the difference? How will this difference affect what you write in your essay? I'll go into more detail about the two charts next week, but the important thing for now is to see the difference.

(Charts taken from [US Department of Transportation](http://www.usdot.gov) website)

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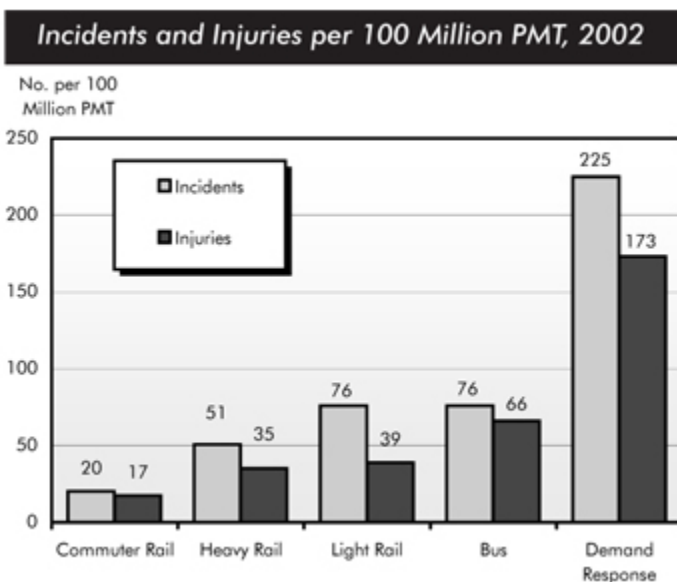
IELTS Writing Task 1: bar chart without years

Last week we saw that there are two types of bar chart:

1. those that show changes over time
2. those that compare different items

The important thing to remember about the second type is that you can't describe increases and decreases. Let's look at this type in more detail.

The chart below shows numbers of incidents and injuries per 100 million passenger miles travelled (PMT) by transportation type in 2002.



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

1. Introduction: Explain what the chart shows by paraphrasing the question.
2. Overview: Look for two main things - in this case, we could mention the highest item and the fact that there were more incidents than injuries for all five transport types. You don't need to mention any numbers at this point.
3. Details: I'd probably group together the two highest items (demand response and bus) in this paragraph. Remember that you can't talk about an increase or decrease; you can only compare the numbers.
4. Details: I'd group the three types of rail transport together for this paragraph. Write some nice comparison sentences!

Note:

You don't need to know what 'demand-response' transport is (it's an American term which I've never used), but [click here](#) if you want to know.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: 'chart without years' essay

The chart below shows numbers of incidents and injuries per 100 million passenger miles travelled (PMT) by transportation type in 2002.

The bar chart compares the number of incidents and injuries for every 100 million passenger miles travelled on five different types of public transport in 2002.

It is clear that the most incidents and injuries took place on demand-response vehicles. By contrast, commuter rail services recorded by far the lowest figures.

A total of 225 incidents and 173 injuries, per 100 million passenger miles travelled, took place on demand-response transport services. These figures were nearly three times as high as those for the second highest category, bus services. There were 76 incidents and 66 people were injured on buses.

Rail services experienced fewer problems. The number of incidents on light rail trains equalled the figure recorded for buses, but there were significantly fewer injuries, at only 39. Heavy rail services saw lower numbers of such events than light rail services, but commuter rail passengers were even less likely to experience problems. In fact, only 20 incidents and 17 injuries occurred on commuter trains.

(165 words, band 9)

Note:

Don't worry about the repetition of "incidents and injuries" in this essay. There are no perfect synonyms for these words, although I managed to use "problems" and "such events" later in the essay. The most important thing is to describe the data clearly and make some good comparisons.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: why I'd start with task 1

Students often ask whether it's better to do task 1 or task 2 first.

In my opinion, it's best to start any exam with something quick and easy that gives you confidence. Hopefully you'll agree that the quickest and easiest part of the whole writing test is the introduction to task 1.

You don't need to think too much about the introduction to task 1; simply rewrite the question statement by changing a few words. [Click here](#) to read one of my lessons

about introductions, and then read [this lesson](#) about paraphrasing. If you practise these techniques, you'll start your IELTS writing test with confidence.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: more than one chart

Many students are still worried about questions with more than one chart.

Here are some tips:

1. If there are 2 charts, they often show different information. Don't worry about comparing them. Just do: introduction, overview, then one paragraph for each chart.
2. If the units are different (e.g. one chart shows 'millions' and the other shows 'percentages'), you can't usually compare them.
3. If the units are the same, you can probably compare the charts.
4. If there are 3 or 4 charts, you can usually compare them.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: paraphrasing

The easiest way to start your Task 1 essay is by paraphrasing the question.

Paraphrasing means writing something in a different way (using your own words).

Here are some simple changes you can make:

- graph = line graph
- chart = bar chart
- diagram = figure
- shows = illustrates (or 'compares' if the graph is comparing)
- proportion = percentage
- information = data
- the number of = the figure for
- the proportion of = the figure for
- people in the USA = Americans
- from 1999 to 2009 = between 1999 and 2009
- from 1999 to 2009 = over a period of 10 years
- how to produce = the process of producing
- in three countries = in the UK, France and Spain (i.e. name the countries)

Tip:

"The figure for / figures for" is a great phrase that not many people use (e.g. the graph shows figures for unemployment in three countries).

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: bar charts with age groups

A few people have asked about the question on page 52 of Cambridge IELTS 5. It shows two bar charts with age groups. [Click here](#) to see the question.

As usual, I recommend writing 4 paragraphs:

1. A quick introduction to say what the charts show.
2. An overview of the main features - one sentence for each chart.
3. Describe the first chart in detail.
4. Describe the second chart in detail.

Here's an example introduction and overview:

The first bar chart compares students of different ages in terms of why they are studying their chosen courses, and the second chart compares the same age groups in terms of the help they require at work.

It is clear that the proportion of people who study for career purposes is far higher among the younger age groups, and decreases steadily with age. The need for employer support also decreases with age, but only up to the point when employees enter their forties.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: choosing which details to include

In [last week's lesson](#) I wrote an introduction and overview for a question about two bar charts. For paragraphs 3 and 4, we need to describe each chart in detail.

I usually find that 3 sentences are enough for a good 'details' paragraph, which means that we only need to choose 3 things to describe for each chart.

3 sentences about the first chart:

1. Compare the percentages for students under 26.
2. Mention the overall trend as students get older, and that the proportions are the same for the 40-49 age group.
3. Compare the percentages for students over 49.

3 sentences about the second chart:

1. Write about the two youngest age groups.
2. Write about the 30-39 age group.
3. Write about the two oldest age groups.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: full essay about 2 bar charts

Here's my full essay for the ['age group bar charts'](#) question:

The bar charts compare students of different ages in terms of why they are studying and whether they are supported by an employer.

It is clear that the proportion of students who study for career purposes is far higher among the younger age groups, while the oldest students are more likely to study for interest. Employer support is more commonly given to younger students.

Around 80% of students aged under 26 study to further their careers, whereas only 10% study purely out of interest. The gap between these two proportions narrows as students get older, and the figures for those in their forties are the same, at about 40%. Students aged over 49 overwhelmingly study for interest (70%) rather than for professional reasons (less than 20%).

Just over 60% of students aged under 26 are supported by their employers. By contrast, the 30-39 age group is the most self-sufficient, with only 30% being given time off and help with fees. The figures rise slightly for students in their forties and for those aged 50 or more.

(178 words, band 9)

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: the overview

A current examiner recently told me that the most common mistake in students' task 1 essays is that there is no overview. This was also true when I was an examiner.

So what makes a good overview? Here are a few tips:

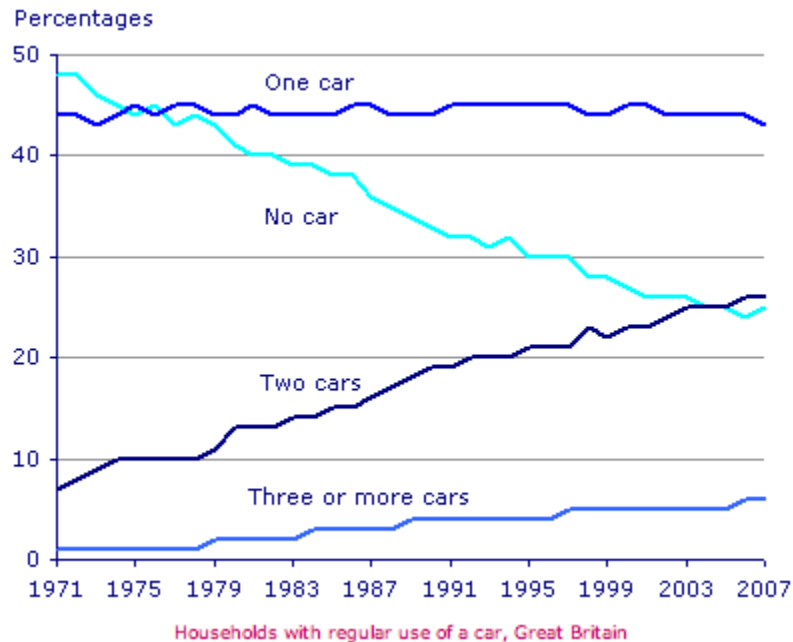
- An overview is simply a summary of the main things you can see.
- Because the overview is so important, I recommend putting it at the beginning of your essay, just after the introduction sentence.
- I write two overview sentences. A one-sentence overview isn't really enough.
- Try not to include specific numbers in the overview. Save the specifics for later paragraphs.
- Look at the 'big picture' e.g. the overall change from the first year to the last year (if years are shown on the chart), the differences between whole categories rather than single numbers, or the total number of stages in a process.

Have another look at the overview paragraphs (paragraph 2) in the essays I've written here on the site. Analyse them carefully, and practise writing your own overviews in the same way.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: example overview

In last week's lesson I gave some tips about how to write a good [overview](#) to summarise the information shown on a graph, chart or diagram. Let's look at an example overview of the graph below.



My overview:

Overall, car ownership in Britain increased between 1971 and 2007. In particular, the number of households with two cars rose, while the number of households without a car fell.

Analysis:

- Notice that I didn't include any specific numbers. Save the details for later.
- The first sentence describes the "big picture". The first thing I did was look at ***all 4 lines and the whole period***. I noticed that there was an overall trend towards people having more cars (the word 'ownership' came from the question). Most students tend to miss this kind of general observation.
- The second sentence highlights the biggest changes over the whole period. With these 2 sentences, I've definitely summarised the main features of the graph.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: how to use your 20 minutes

You have 20 minutes for task 1, so try spending 5 minutes on each paragraph. This might help you to organise your time better.

First 5 minutes

Read the question, make sure you understand the chart, write your introduction by paraphrasing the question.

Second 5 minutes

Look at the chart and try to find 2 general points. Don't look at specific details; look for "the big picture". Write 2 sentences summarising the information.

Final 10 minutes

Describe specific details. Try to break this part into 2 paragraphs because it looks better. You could spend 5 minutes on each paragraph.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: repeating key words

Students often worry about repeating the same words in writing task 1.

Repeating a key word or phrase a few times is not a problem; sometimes it is necessary to show that you are consistently talking about the same thing. If you try to use too much variety, there is a danger that you will confuse the reader or write something that does not mean what you want it to mean.

It's fine to either repeat the key words or make small changes. Look at these examples of small changes I made to the phrase **average weekly spending**:

- spent on average
- average expenditure
- weekly spending figures
- levels of spending
- spent per week
- expenditure per week

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: a common mistake

Students often make mistakes with thousands, millions and billions. It might seem strange, but you should say "10 million" not "10 millions". It's the same with hundred, thousand and billion. Try to avoid this mistake in writing task 1 - examiners notice it!

