

Preparing for the IELTS test with Holmesglen Institute of TAFE

The writing component

The IELTS writing test takes one hour. In this time you are required to complete two tasks.

TASK ONE is a report based on some graphic information provided on the question paper. With few exceptions, the graphic information will come in one of five forms – a line graph, bar graph, pie chart, table or diagram illustrating a process. You are required to describe the information or the process in a report of 150 words. This task should be completed in 20 minutes. It is important that you are familiar with the language appropriate to report writing generally and to each of the five types of report.

TASK TWO is an essay based on a topic given on the question paper. You should write at least 250 words in 40 minutes.

It is important that you keep within the advised time limits as Task Two carries more weight in your final band score than Task One. Remember that illegible handwriting will reduce your final score.

Writing task one: single line graph

Task description

You will be given a graph with a single line. Your task is to write a 150 word report to describe the information given in the graph. You are not asked to give your opinion.

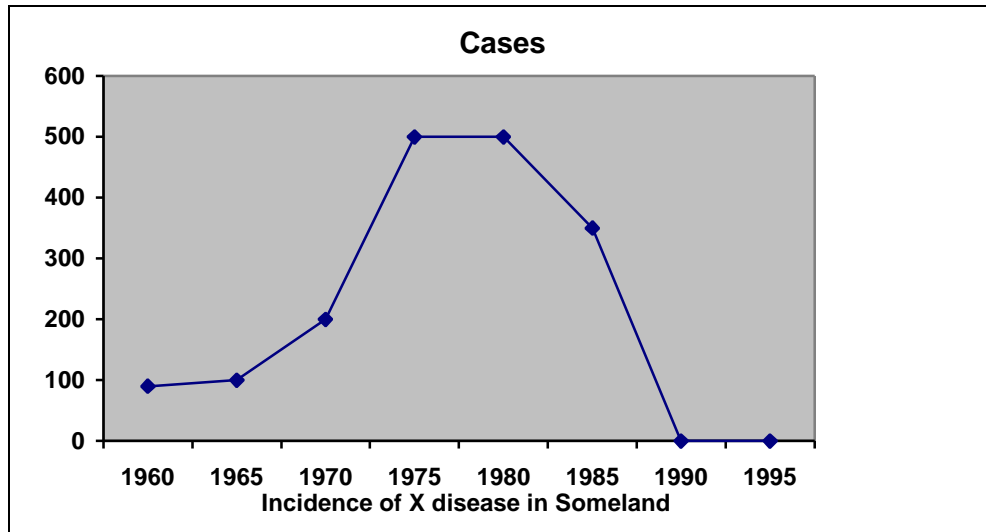
You should spend around twenty minutes on the task. Task one is not worth as many marks as task two and so you should make sure that you keep within the recommended twenty minute time frame.

What is being tested is your ability to:

- ◆ objectively describe the information given to you
- ◆ report on a topic without the use of opinion
- ◆ use suitable language to describe the graph

Sample task

You should spend about 20 minutes on this task. Write a report for a university lecturer describing the information in the graph below. You should write at least 150 words.



When you've finished the task

How good is your answer? Check the guidelines on the next page and read the sample answer.

Guidelines for a good answer

Does the report have a suitable structure?

- ◆ Does it have an introduction, body and conclusion?
- ◆ Does it include connective words to make the writing cohesive within sentences and paragraphs?

Does the report use suitable grammar and vocabulary?

- ◆ Does it include a variety of sentence structures?
- ◆ Does it include a range of appropriate vocabulary?

Does the report meet the requirements of the task?

- ◆ Does it meet the word limit requirements?
- ◆ Does it describe the whole graph adequately?
- ◆ Does it focus on the important trends presented in the graphic information?

Sample answer

The graph shows the number of cases of X disease in Someland between the years 1960 and 1995. As an overall trend, it is clear that the number of cases of the disease increased fairly rapidly until the mid seventies, remained constant for around a decade at 500 cases before dropping to zero in the late 80s.