Correct: 10 million people

Wrong: 10 millions people, 10 millions of people, 10 million of people

Note:

When there is no number, we do write "millions of".
e.g. Millions of people travel abroad each year.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: double, twice as, twofold

A few students have asked me about how to use 'double', 'twice as', 'three times', 'twofold', 'threefold' etc. Compare how each word/phrase is used in the following examples:

1. 'double' (verb)

The number of unemployed people doubled between 2005 and 2009.

2. 'twice as...as/compared to', 'three times as...as/compared to'

There were twice as many unemployed people in 2009 as in 2005.

Twice as many people were unemployed in 2009 compared to 2005.

3. 'twofold', 'threefold' (adjective or adverb)

There was a twofold increase in the number of unemployed people between 2005 and 2009. (adjective with the noun 'increase')

The number of unemployed people increased twofold between 2005 and 2009. (adverb with the verb 'increase')

Try using these forms in your own sentences. Make sure you follow the patterns.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: introduction technique

The task 1 introduction should be fast and easy to do. Just write one sentence in which you paraphrase the question statement.

The climograph below shows average monthly temperatures and rainfall in the city of Kolkata.

Here's my one-sentence introduction:

The chart compares average figures for temperature and precipitation over the course of a calendar year in Kolkata.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: 'to' or 'by'

In IELTS writing task 1, you might need to use verbs like increase, decrease, rise and fall. These verbs can be followed by the words 'to' and 'by', but what's the difference?

Let's use these figures:

- Company profit in 2005 = £20,000
- Company profit in 2010 = £25,000

Now compare these sentences:

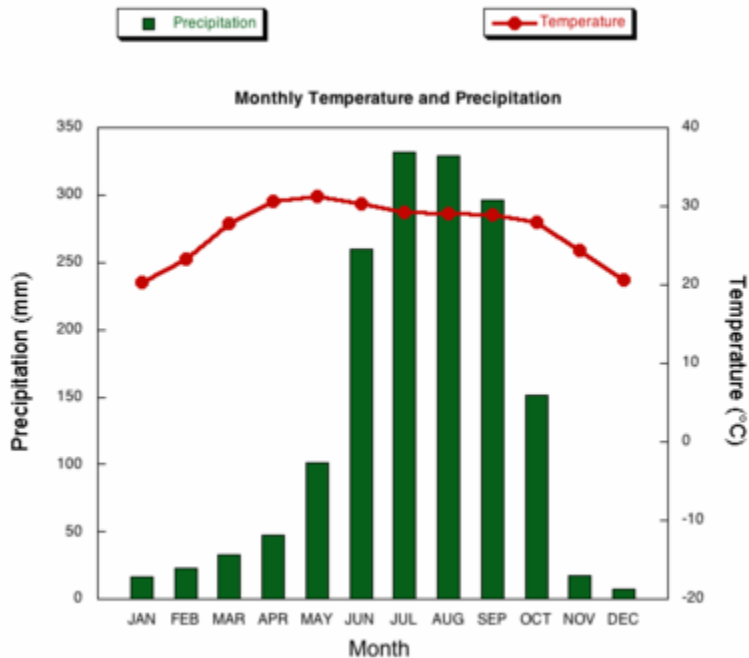
- Company profit rose **to** £25,000 in 2010.
- Company profit rose **by** £5,000 between 2005 and 2010.

It's easy: 'to' is used before the new figure, and 'by' is used to show the change. It's the same when you are talking about a fall.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: climate essay

The climograph below shows average monthly temperatures and rainfall in the city of Kolkata.



The chart compares average figures for temperature and precipitation over the course of a calendar year in Kolkata.

It is noticeable that monthly figures for precipitation in Kolkata vary considerably, whereas monthly temperatures remain relatively stable. Rainfall is highest from July to August, while temperatures are highest in April and May.

Between the months of January and May, average temperatures in Kolkata rise from their lowest point at around 20°C to a peak of just over 30°C. Average rainfall in the city also rises over the same period, from approximately 20mm of rain in January to 100mm in May.

While temperatures stay roughly the same for the next four months, the amount of rainfall more than doubles between May and June. Figures for precipitation remain above 250mm from June to September, peaking at around 330mm in July. The final three months of the year see a dramatic fall in precipitation, to a low of about 10mm in December, and a steady drop in temperatures back to the January average.

(173 words, band 9)

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: process diagrams

The following paragraph describes the process of making cement.

At the first stage in the cement production process, limestone and clay **are crushed** to form a powder. This powder **is then mixed** and **passed** through a rotating heater. The resulting mixture **is ground**, and finally the end product, cement, **is packed** into large bags.

There are 2 things that make process descriptions special:

1. Phrases that order the process and link the steps (underlined)
2. Passive verbs (highlighted)

(See Cambridge IELTS book 8 for the full question)

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: diagram overview

After the introduction, I tell my students to write an overview of the information shown on the chart. When the chart shows numbers, we look for the highest, lowest, biggest change, overall trend etc.

But how do you write an overview of a diagram that doesn't show numbers?

Here are some things you could put in a process diagram overview:

- The total number of steps in the process.
- Where the process begins and ends.

And this is what you could write about for a comparing diagram:

- The total number of changes or differences.
- The main changes or differences.
- The main similarities or what doesn't change

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: using the passive

In which of the following sentences is the passive used appropriately? Which sentences should be changed to the active?

- 1) The number of marriages was decreased between 1999 and 2009.
- 2) First, the raw materials are mixed together.
- 3) The figure for residents with no children has been increased this year.
- 4) The final product is packaged and delivered to shops

FROM SIMON:

1 and 3 need to be changed:

1. The number of marriages decreased between 1999 and 2009. (not 'was decreased')
3. The figure for residents with no children has increased this year. (not 'has been increased')

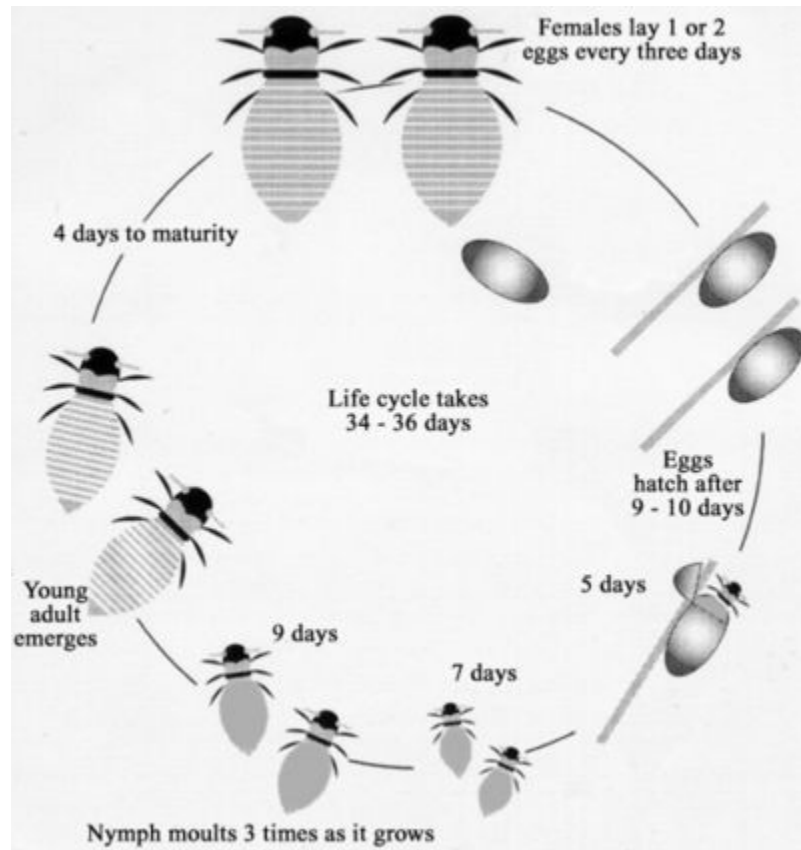
The passive is used correctly in sentences 2 and 4 because they describe steps in a process.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: life cycle diagram

The diagram shows the life cycle of the honey bee. Two things to consider are:

1. how to summarise the diagram before describing the stages in detail
2. whether to use active or passive verb forms



nymph = immature form of an insect

moult = shed or lose old feathers, hair or skin to allow for new growth

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: introduction and overview

As I've explained before, we don't write a conclusion for task 1, we write an overview. You can put this at the end of your essay, but I prefer to put it straight after the introduction. Let's return to last week's **life cycle** question.

Example introduction and overview:

The diagram illustrates the various stages in the life of a honey bee. We can see that the complete life cycle lasts between 34 and 36 days. It is also noticeable that there are five main stages in the development of the honey bee, from egg to mature adult insect.

Note: I often separate the introduction and overview, but in this case I've put them together in the same paragraph. Both ways are fine.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: life cycle essay

Here's my full essay for the [life cycle](#) question:

The diagram illustrates the various stages in the life of a honey bee. We can see that the complete life cycle lasts between 34 and 36 days. It is also noticeable that there are five main stages in the development of the honey bee, from egg to mature adult insect.

The life cycle of the honey bee begins when the female adult lays an egg; the female typically lays one or two eggs every 3 days. Between 9 and 10 days later, each egg hatches and the immature insect, or nymph, appears.

During the third stage of the life cycle, the nymph grows in size and sheds its skin three times. This moulting first takes place 5 days after the egg hatches, then 7 days later, and again another 9 days later. After a total of 30 to 31 days from the start of the cycle, the young adult honey bee emerges from its final moulting stage, and in the space of only 4 days it reaches full maturity.

(169 words, band 9)

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: describing percentages

Here are 3 useful techniques for describing percentages:

1. English speakers usually put the percentage at the start of the sentence.
2. Use *while*, *whereas* or *compared to* (after a comma) to add a comparison.
3. Use "the figure for" to add another comparison in the next sentence.

Use these examples as models for your own sentences:

In 1999, 35% of British people went abroad for their holidays, while only 28% of Australians spent their holidays in a different country. The figure for the USA stood at 31%.

Around 40% of women in the UK had an undergraduate qualification in 1999, compared to 37% of men. The figures for the year 2000 rose slightly to 42% and 38% respectively.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: charts showing countries

A few things to remember when the graph or chart shows countries:

1. If the question doesn't name the countries (e.g. "in three countries"), you could name them in your introduction (e.g. "in Britain, France and Germany"). You could even write "in three countries, namely Britain, France and Germany".
2. Don't forget the word "the" when writing about "the USA" and "the UK".
3. Always compare the countries; never describe the figures for each country in separate paragraphs.

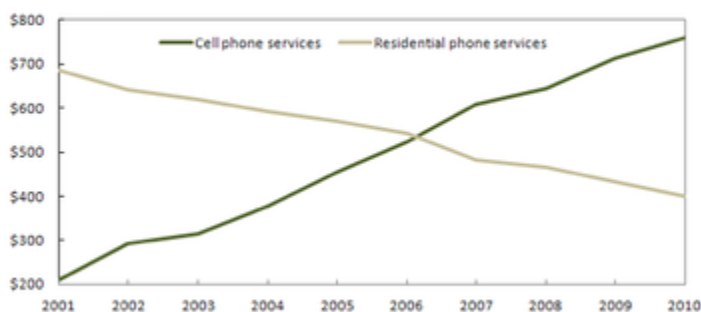
Finally, try to vary the way you write about countries. For example:

- The number of elderly people in the USA rose.
- Canada also saw a rise in the number of elderly people.
- However, the figure for Australia fell.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: line graph essay

Chart 1. Average annual expenditures on cell phone and residential phone services, 2001–2010



SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Expenditure Survey

The line graph compares average yearly spending by Americans on mobile and landline phone services from 2001 to 2010.

It is clear that spending on landline phones fell steadily over the 10-year period, while mobile phone expenditure rose quickly. The year 2006 marks the point at which expenditure on mobile services overtook that for residential phone services.

In 2001, US consumers spent an average of nearly \$700 on residential phone services, compared to only around \$200 on cell phone services. Over the following five years, average yearly spending on landlines dropped by nearly \$200. By contrast, expenditure on mobiles rose by approximately \$300.

In the year 2006, the average American paid out the same amount of money on both types of phone service, spending just over \$500 on each. By 2010, expenditure on mobile phones had reached around \$750, while the figure for spending on residential services had fallen to just over half this amount.

(162 words, band 9)

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: repeating words

In last week's [line graph essay](#) I repeated the word "expenditure" four times. Is this a problem?

The answer is no! If you look at the graph, you can see that the whole essay must be about expenditure. In fact, I needed to mention the idea of expenditure eleven times! Does the examiner really expect you to think of eleven synonyms for "expenditure"? Of course not.

It's impossible to avoid repeating some of the key words in writing task 1. Try to add variety where you can (I also used "spending", "spent" and "paid out"), but don't become obsessed with this. The important thing is to describe and compare the data.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: the most common mistake

The most common mistake in IELTS writing task 1 is **not** a grammar mistake. Find the 2 big mistakes in the sentences below:

The unemployment rate in the UK rose by 2% between 2008 and 2009, whereas Canada decreased by about 1%. The USA was the highest, at just over 4%.

CORRECT ANSWER FROM SIMON:

The big problem is: you CAN'T write "Canada decreased" or "the USA was the highest". Canada didn't decrease! The unemployment rate decreased.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: 'details' paragraphs

If you've read my task 1 lessons, you'll know that I always write 4 paragraphs:

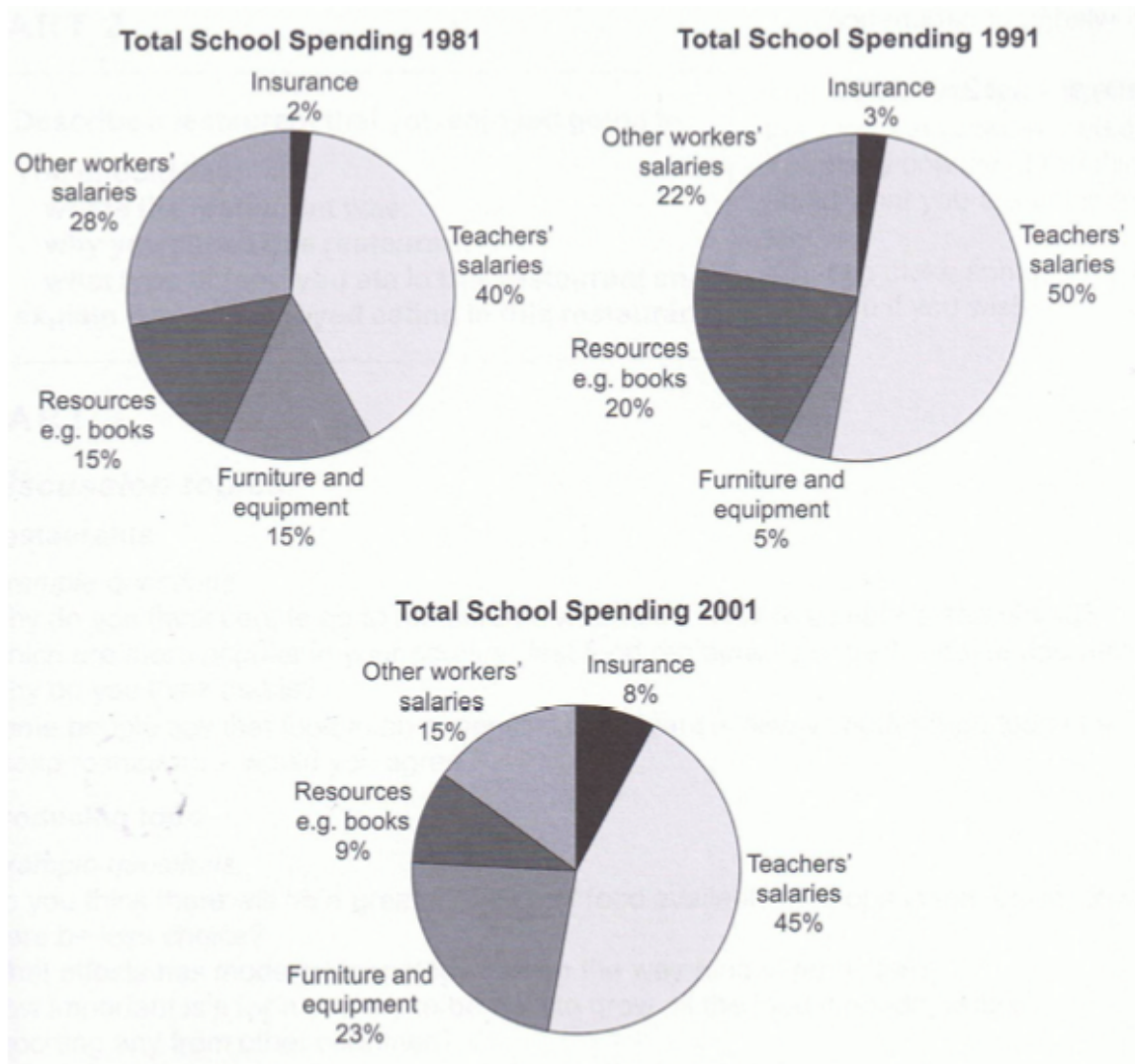
1. Introduction - paraphrase the question
2. Overview - describe 2 main or general things
3. Details

4. Details

Let's forget the introduction and overview for the moment, and focus on the two 'details' paragraphs. Why do we need two paragraphs?

The answer is that this encourages you to divide the information into 2 groups, and hopefully this means that your essay will be better organised and you'll make some useful comparisons.

[Click here](#) to see 3 pie charts (taken from Cambridge book 8). Thinking about the 'details' paragraphs only, how would you divide the information into 2 groups?



--

IELTS Writing Task 1: 'details' paragraphs

Last week I asked you to think about how to divide the information from 3 pie charts into 2 groups in order to write 2 'details' paragraphs ([click here](#) to see the pie charts again).

Here are two paragraphs that I wrote with my students:

In 1981, 40% of the school's budget went on teachers' salaries. This figure rose to 50% in 1991, but fell again by 5% in 2001. The proportion of spending on other workers' wages fell steadily over the 20-year period, from 28% of the budget in 1981 to only 15% in 2001.

Expenditure on insurance stood at only 2% of the total in 1981, but reached 8% in 2001. Finally, the percentages for resources and furniture/equipment fluctuated. The figure for resources was highest in 1991, at 20%, and the proportion of spending on furniture and equipment reached its peak in 2001, at 23%.

Analysis:

You can see that I chose to put the two types of salaries together in one paragraph, and the other three categories together in the second paragraph. There are other ways to divide the information, but this seemed the most obvious way to me.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: pie charts essay

Here's my full essay for the [3 pie charts](#) question that we've been looking at over the last two weeks:

The pie charts compare the expenditure of a school in the UK in three different years over a 20-year period.

It is clear that teachers' salaries made up the largest proportion of the school's spending in all three years (1981, 1991 and 2001). By contrast, insurance was the smallest cost in each year.

In 1981, 40% of the school's budget went on teachers' salaries. This figure rose to 50% in 1991, but fell again by 5% in 2001. The proportion of spending on other workers' wages fell steadily over the 20-year period, from 28% of the budget in 1981 to only 15% in 2001.

Expenditure on insurance stood at only 2% of the total in 1981, but reached 8% in 2001. Finally, the percentages for resources and furniture/equipment fluctuated. The figure for resources was highest in 1991, at 20%, and the proportion of spending on furniture and equipment reached its peak in 2001, at 23%.

(158 words, band 9)

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: rise or raise?

These two words are often confused by students. Here is the main difference:

- something rises (e.g. the price rose)
- somebody raises something (e.g. the company raised the price)

"Rise" (rose, risen) can be a verb or a noun. I often use it for IELTS writing task 1:

- The price of cigarettes **rises** every year. (verb, present)
- In 2008, the number of customers **rose from** 100 **to** 200. (verb, past)
- There has been **a dramatic rise in** Internet usage in the UK. (noun)
- In 2008, the UK saw **a rise in** the divorce rate. (noun)

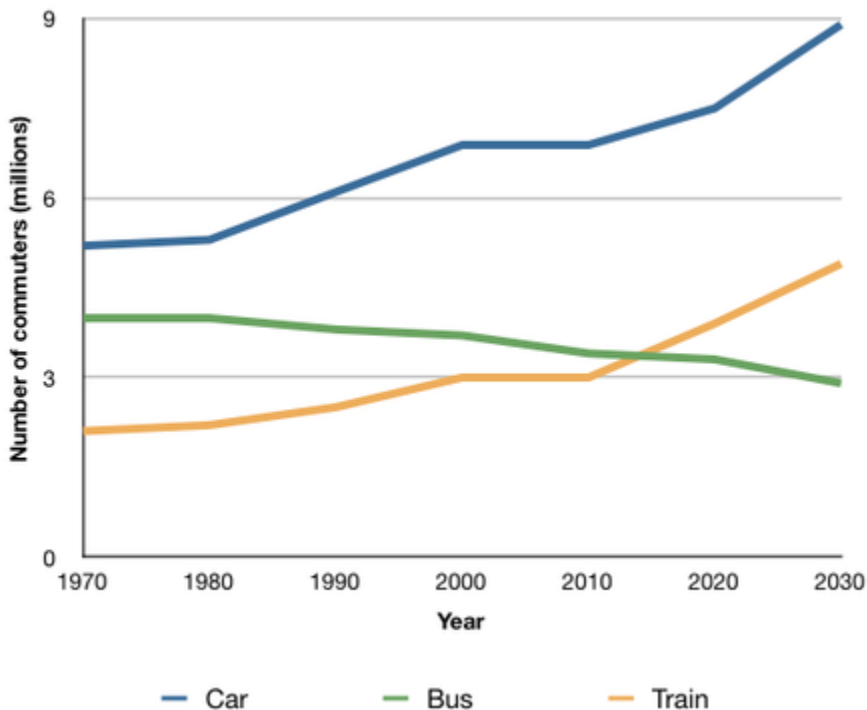
"Raise" (raised) is almost always a verb. You probably won't use it for task 1:

- The Government **raises** the price of cigarettes every year.
- Charities work to **raise** the standard of living in developing countries.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: full essay

The graph below shows the average number of UK commuters travelling each day by car, bus or train between 1970 and 2030.



Here's the essay I wrote with my students' help:

The line graph compares figures for daily travel by workers in the UK using three different forms of transport over a period of 60 years.

It is clear that the car is by far the most popular means of transport for UK commuters throughout the period shown. Also, while the numbers of people who use the car and train increase gradually, the number of bus users falls steadily.

In 1970, around 5 million UK commuters travelled by car on a daily basis, while the bus and train were used by about 4 million and 2 million people respectively. In the year 2000, the number of those driving to work rose to 7 million and the number of commuting rail passengers reached 3 million. However, there was a small drop of approximately 0.5 million in the number of bus users.

By 2030, the number of people who commute by car is expected to reach almost 9 million, and the number of train users is also predicted to rise, to nearly 5 million. By contrast, buses are predicted to become a less popular choice, with only 3 million daily users.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: 'while' sentences

In writing task 1, you usually need to make comparisons. A good way to do this is to write a complex sentence using the word 'while'. I wrote two such sentences in my [essay](#) last week. Look carefully at where I put the comma in each sentence.

1) 'while' at the beginning of the sentence:

While the numbers of people who use the car and train increase gradually, the number of bus users falls steadily.

2) 'while' in the middle of the sentence:

In 1970, around 5 million UK commuters travelled by car on a daily basis, while the bus and train were used by about 4 million and 2 million people respectively

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: maps essay

Here's my full essay for [this map question](#):

The diagrams illustrate some changes to a small island which has been developed for tourism.