In 1960, the number of cases stood at approximately 100. That number rose steadily to 200 by 1969 and then more sharply to 500 in 1977. At this point the number of cases remained stable until 1984 before plummeting to zero by 1988. From 1988 to 1995 Someland was free of the disease.

In conclusion, the graph shows that the disease was increasingly prevalent until the 1980s when it was eradicated from Someland.

What do you think?

What is your opinion of this sample answer? How well does it meet the requirements of the guidelines? Read the next page for a teacher's comments on this answer.

Teacher's comments on the sample answer

Here is what an IELTS teacher said about the sample answer.

The report **structure** is easy to follow and logical with a clear introduction, body and conclusion. The candidate uses cohesive words to connect pieces of information and make the writing flow such as 'until' and 'before' in the second sentence.

The candidate uses a variety of **grammatical structures and vocabulary** so that the writing is not repetitive.

In terms of **task requirements** the report is a little short but this is because the simple graph used as an example does not have sufficient information for the candidate to describe. In the real IELTS test the graph will have more information and so the need to look for trends will be even greater than in this example.

Strategies for improving your IELTS score

Selecting information

It is important that you describe the whole graph fully. However, this does not mean that you should note every detail. In most cases there will be too much information for you to mention each figure. You will therefore need to summarise the graph by dividing it into its main parts. This is what we mean by describing the trends.

For example, in a chronological line graph it might seem sensible to describe the information year by year or period by period. The graph above gives the information in five year sections so we could write our report like this:

The number of cases of X disease started at 50 in 1965 and then went up gradually to 100 in 1965 and continued up to 200 in 1970 and then went up more sharply to 380 in 1975.

While this way of describing the information may be accurate, it does not meaningfully sum up the information in the graph. In fact, the information in the graph would most meaningfully be described in four chronological sections following the shape of the graph.

In the Sample Task, the graph shows four main trends:

- ◆ first, a gradual increase from 1960 to 1968
- ◆ second, a steeper increase from 1968 to 1977
- ◆ third, a plateau from 1977 to 1983
- ◆ fourth, a drop from 1983 to 1988

The structure of the report must show these four main trends clearly.

Report structure

Your report should be structured simply with an introduction, body and conclusion. Tenses should be used appropriately.

Introduction

Use two standard opening sentences to introduce your report. These opening sentences should make up the first paragraph. Sentence one should define what the graph is about; that is, the date, location, what is being described in the graph etc. For example:

The graph shows the number of cases of X disease in Someland between the years 1960 and 1995 ...

Notice the tense used. Even though it describes information from the past, the graph shows the information in the present time.

Notice that the sample opening sentence does not simply copy the words used on the graphic material. Copied sentences will not be assessed by the examiner and so you waste your time including them.

Describing the overall trend

Sentence two (and possibly three) might sum up the overall trend. For example:

It can be clearly seen that X disease increased rapidly to 500 cases around the 1980s and then dropped to zero before 1999, while Y disease fell consistently from a high point of nearly 600 cases in 1960 to less than 100 cases in 1995.

Notice the tense used. Here we are talking about the occurrence of the disease in the past.

Describing the graph in detail

The body of the report will describe the graph or graphs in detail. You will need to decide on the most clear and logical order to present the material. Line graphs generally present information in chronological order and so the most logical order for you to write up the information would, most probably be from earliest to latest. Bar graphs, pie charts are organised in different ways and so you need to decide on the organisation of each one.

Concluding sentences

Your report may end with one or two sentences which summarise your report to draw a relevant conclusion.