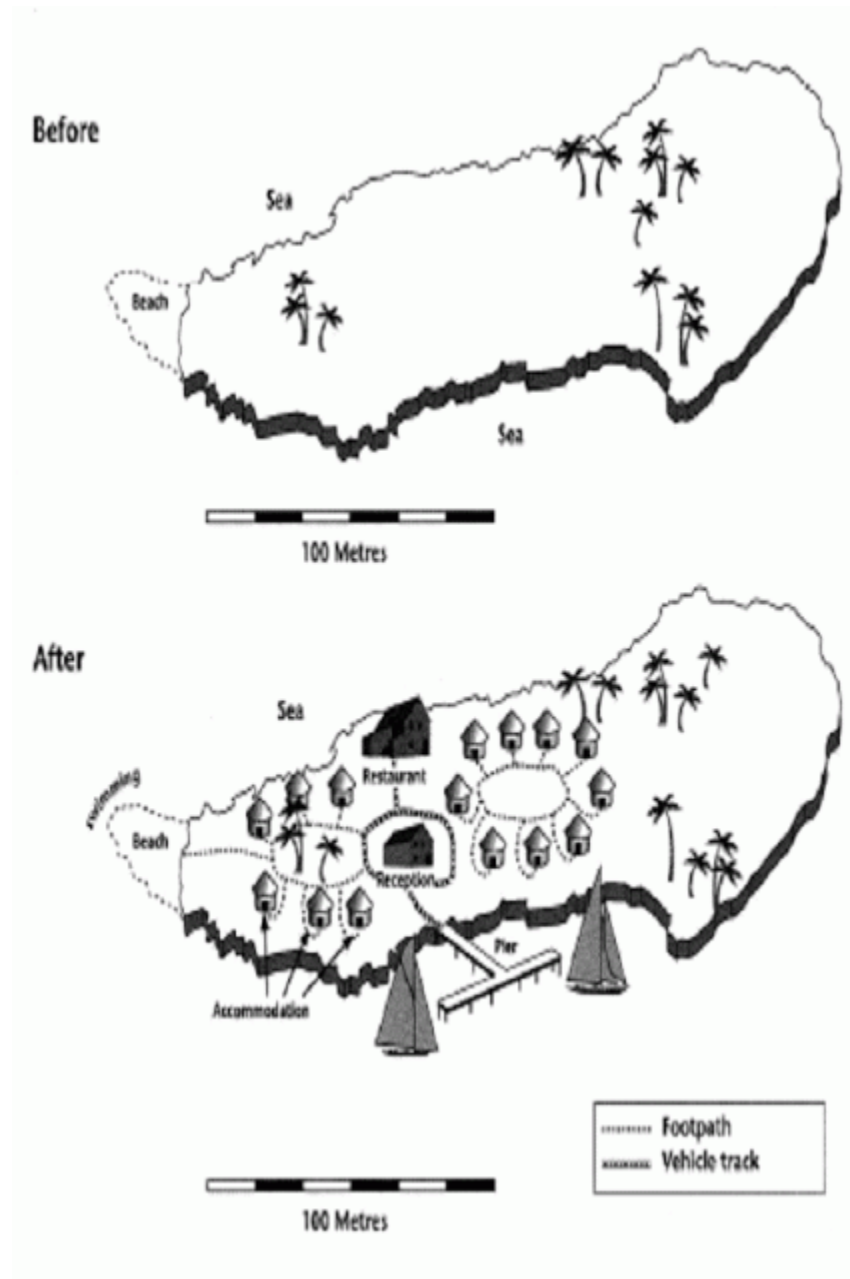
It is clear that the island has changed considerably with the introduction of tourism, and six new features can be seen in the second diagram. The main developments are that the island is accessible and visitors have somewhere to stay.

Looking at the maps in more detail, we can see that small huts have been built to accommodate visitors to the island. The other physical structures that have been added are a reception building, in the middle of the island, and a restaurant to the north of the reception. Before these developments, the island was completely bare apart from a few trees.

As well as the buildings mentioned above, the new facilities on the island include a pier, where boats can dock. There is also a short road linking the pier with the reception and

restaurant, and footpaths connect the huts. Finally, there is a designated swimming area for tourists off a beach on the western tip of the island.

(175 words, band 9)



--

IELTS Writing Task 1: did you analyse?

Did you analyse the [map essay](#) I wrote last week, or did you just read it quickly? Here are some things that you might have noticed if you analysed it carefully:

Range of verb tenses, and use of both active and passive:

- has been developed, have been built
- has changed
- can be seen
- is, are, include
- was

Phrases and collocations that would impress the examiner:

- with the introduction of tourism
- new features
- main developments
- the island is accessible
- small huts*
- to accommodate visitors
- physical structures
- in the middle of, to the north of
- completely bare apart from
- where boats can dock*
- a designated swimming area
- the western tip* of the island

***huts**, **dock** and **tip** might be the words that most impress the examiner in this essay. Can you think why? Does this surprise you?

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: look carefully!

It's really important that you take time to notice and select the main features for your description of a graph, chart or diagram.

Percentages of mobile phone owners using various mobile phone features

	2006	2008	2010
Make calls	100	100	99
Take photos	66	71	76
Send & receive text messages	73	75	79
Play games	17	42	41
Search the Internet	no data	41	73
Play music	12	18	26
Record video	no data	9	35

Look at the table above and a student's summary of main features below.

Overall, it can be seen that the people who used mobile phones for making calls were at the top in all three years. However, it is noticeable that there is no record of Internet usage and video recording in 2006.

I told the student that I thought she had missed some of the key features shown in the table. What main features can you see if you look more carefully?

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: the main features

Last week I wrote about [looking carefully](#) to find the main features before you start your description of a graph, chart or diagram. In the table below, I've highlighted my choices for the main features (in purple).

Percentages of mobile phone owners using various mobile phone features

	2006	2008	2010
Make calls	100	100	99
Take photos	66	71	76
Send & receive text messages	73	75	79
Play games	17	42	41
Search the Internet	no data	41	73
Play music	12	18	26
Record video	no data	9	35

Here's my paragraph describing the information highlighted above:

It is clear that between 2006 and 2010 the main reason why people used their mobile phones was to make calls. However, during the same period there was a marked increase in the popularity of other mobile phone features, with the most dramatic increase being seen in the use of mobiles to search the Internet.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: the details

After describing the main features or general trends shown on a graph or chart, we need to describe specific details. It's important to include some numbers and make some comparisons.

Whenever a chart shows years, I describe the details starting with the first year and the highest figure(s). Here's an example paragraph about the year 2006:

In 2006, 100% of mobile phone owners used their phones to make calls, while the next most popular uses of mobiles were for text messaging (73%) and taking photos (66%).

By contrast, less than a fifth of owners played games or music on their phones, and there were no figures for users doing Internet searches or recording video.

After this, I would write a final paragraph containing a few key numbers for the other two years (2008 and 2010). I'll show you my full essay next week.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: mobile phones essay

Here's my full essay about the table in [last week's lesson](#):

The table compares the percentages of people using different functions of their mobile phones between 2006 and 2010.

Throughout the period shown, the main reason why people used their mobile phones was to make calls. However, there was a marked increase in the popularity of other mobile phone features, particularly the Internet search feature.

In 2006, 100% of mobile phone owners used their phones to make calls, while the next most popular functions were text messaging (73%) and taking photos (66%). By contrast, less than 20% of owners played games or music on their phones, and there were no figures for users doing Internet searches or recording video.

Over the following 4 years, there was relatively little change in the figures for the top three mobile phone features. However, the percentage of people using their phones to access the Internet jumped to 41% in 2008 and then to 73% in 2010. There was also a significant rise in the use of mobiles to play games and to record video, with figures reaching 41% and 35% respectively in 2010.

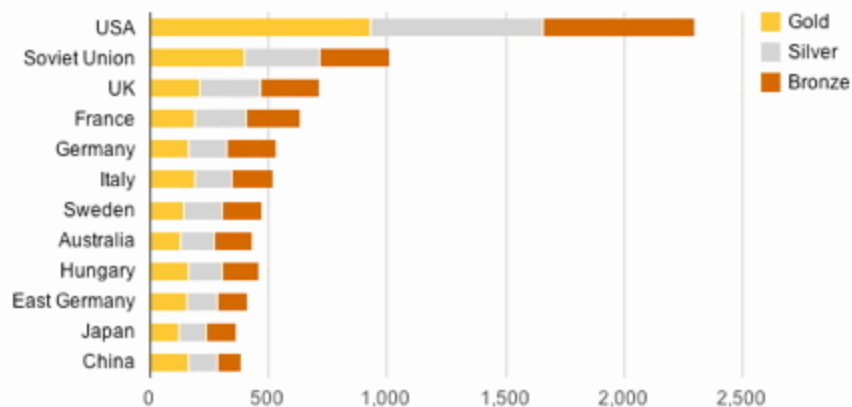
Note:

The above essay isn't perfect, but it's still good enough for a band 9. You are not expected to write a masterpiece in only 20 minutes.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: stacked bar chart essay

The chart below shows the total number of Olympic medals won by twelve different countries.



The bar chart compares twelve countries in terms of the overall number of medals that they have won at the Olympic Games.

It is clear that the USA is by far the most successful Olympic medal winning nation. It is also noticeable that the figures for gold, silver and bronze medals won by any particular country tend to be fairly similar.

The USA has won a total of around 2,300 Olympic medals, including approximately 900 gold medals, 750 silver and 650 bronze. In second place on the all-time medals chart is the Soviet Union, with just over 1,000 medals. Again, the number of gold medals won by this country is slightly higher than the number of silver or bronze medals.

Only four other countries - the UK, France, Germany and Italy - have won more than 500 Olympic medals, all with similar proportions of each medal colour. Apart from the USA and the Soviet Union, China is the only other country with a noticeably higher proportion of gold medals (about 200) compared to silver and bronze (about 100 each).

(178 words, band 9)

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IELTS Writing Task 1: language for comparing

If you look carefully at the [bar chart essay](#) I wrote last week, you'll find some good phrases for comparing. See if you can adapt them to other task 1 questions.

- The chart compares... in terms of the number of...
- ...is by far the most... **OR** ...has by far the highest number of...
- the figures for... tend to be fairly similar
- In second place on the chart is...*
- The number of... is slightly higher than...
- Only four other countries have...
- ...all with similar proportions of...
- ...is the only country with a noticeably higher proportion of...

***Note:** Only use phrases like "in second place" if the chart shows some kind of competition. Don't write "in first / second place" if the chart shows unemployment or health problems!

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: different introductions

Have you ever tried writing several different introductions for the same question? It's a useful exercise. Take this question for example:

The table below shows the proportion of different categories of families living in poverty in Australia in 1999.

Family type	Proportion of people from each household type living in poverty
single aged person	6% (54,000)
aged couple	4% (48,000)
single, no children	19% (359,000)
couple, no children	7% (211,000)
sole parent	21% (232,000)
couple with children	12% (933,000)
all households	11% (1,837,000)

(Cambridge IELTS 4, page 31)

Here are 3 introductions that paraphrase the question in different ways. Notice that I sometimes use words from the table to help me.

- 1) The chart compares percentages of Australians from six different family types who were classed as poor in 1999.
- 2) The table gives information about poverty rates among six types of household in Australia in the year 1999.
- 3) The table compares different categories of Australian families in terms of the proportion of people living below the poverty line in each one.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: the most important skill

Probably the most important skill for task 1 is to be able to describe numbers correctly. Look at the table below.

Goods transported in UK (millions of tonnes)

Year	Road	Rail
1970	60	35
1980	65	38

It's useful to think about how to start your sentences. For example, here are some sentences about the year 1970:

- 1) 60 million tonnes of goods were transported by road.
- 2) The amount of goods transported by road totalled 60 million tonnes.
- 3) Road vehicles were used to transport 60 million tonnes of goods.

You should notice that it's much easier to begin with the number (sentence 1). This is how I usually prefer to write sentences for task 1.

Number 2 is good, but you might find that you repeat "the amount of goods" too many times if you only use this type of sentence.

Number 3 is the most difficult. You can't say "Road was used", so you have to add the word "vehicles". Most students make a mistake here.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: too many synonyms

Some students learn 10 different ways to write the word "shows" (e.g. the graph shows). They find words like depicts, indicates, reveals, displays, exhibits etc. But none of these words are really appropriate for the kind of essay we are writing.

I advise my students to keep it simple and avoid making mistakes. Just learn one or two different ways to write the same thing. For example:

- shows = illustrates / compares
- graph = line graph
- chart = bar chart / pie chart
- the number of = the figure for
- increased = rose / saw an increase / there was a rise

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: students' questions

Here are my answers to some questions about writing task 1:

1) Can I start my introduction like this: "It is on a line graph playing out over a 60 year time period that one sees...?"

No. That sentence looks very strange to me as a native speaker, and it won't impress the examiner. Just stick to the simple approach that I recommend in my task 1 lessons here on the website.

2) What will happen if my overview paragraph is different from what the examiner would write for an overview?

I tell my students to choose two main or general points for their overview (summary) paragraph. There are usually more than two main points to choose from, so don't worry about whether the examiner would choose something different. If your overview sentences summarise the information well, you'll be fine.

3) Is writing task 1 less important than task 2?

Yes. Task 1 is worth one third of your writing score. Task 2 is worth two thirds.

4) Can I write more than 150 words?

Yes. There is no maximum word count.

5) Is every word counted, even words like "a"?

Yes. All words are counted, even small words like "a" and "of".

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: comparing numbers

Can you work out what the missing words in the paragraph below are?

In 1970, around 5 million people travelled to work by car each day, _____ about 4 million who used the bus _____ 2 million who commuted by train. Over the next 30 years there was a significant increase in the number of car users, to almost 7 million, _____ a steady rise in rail passengers, to 3 million. _____, the number of bus commuters decreased slightly

CORRECT ANSWERS FROM SIMON:

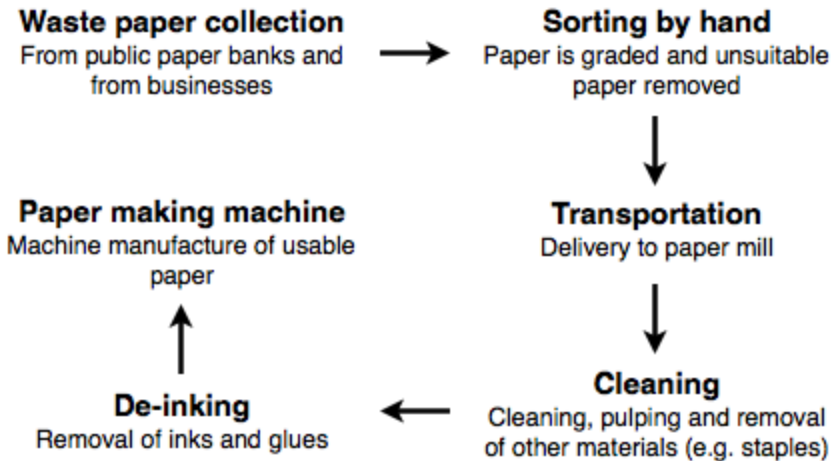
1. compared to (with)
2. and only (about / around)
3. and
4. By contrast (In contrast)

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: flow chart

A flow chart is really the same as a [process diagram](#), but I might use the term 'flow chart' when the process is shown without any pictures. Try writing 4 paragraphs about the flow chart below. I'll write something for next week.

The chart below shows the process of waste paper recycling.



--

IELTS Writing Task 1: flow chart essay

The chart below shows the process of waste paper recycling.

The flow chart shows how waste paper is recycled. It is clear that there are six distinct stages in this process, from the initial collection of waste paper to the eventual production of usable paper.

At the first stage in the paper recycling process, waste paper is collected either from paper banks, where members of the public leave their used paper, or directly from businesses. This paper is then sorted by hand and separated according to its grade, with any paper that is not suitable for recycling being removed. Next, the graded paper is transported to a paper mill.

Stages four and five of the process both involve cleaning. The paper is cleaned and pulped, and foreign objects such as staples are taken out. Following this, all remnants of ink and glue are removed from the paper at the de-inking stage. Finally, the pulp can be processed in a paper making machine, which makes the end product: usable paper.

(160 words, band 9)

Note: I joined the introduction and overview together because they were both short. Try to analyse the essay - why is it worth band 9?

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: why was it band 9?

The essay I shared [last Thursday](#) was good enough for a band 9, but why? Apart from being well organised and covering all of the necessary points, the essay contains some phrases that would ensure high vocabulary and grammar scores:

Vocabulary

- there are six **distinct** stages
- from the **initial** collection... to the **eventual** production
- members of the public
- directly from businesses
- separated according to its grade
- Stages four and five both **involve** cleaning
- foreign objects are taken out
- remnants of ink and glue
- the end product

Grammar

- six distinct stages, from... to... (good use of 'from-to' after comma)
- where members of the public... (inclusion of extra information between commas)
- This paper (use of 'this' to refer back to an idea in the previous sentence)
- with any paper... being (use of **with + ing** to add extra information)
- cleaned, pulped, taken out, removed (use of passive verb forms instead of nouns shown on the diagram)
- which makes the end product (use of relative pronoun 'which' to connect ideas)

Note: The best way to get a high grammar score is to reduce the number of mistakes that you make, not to use 'difficult' structures.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: past simple, past perfect

Look at the following description:

In 2002, the cost of an average house in the UK was around £130,000. By 2007, the average house price had risen to almost £190,000, but it fell back to just under £150,000 in 2008.

Notice the verbs used with "in" and "by":

- I used "in" with the past simple (was, fell).
- I used "by" with the past perfect (had risen) to give the idea that the increase had happened in the years leading up to 2007.
- To avoid worrying about "by + past perfect" you could write: "Between 2002 and 2007, the average house price rose to..."

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: technique review

Let's review the approach (method / technique) that I suggest for writing task 1. Your task 1 essay should contain three elements:

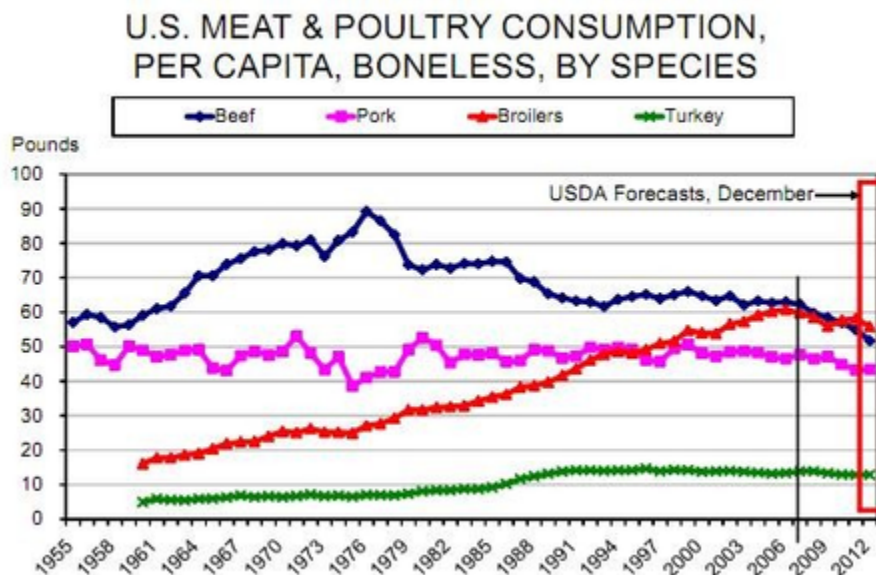
1. You need a short introduction to explain what the graph, chart or diagram shows. The easiest way to write this is by paraphrasing the question. The examiner will be impressed if you can paraphrase effectively.
2. You need an overview of the information. This means that you need to look at the "big picture", not the individual details. I recommend writing a short paragraph with two sentences that summarise two main things that you can see on the chart. If you forget the overview, you'll get a lower score.
3. Finally, you need to describe some specific details. This is where you select, describe and compare individual pieces of information (usually numbers). I try to separate this description of details into two paragraphs.

If you look through the task 1 lessons on this site, you'll see how I include these three elements in every essay.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: specific details.

The graph below shows trends in US meat and poultry consumption.



(Note: I'm ignoring the forecast and treating 2012 as a past year)

The line graph shows changes in the per capita consumption of beef, pork, broilers and turkey in the United States between 1955 and 2012.

It is noticeable that beef was by far the most popular of the four types of meat for the majority of the 57-year period. However, a considerable rise can be seen in the consumption of broilers, with figures eventually surpassing those for beef.

Between 1955 and 1976, US beef consumption rose from around 60 to a peak of 90 pounds per person per year. During the same period, consumption of broilers also rose, to nearly 30 pounds per person, while the figures for pork fluctuated between 50 and 40 pounds per person. Turkey was by far the least popular meat, with figures below 10 pounds per capita each year.

By 2012, the amount of beef consumed by the average American had plummeted to around 50 pounds, but the consumption of broilers had doubled since the 1970s, to approximately 55 pounds per capita. By contrast, there were no significant changes in the trends for pork and turkey consumption over the period as a whole.

Task:

Analyse the above paragraphs carefully. Look at which figures I decided to include, the language used for comparisons, and the way I divided the description into two separate paragraphs.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: avoid common mistakes

Here's some advice to help you avoid common mistakes in IELTS writing task 1:

1. Don't copy the question for your introduction. You should **paraphrase** the question (i.e. rewrite it using some different words).
2. Don't forget to separate your paragraphs clearly.
3. Don't forget to write a good summary/overview of the information. A quick one-sentence conclusion is not good enough. I prefer to put the overview straight after the introduction, and I try to write 2 sentences describing the information in general. You won't get a high score if you don't write a good overview.
4. Don't describe items separately (e.g. 2 lines on a graph). You should always try to **compare** things if it is possible to do so. Instead of describing 2 lines separately, compare the 2 lines at key points.
5. Don't try to describe every number on a chart or graph (unless there are only a few numbers). A key skill in task 1 is being able to **choose** the key information and describe or compare it well. I usually mention around 6 or 7 numbers in my main paragraphs.
6. Don't spend longer than 20 minutes on task 1. Practise spending 5 minutes on each of your 4 paragraphs. Stop yourself after 20 minutes; remember that task 2 is worth more marks.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: paraphrasing

If you've read my advice about [how to write an introduction](#) for writing task 1, you'll know that we simply paraphrase the question statement (we rewrite it using different words). A good idea would be to go through all of my sample task 1 reports, and make a list of paraphrased items.

Working back from my most recent lesson, here's some paraphrasing that I used in my introductions:

- graph = line graph
- trends in = changes in
- US consumption = consumption in the United States
- chart = flow chart (also: bar chart, pie chart, table)
- the process of paper recycling = how paper is recycled
- the diagram = the figure
- shows = illustrates
- to produce forecasts = to forecast
- shows = compares
- the total number = the overall number
- various mobile phone features = different functions of mobile phones
- maps show = diagrams illustrate
- an island before and after = some changes to an island

See if you can continue this list. I'm sure you'll find it useful to have a large paraphrasing [repertoire](#).

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: nouns and verbs

Charts and tables usually show nouns rather than verbs. However, you need to find the right verb in order to write a good sentence. Example:

Average distance in miles travelled per person per year

	1985	2000
Walking	255	237
Car	3,199	4,806

Don't write:

- Walking was 255 miles per person in 1985.
- Car was the highest form of transport.