Grammar and vocabulary

Avoiding repetition

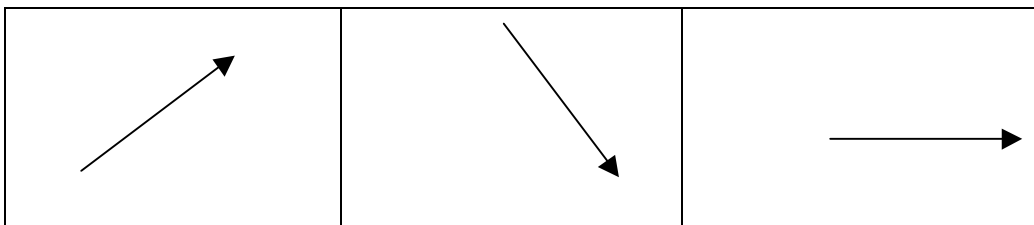
You will receive a higher mark if your writing uses a range of structures and vocabulary correctly rather than a limited number. For example, the candidate who writes:

The number of cases of X disease started at 50 in 1965 and then went up to 200 in 1970 and then went up to 500 in 1980 and then went down to zero in 1990.

will lose marks for being repetitive. You should therefore practise writing reports using a wide variety of terms to describe the different movements in the graphs and different structures to vary your writing.

Describing trends

Trends are changes or movements. These changes are normally expressed in numeric items, for example, population, production volumes or unemployment. There are three basic trends:



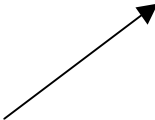
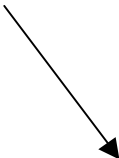

Expressing movement: nouns and verbs

For each trend there are a number of verbs and nouns to express the movement. We can use a verb of change, for example:

Unemployment levels **fell**

Or we can use a related noun, for example:

There was a **fall** in unemployment levels

Direction	Verbs	Nouns
	Rose (to) Increased (to) Went up (to) Climbed (to) Boomed	A rise An increase Growth An upward trend A boom (a dramatic rise)
	Fell (to) Declined (to) Decreased (to) Dipped (to) Dropped (to) Went down (to) Slumped (to) Reduced (to)	A decrease A decline A fall A drop A slump (a dramatic fall) A reduction
	Levelled out (at) Did not change Remained stable (at) Remained steady (at) Stayed constant (at) Maintained the same level	A levelling out No change
	Fluctuated (around) Peaked (at) Plateaued (at) Stood at (we use this phrase to focus on a particular point, before we mention the movement, for example: In the first year, unemployment stood at ...)	A fluctuation Reached a peak (of) Reached at plateau (at)

Describing the movement: adjectives and adverbs

Sometimes we need to give more information about a trend as follows:

There has been a **slight** increase in the value of the dollar
(degree of change)

Unemployment fell **rapidly** last year (the speed of change)

Remember that we modify a noun with an adjective (a **slight** increase) and a verb with an adverb (to increase **slightly**).

Describing the degree of change

Adjectives	Adverbs
dramatic	dramatically
sharp	sharply
huge	
enormous	enormously
steep	steeply
substantial	substantially
considerable	considerably
significant	significantly
marked	markedly
moderate	moderately
slight	slightly
small	
minimal	minimally