Do write:

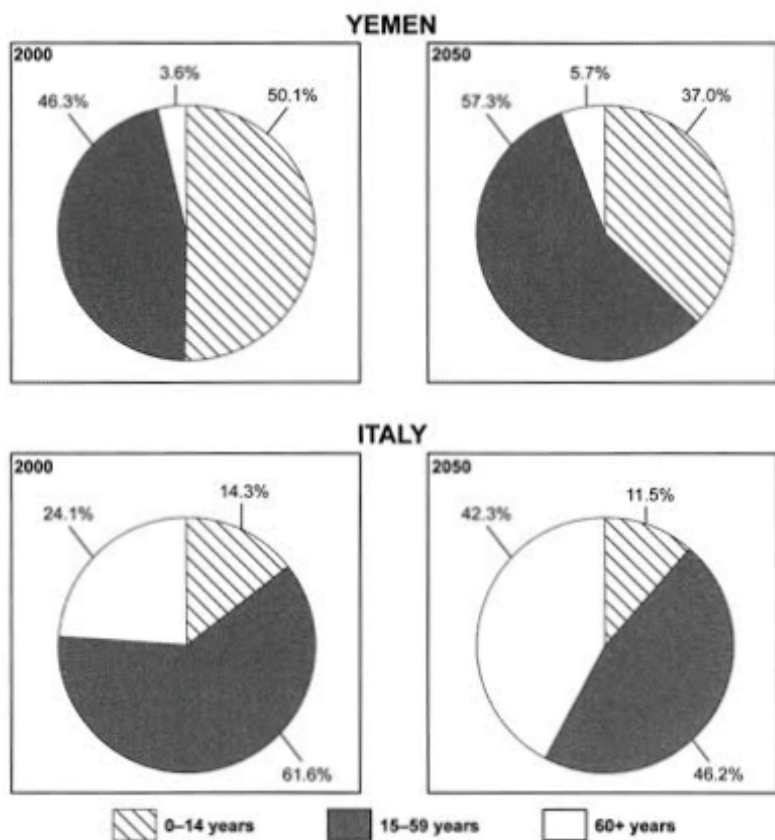
- The average person walked 255 miles in 1985.
- People travelled more miles by car than by any other form of transport.

(Table taken from Cambridge IELTS 6, page 52)

The charts below give information on the ages of the populations of Yemen and Italy in 2000 and projections for 2050.

Summarise the information by selecting and reporting the main features, and make comparisons where relevant.

Write at least 150 words.



The pie charts compare the proportions of people falling into three distinct age groups in Yemen and Italy in two different years.

It is clear that Italy had the older population in the year 2000, and that the same is predicted for the year 2050. The populations of both countries are expected to age over the fifty-year period.

In the year 2000, just over half of the population of Yemen was aged 14 or under, while most Italians (61.6%) fell into the 15 to 59 age group, and only 14.3% were children under 15 years of age. People aged 60 or over accounted for almost a quarter of the Italian population, but only 3.6% of the inhabitants of Yemen.

By 2050, the proportion of children under 15 is predicted to drop in both countries, most noticeably in Yemen where the figure is expected to fall by 13.1%. On the other hand, the figures for elderly people are expected to rise, by 2.1% in Yemen and a massive 18.2% in Italy. Finally, it is anticipated that the 15 to 59 age group will grow by around 10% in Yemen, but shrink by around 15% in Italy.

--

A real-life example of IELTS writing

A student sent me [this link](#) to a BBC article about unemployment. It's a fantastic real-life example of the kind of language that I often use in my task 1 reports.

Here's part of the article with some useful language highlighted:

The UK unemployment rate has fallen to its lowest level since 2009, official figures show. At 7.4%, this is the lowest rate since the February-to-April period in 2009. The number of people out of work fell by 99,000 to 2.39 million in the three months to October.

In Northern Ireland the unemployment rate was slightly higher at 7.5%, while Scotland's figure was 7.1%. The North East of England had the highest unemployment rate, at 10.1%, while the lowest rate was 5.6% in the East of England.

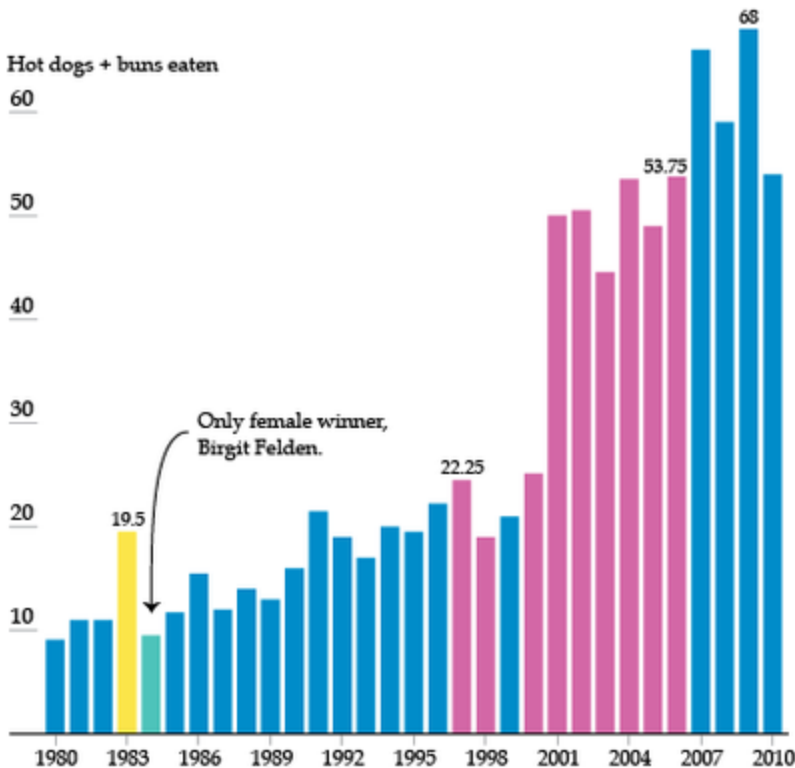
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IELTS Writing Task 1: 'hot dog' bar chart

I enjoyed writing today's report about the chart below!

Nathan's Hot Dog Eating Contest

Nathan's hot dog eating contest is held in Brooklyn's Coney Island every 4th of July. The current record of 68 hot dogs and buns consumed in 15 minutes is held by American Joey Chestnut. Prior to Chestnut's reign, Takeru Kobayashi of Japan won six years in a row.



Note: I've underlined some good phrases.

The bar chart shows the number of hot dogs and buns eaten in 15 minutes by the winners of 'Nathan's Hot Dog Eating Contest' in Brooklyn, USA between 1980 and 2010.

It is noticeable that the number of hot dogs and buns eaten by winners of the contest increased dramatically over the period shown. The majority of winners were American or Japanese, and only one woman had ever won the contest.

Americans dominated the contest from 1980 to 1996, and the winning number of hot dogs and buns consumed rose from only 8 to around 21 during that time. 1983 and 1984 were notable exceptions to the trend for American winners. In 1983 a Mexican won the contest after eating 19.5 hot dogs, almost double the amount that any previous winner had eaten, and 1984 saw the only female winner, Birgit Felden from Germany.

A Japanese contestant, Takeru Kobayashi, reigned as hot dog eating champion for six years from 2001 to 2006. Kobayashi's winning totals of around 50 hot dogs were roughly double the amount that any previous winner had managed. However, the current champion, American Joey Chestnut, took hot dog eating to new heights in 2009 when he consumed an incredible 68 hot dogs and buns in the allotted 15 minutes.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: describing numbers

Probably the most important skill for writing task 1 is being able to describe numbers correctly. IELTS candidates make a lot of basic mistakes in this area.

Take the simple table below for example. It shows the percentages of people who used two different forms of communication in the year 2012.

Form of communication	2012
Text message	95%
Email	52%

Can you write one correct sentence to describe the numbers in the table? Here is the big mistake that examiners see all the time:

In 2012, text message was 95%, while email was only 52%.

Can you see what the problem is here? Try translating the sentence into your language exactly as it is. Does it make sense?

FROM SIMON

Here's the problem:

You can't say "text message was 95%".

"Text message" wasn't anything! The figure "95%" is a percentage of PEOPLE who communicated BY text message.

Be careful with this. Many IELTS candidates write things like "the USA was 95%" when the information refers to the percentage of PEOPLE in the USA.

So here's my correct sentence for the lesson above:

In 2012, 95% of people communicated by text message, while only 52% of people sent or received emails.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: correct the mistakes

The following sentences were written about the table in [this](#) lesson. Try to correct or improve them.

1. In 2006, make calls was 100% of mobile phone users.
2. Text messaging was in second place and taking photos was third.
3. Playing games and music were less popular, they had less than 20% each.
4. In 2010, the use of mobiles to play games was increased significantly.

FROM SIMON:

First, I'll try to explain what is wrong with each sentence:

1. You can't write "make calls was...". The subject of the sentence should be the percentage of people.
2. Using "second place, third place" makes this sound like a competition! Also, we should try to include some figures in this sentence.
3. "Playing games and music" didn't "HAVE" anything, so we need to find a different way to express this idea.
4. The passive "was increased" is wrong here. It should be a normal active sentence without the word "was".

Here are my example answers:

1. In 2006, 100% of mobile phone owners used their phones to make calls.
2. The next most popular functions were text messaging (73%) and taking photos (66%).
3. Game and music applications were less popular, with under 20% of mobile phone owners using these features.
4. In 2010, the use of mobiles to play games increased significantly.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: pie chart and table

If you get a question like [this one](#) from Cambridge IELTS book 8, you don't need to worry about comparing the two charts. Just describe them separately:

WRITING TASK 1

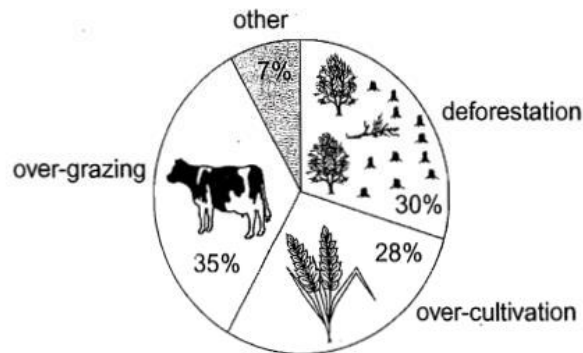
You should spend about 20 minutes on this task.

The pie chart below shows the main reasons why agricultural land becomes less productive. The table shows how these causes affected three regions of the world during the 1990s.

Summarise the information by selecting and reporting the main features, and make comparisons where relevant.

Write at least 150 words.

Causes of worldwide land degradation



Causes of land degradation by region

Region	% land degraded by...			Total land degraded
	deforestation	over-cultivation	over-grazing	
North America	0.2	3.3	1.5	5%
Europe	9.8	7.7	5.5	23%
Oceania*	1.7	0	11.3	13%

* A large group of islands in the South Pacific including Australia and New Zealand

1. Introduction: say what each chart shows
2. Overview: write one general sentence about the pie chart, and one about the table
3. Details: describe the pie chart
4. Details: describe the table

Here's an example 'overview'. Notice that I write a separate sentence about each chart, and I paraphrase several of the words from the question.

Overview (paragraph 2):

It is clear from the pie chart that there are three principal reasons why farmland becomes degraded, and over-grazing is the main one. The table shows that Europe had a far higher proportion of unproductive land than Oceania or North America in the 1990s.

Task: Find the examples of paraphrasing in the paragraph above

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: add a comparison

In last week's [video lesson](#) I followed some easy steps to build the following sentence:

The number of Japanese tourists who travelled abroad increased dramatically from just under 5 million to around 15 million between 1985 and 1995, a rise of about 10 million in 10 years.

The next step after writing this sentence about Japanese tourists would be to add a comparison with tourists from the other countries shown on the graph or chart. Let's use the chart below as an example (numbers represent millions of tourists who travelled abroad).

	1985	1995
Japan	4.9	15.1
Australia	7.1	7.2
Canada	6.0	5.5

Here's my original sentence about Japan, with a comparison sentence about Australia and Canada. Look carefully at how I construct the comparison sentence. If you want a good score in writing task 1, these are the kinds of sentences that you need to be able to write!