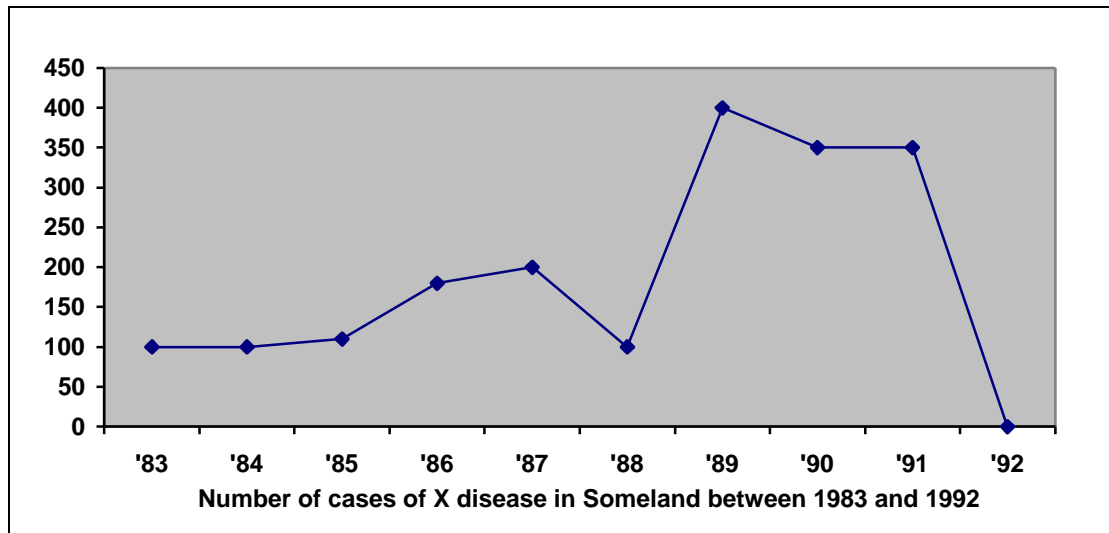
Describing the speed of change

Adjectives	Adverbs
rapid	rapidly
quick	quickly
swift	swiftly
sudden	suddenly
steady	steadily
gradual	gradually
slow	slowly

Exercise

Use the following terms and any others necessary to describe the graph below.

initially, stood at, dip/dipped, peak/peaked, level/levelled out



Describing a trend

We can describe a trend by looking at:

- ◆ the difference between two levels
- ◆ the end point of the trend

Describing the difference between two levels

This year unemployment has increased **by** 20,000 cases (the difference between this year and last year is 20,000 cases).

This year there has been an increase in unemployment **of** 5%.

Notice the prepositions. We use to increase **by** (with the verb) and an increase **of** (with the noun).

Describing the end point

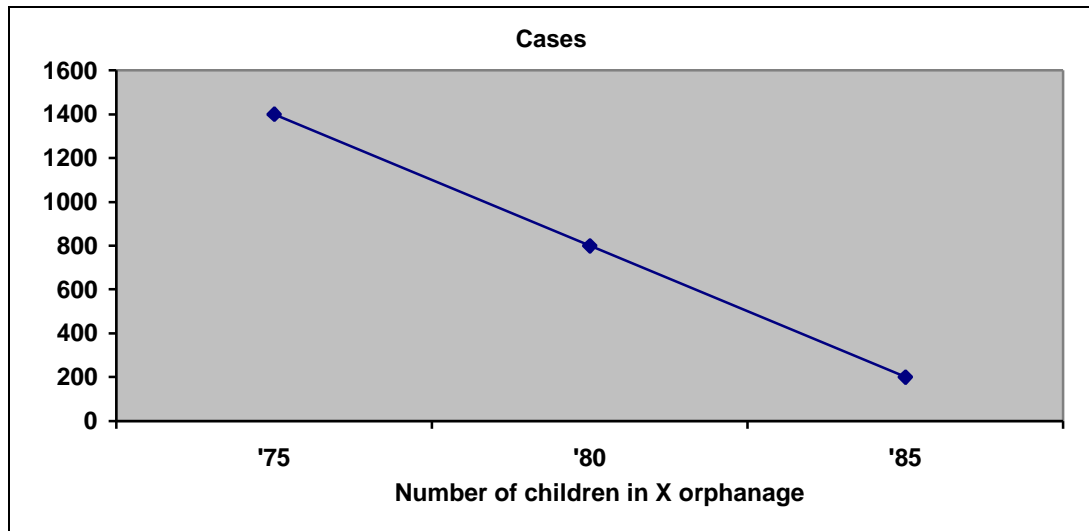
This year unemployment has risen to 10% (the end result is that unemployment is up to 10%).

This year there has been a rise in unemployment to 10%.

Notice the prepositions. We use to rise **to** (with the verb) and a rise **to** (with the noun).

Exercise

Write 3 sentences describing the graph below using **by**, **of** and **to**.