The number of Japanese tourists who travelled abroad increased dramatically from just under 5 million to around 15 million between 1985 and 1995, a rise of about 10 million in 10 years. By contrast, the number of Australians who visited other countries remained stable, at just over 7 million, and the figure for Canada fell slightly, from 6 million travellers in 1985 to 5.5 million in 1995.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: 'overview' not conclusion

You don't need to write a conclusion for IELTS writing task 1. You need to write an "overview" of the information.

But why don't you need to write a conclusion? What's the difference between a conclusion and an overview?

First, a conclusion is really a final judgement, decision or opinion. This is perfect for the task 2 essay, but task 1 asks you to write a description without analysis or opinions. On the other hand, an "overview" is a simple description of the main points. It is a summary of the information shown in the graph or chart.

Second, a conclusion should be at the end of a piece of writing. An overview or general summary could go either at the end or near the beginning. Personally, I think it's a good idea to describe the main features of the graph or chart near the beginning of your essay.

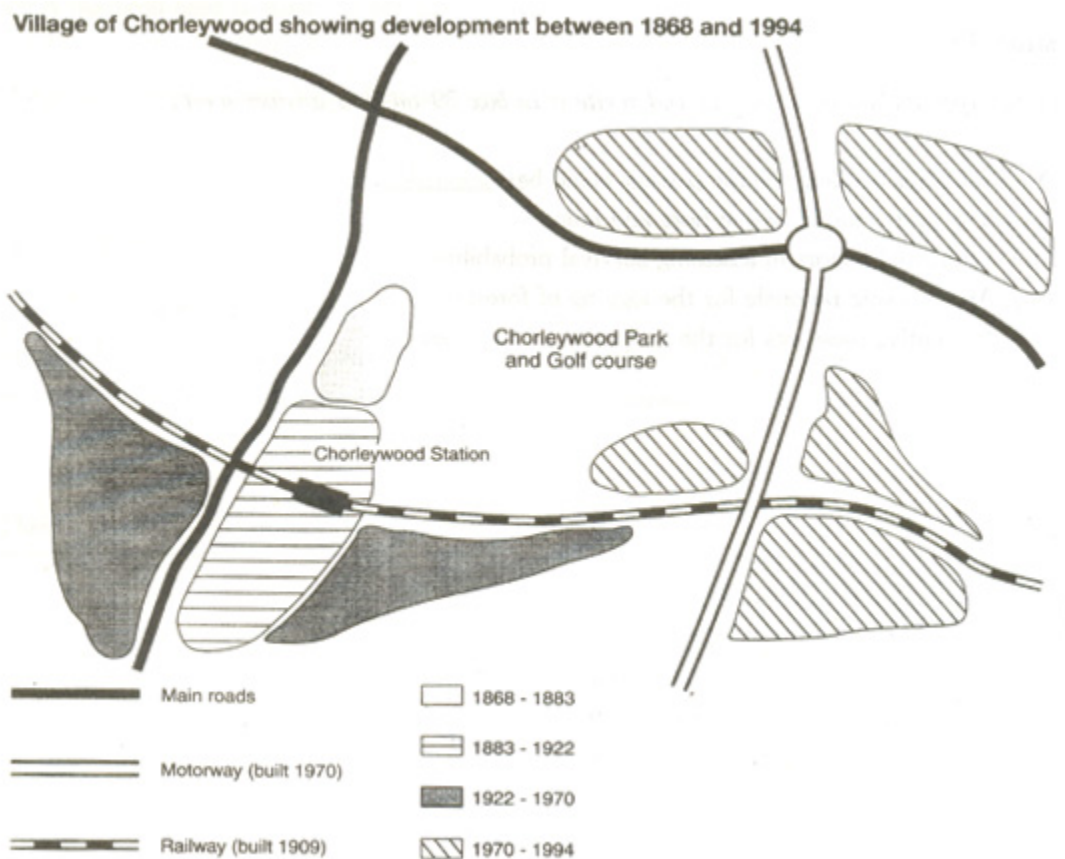
So, my suggested essay structure for task 1 looks like this:

1. Introduction: what does the chart show?
2. Overview / summary: what are the most noticeable features?
3. Specific details: try to write 2 paragraphs.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: map essay

Here is a band 9 answer for [this question](#):



The map shows the growth of a village called Chorleywood between 1868 and 1994.

It is clear that the village grew as the transport infrastructure was improved. Four periods of development are shown on the map, and each of the populated areas is near to the main roads, the railway or the motorway.

From 1868 to 1883, Chorleywood covered a small area next to one of the main roads. Chorleywood Park and Golf Course is now located next to this original village area. The village grew along the main road to the south between 1883 and 1922, and in 1909 a railway line was built crossing this area from west to east. Chorleywood station is in this part of the village.

The expansion of Chorleywood continued to the east and west alongside the railway line until 1970. At that time, a motorway was built to the east of the village, and from 1970 to 1994, further development of the village took place around motorway intersections with the railway and one of the main roads.

Don't just read this essay once. Spend some time analysing it:

- In what order did I describe the information shown on the map?
- What information did I choose for paragraphs 3 and 4?
- What good vocabulary does the essay contain?

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: ages and age groups

It's easy to make small mistakes when describing ages and age groups. Here are some examples that should help.

One person:

- He is 10 years old.
- He is a 10-year-old.
- He is aged 10.

More than one person:

- The children in the class are all 10 years old.
- It is a class of 10-year-olds (or "10-year-old children").
- The children in the class are all aged 10.

Age groups with more than one person:

- The chart shows the preferred hobbies of children (who are) between 10 and 12 years old.
- The chart shows the preferred hobbies of 10- to 12-year-olds (or "10- to 12-year-old children").
- The chart shows the preferred hobbies of children aged 10 to 12.

Note:

If you miss the hyphens (-), it's not a big problem. It won't affect your score.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: easy introductions

Task 1 introductions should be fast and easy. Just paraphrase the question statement (rewrite it in your own words). If you practise this technique, you will be able to start the writing test with confidence.

Look at this question statement from Cambridge IELTS book 2, page 95:

The table below shows the figures for imprisonment in five countries between 1930 and 1980.

I'll change 3 elements of this sentence:

1. table shows = bar chart compares
2. figures for imprisonment = number of people in prison
3. between... and... = over a period of

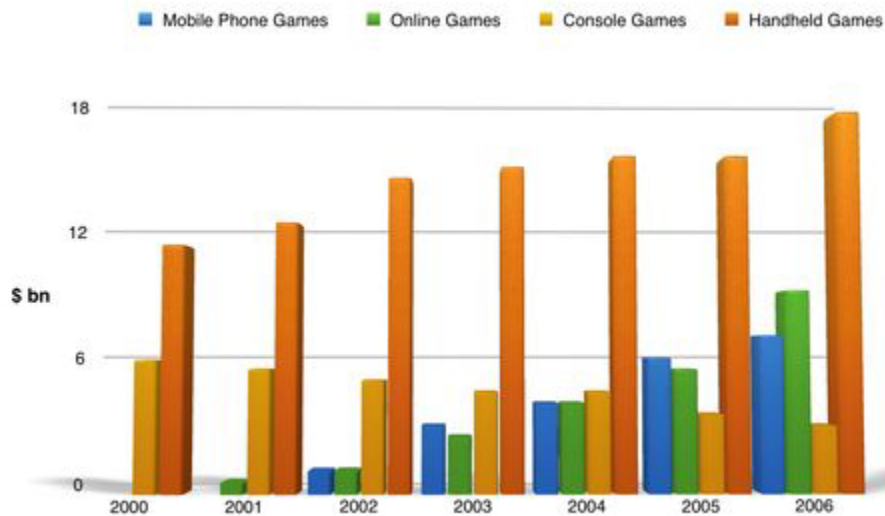
So, here's my paraphrased introduction:

The bar chart compares the number of people in prison in five different countries over a period of 50 years.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: bar chart essay

Here's my full essay for [last week's question](#):



The bar chart compares the turnover in dollars from sales of video games for four different platforms, namely mobile phones, online, consoles and handheld devices, from 2000 to 2006.

It is clear that sales of games for three out of the four platforms rose each year, leading to a significant rise in total global turnover over the 7-year period. Sales figures for handheld games were at least twice as high as those for any other platform in almost every year.

In 2000, worldwide sales of handheld games stood at around \$11 billion, while console games earned just under \$6 billion. No figures are given for mobile or online games in that year. Over the next 3 years, sales of handheld video games rose by about \$4 billion, but the figure for consoles decreased by \$2 billion. Mobile phone and online games started to become popular, with sales reaching around \$3 billion in 2003.

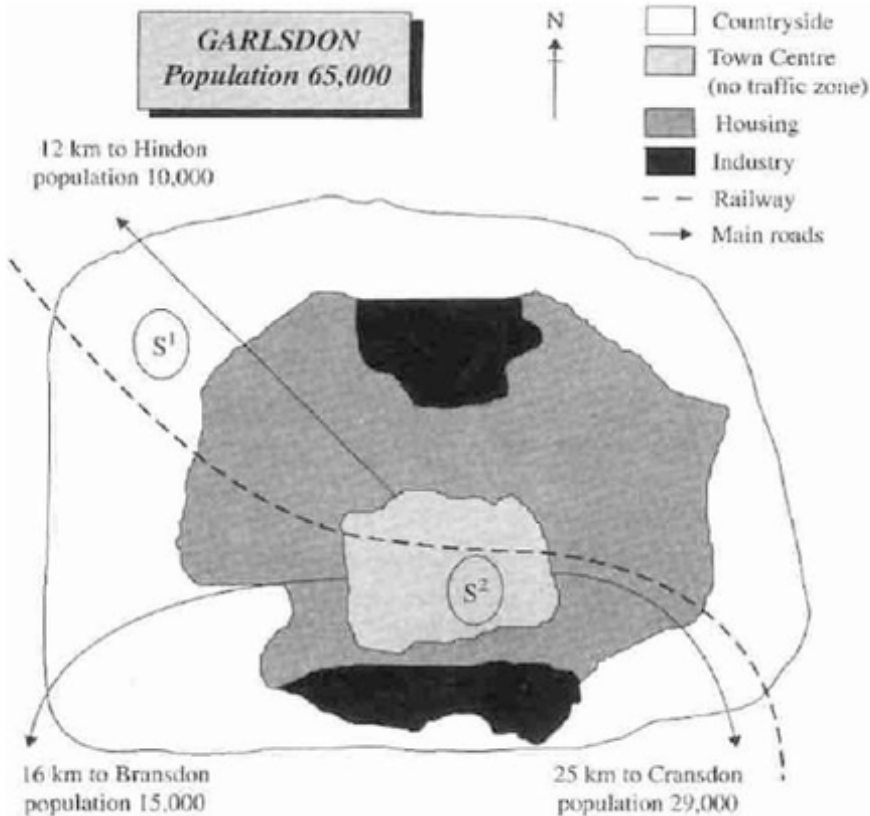
In 2006, sales of handheld, online and mobile games reached peaks of 17, 9 and 7 billion dollars respectively. By contrast, turnover from console games dropped to its lowest point, at around \$2.5 billion

--

Look at the following question, then compare the two reports on the next page. I wrote both myself, the first one in August 2011 and the second one in April 2014. I did not look at the first report when writing the second one.

It's interesting that my first two paragraphs (the introduction and overview) are almost identical in each report. You can see that I always use the same approach when writing these paragraphs. On the other hand, I made different decisions when writing paragraphs 3 and 4 (describing specific details). I wouldn't say that one essay is better than the other; I just think it's interesting to compare two ways of answering the same question.

The map below is of the town of Garlsdon. A new supermarket



Essay 1

The map shows two potential locations (S1 and S2) for a new supermarket in a town called Garlsdon.

The main difference between the two sites is that S1 is outside the town, whereas S2 is in the town centre. The sites can also be compared in terms of access by road or rail, and their positions relative to three smaller towns.

Looking at the information in more detail, S1 is in the countryside to the north west of Garlsdon, but it is close to the residential area of the town. S2 is also close to the housing area, which surrounds the town centre.

There are main roads from Hindon, Bransdon and Cransdon to Garlsdon town centre, but this is a no traffic zone, so there would be no access to S2 by car. By contrast, S1 lies on the main road to Hindon, but it would be more difficult to reach from Bransdon and Cransdon. Both supermarket sites are close to the railway that runs through Garlsdon from Hindon to Cransdon.

(171 words, band 9)

Essay 2

The map compares two potential locations for the building of a new supermarket in a town called Garlsdon.

The main difference between the two sites is that one is located in the countryside outside the town, whereas the other is in the town centre. Both potential sites are close to the railway, and reasonably near to a main road.

The first possible site for the supermarket (S1) is located in an area of countryside to the north west of Garlsdon. It is close to the railway line and to a main road connecting Garlsdon to the smaller town of Hindon. It is also situated near to the residential housing area of Garlsdon.

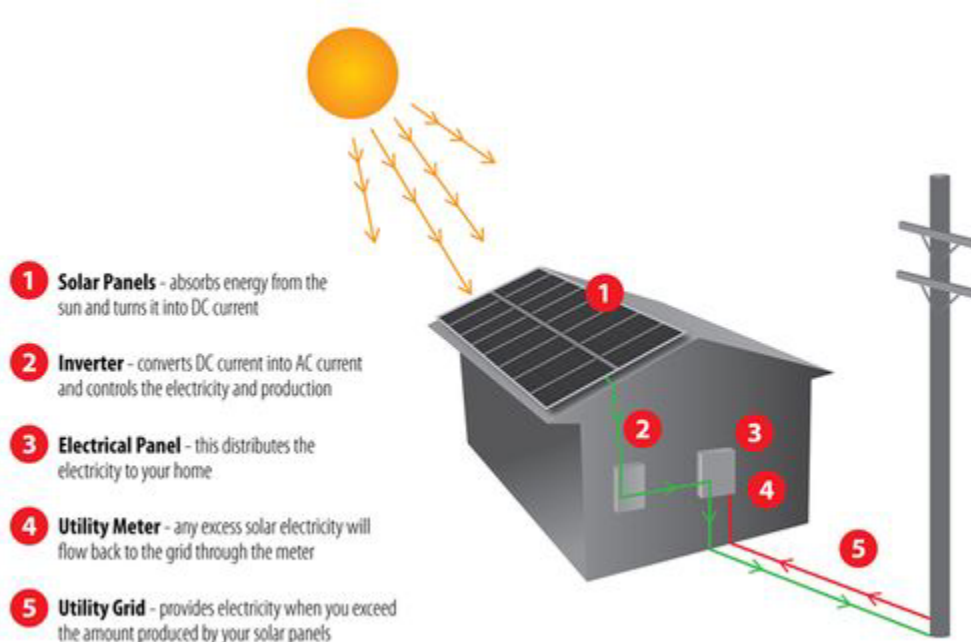
The second site (S2), by contrast, is in Garlsdon town centre. It is also accessible by rail, but not by road because the town centre is a no-traffic zone. Despite this, the main roads to Cransdon, Bransdon and Hindon are not too far away. The distance to Garlsdon's housing area is similar to the distance from S1 to the same area.

(174 words, band 9)

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: 'solar panel' process

Here's my full report for the [solar panel](#) process diagram:



The picture illustrates the process of producing electricity in a home using solar panels.

It is clear that there are five distinct stages in this process, beginning with the capture of energy from sunlight. The final two steps show how domestic electricity is connected to the external power supply.

At the first stage in the process, solar panels on the roof of a normal house take energy from the sun and convert it into DC current. Next, this current is passed to an inverter, which changes it to AC current and regulates the supply of electricity. At stage three, electricity is supplied to the home from an electrical panel.

At the fourth step shown on the diagram, a utility meter in the home is responsible for sending any extra electric power outside the house into the grid. Finally, if the solar

panels do not provide enough energy for the household, electricity will flow from the utility grid into the home through the meter.

Note:

I've underlined examples of the two language features that make process diagram descriptions special: 'steps' language, and passive verbs.

--

IELTS Writing Task 1: make a list of collocations

Collocations (explained in more detail in [this lesson](#)) are groups of words that are often found together.

I'm sure you already know several common collocations for writing task 1 (e.g. a significant rise, reach a peak), but why not make a list of as many as possible? Let's start the list by looking through my recent task 1 lessons.

Collocations for any topic:

- distinct stages
- final steps
- at the... stage
- a significant rise
- over a/the period

Collocations for specific topics:

- produce electricity
- the capture of energy
- take energy, convert energy
- global turnover
- sales figures, worldwide sales

See if you can add to the list. I'll give you some more advice about collocations this weekend.

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IELTS Writing Task 1: fill the gaps

The following sentences describe the bar chart on page 51 of Cambridge IELTS book 2. What words would you use to fill the gaps?

1. The chart compares the _____ of hours of free time that men and women had between 1998 and 1999.
2. It is _____ that men enjoyed more leisure time than women.
3. Unemployed males had just _____ 80 hours of leisure time per week.

4. The figures for retired men and women were exactly the same as _____ for the unemployed.
5. Housewives enjoyed the next highest _____ of spare time.
6. Part-time working women enjoyed only 3 extra hours of leisure _____ to those who worked full-time.

CORRECT ANSWERS FROM SIMON:

1. number
2. clear
3. over / under (it depends whether you have seen the chart or not)
4. THOSE
5. amount
6. COMPARED

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IELTS Writing Task 1: shows, compares, illustrates

I often meet students who have learnt ten different ways to paraphrase "the graph shows". If you look in a dictionary, you'll find many synonyms for the word "show" (e.g. display, exhibit, parade, depict, convey). But is it a good idea to use these synonyms?

The answer is no.

First, most synonyms of the word "show" are not appropriate for descriptions of a graph or chart. The phrase "the graph exhibits" will look very strange to the examiner. Second, if you learn ten synonyms, you'll probably waste time deciding which one to use.

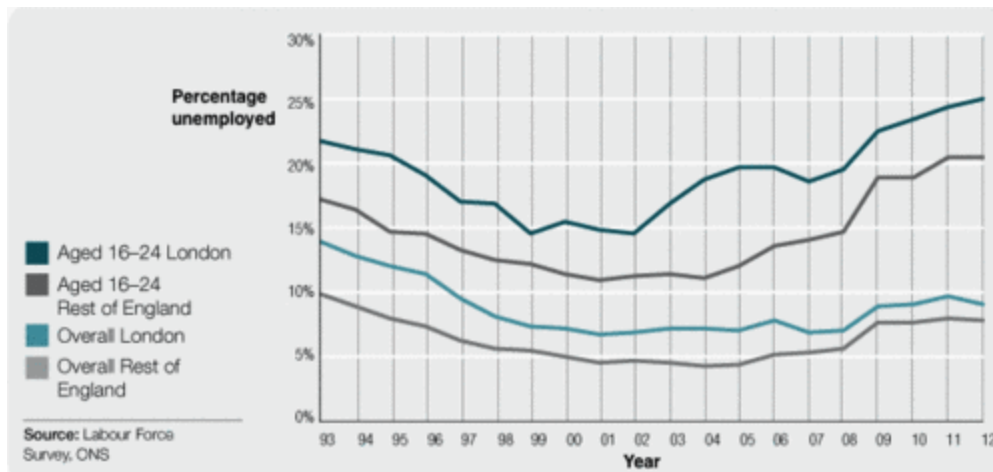
I tell my students to remember just two synonyms for "shows": **compares** and **illustrates** (e.g. the bar chart compares; the diagram illustrates). It won't help your score if you use a strange synonym that you found in a dictionary.

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IELTS Writing Task 1: introduction and overview

Let's look at an introduction and overview for the line graph below.

The graph below shows changes in young adult unemployment rates in England between 1993 and 2012.



Introduction and overview paragraphs:

The line graph compares levels of unemployment among 16 to 24-year-olds with overall unemployment figures over a period of 20 years in England.

It is clear that the proportion of young adults who were unemployed at any time between 1993 and 2012 was significantly higher than the overall proportion of adults without work. Unemployment rates for both groups of adults were consistently higher in London than in the rest of England.

Analysis:

Can you see examples of paraphrasing in my introduction? Can you see which two main points I chose for my overview?

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IELTS Writing Task 1: describing details

Here are my two "details" paragraphs for the question that I started in last week's [lesson](#). Notice that I only mention three of the years, but I make lots of comparisons between the four groups of people.

Fill the gaps to complete my description:

In 1993, around 18% of English 16 to 24-year-olds living _____ London were unemployed, but the figure for those living in the capital was 5% higher, at 22%. Similarly, the overall adult unemployment rate in London, at 14%, was 4% higher than the rate in the rest of England. While levels of joblessness fell significantly over the _____ 10 years, the trend for higher levels in London and among young adults _____.

Young adult unemployment in England rose _____ between 2002 and 2012, from 12% to 21% outside London, and from around 15% to a _____ of 25% in the capital. By contrast, the proportions of all adults without work _____ below 10%, both in London and in the rest of the country.

ANSWERS FROM SIMON

Here are the words that I used when I wrote the paragraphs:

1. outside
2. following
3. continued
4. dramatically
5. peak
6. remained

I don't think anyone chose the same words as I did, so check my answers carefully to see what you can learn!

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IELTS Writing Task 1: nouns and verbs

When describing changes I prefer to avoid words like *soar*, *rocket* and *plummet* because they are too "sensationalist" - they exaggerate too much, and are more journalistic than academic in style.

Instead, we can demonstrate good control of grammar by using words like **increase**, **rise** and **fall** as both nouns and verbs:

- London saw **a significant increase** in the cost of homes. (noun)
- The cost of homes in London **increased significantly**. (verb)
- There was **a rise** in house prices between 1990 and 1995. (noun)
- House prices **rose** between 1990 and 1995. (verb)
- There was **a 7% fall** in the average house price in Tokyo. (noun)
- The average Tokyo house price **fell** by 7%. (verb)

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IELTS Vocabulary: soar, rocket, plummet

In Thursday's [lesson](#) I suggested that you should avoid using words like *soar*, *rocket* and *plummet* when describing changes on a graph or chart. I explained that these words exaggerate too much, and that they are not 'academic'.

But someone asked this sensible question:

How can we get a high score for lexical resource (vocabulary) if we only use common words like 'increase', 'rise' and 'fall'?

The quick answer is that it's better to use 'less common vocabulary' for other aspects of your description. If you analyse [this](#) band 9 essay, you'll see that I used common words like *rose*, *decreased*, *reaching* and *dropped* to describe changes, but I managed to use 'less common vocabulary' for other aspects of my description e.g. global turnover, devices, namely, platform.

I'll explain more about how to get a high vocabulary score tomorrow

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IELTS Writing Task 1: two different charts

From Simon: I've been busy moving house today, which is why this lesson is so late!

Question: How should you structure your task 1 report if the question shows two different charts (e.g. a line graph and a pie chart)?

Answer: It's easy. Just follow the 4-paragraph structure below:

1. Introduction - say what each chart shows (one or two sentences)
2. Overview - write one sentence about each chart, describing its main feature
3. Describe the first chart in detail
4. Describe the second chart in detail

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IELTS Writing Task 1: too many numbers!

Students often find it difficult to describe tables with lots of numbers.

The table below contains 36 numbers. We can't describe all of them, so which ones should we choose? How many numbers do we need to include?

The table below shows changes in the numbers of residents cycling to work in different areas of the UK between 2001 and 2011.

Area	2001	2011	Percentage Change (%)
Inner London	43,494	106,219	144
Brighton and Hove	3,168	6,635	109
Bristol, City of	8,108	15,768	94
Manchester	4,610	8,426	83
Newcastle upon Tyne	1,781	3,223	81
Sheffield	2,365	4,267	80
Cardiff	3,514	5,791	65
Gateshead	816	1,314	61
Exeter	2,304	3,542	54
Leeds	4,189	6,237	49
Liverpool	2,686	3,970	48
Outer London	33,836	49,070	45