Expressing approximation

We use words to express approximation when the point we are trying to describe is between milestones on the graph.

just under
well under
roughly
approximately
about

just over
well over
nearly
around

Writing task one: double line graph

Task description

You will be given a graph with two lines. Your task is to describe the information given in the graph by writing a 150 word report. You are not asked to give your opinion.

You should spend around 20 minutes on the task.

What is being tested is your ability to:

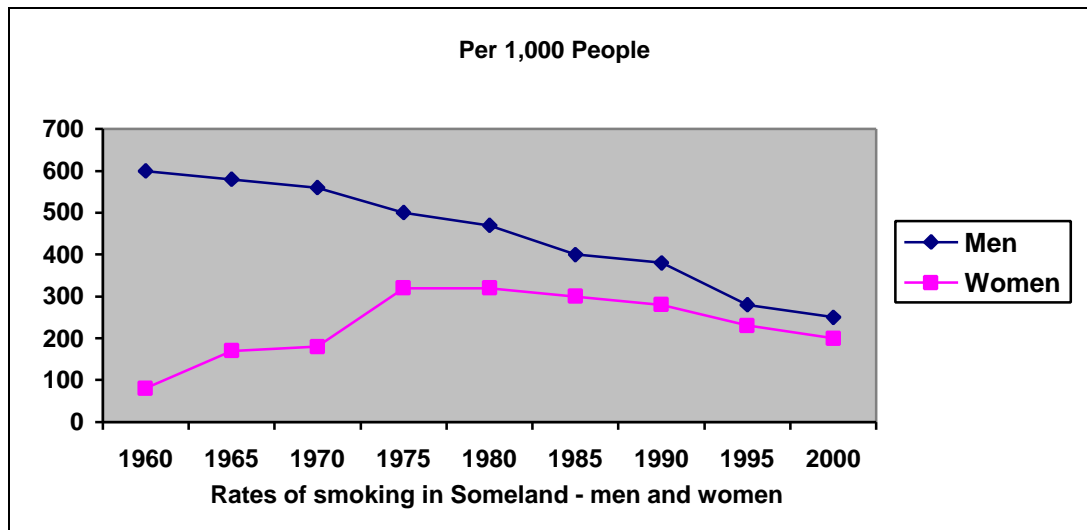
- ♦ objectively describe the information given
- ♦ compare and contrast
- ♦ report on an impersonal topic without the use of opinion
- ♦ use the language of graph description

Sample task

You should spend about 20 minutes on this task.

Write a report for a university lecturer describing the information in the graph below.

You should write at least 150 words.



Your task

Complete the task one report writing exercise above. Spend only 20 minutes. Then look at the guidelines and the sample answer below.

Guidelines for a good answer

Does the report have a suitable structure?

- ◆ Does it have an introduction, body and conclusion?
- ◆ Does it include connective words to make the writing cohesive within sentences and paragraphs?

Does the report use suitable grammar and vocabulary?

- ◆ Does it include a variety of sentence structures?
- ◆ Does it include a range of appropriate vocabulary?

Does the report meet the requirements of the task?

- ◆ Does it meet the word limit requirements?
- ◆ Does it describe the whole graph adequately?
- ◆ Does it focus on the important trends presented in the graphic information?

Now read sample answer one. How well does it follow the guidelines?

Sample answer one

The graph shows the rate of smoking in Someland.

In 1960, 600 men in every 1,000 was smoking. This number decreased gradually to 500 by 1974 and continued to decrease but more steeply to 300 in 1995. In contrast the rate of women smokers in 1960 was very low at only 80 in every 1,000. This number increased to 170 by 1968 and increased again but more steeply to 320 in 1977. The rate of female smokers then remained stable at 320 until 1984 at which point the figures began to decline and had dropped to 250 by 1995.

Teacher's comments on sample answer one

Here is what an IELTS teacher said about this sample answer:

The report **structure** lacks a clear introduction giving the parameters of the graph (should include who and when) and lacks a statement summing up the main trends. The report also lacks any conclusion.

The candidate uses a variety of **grammatical structures** and **vocabulary** so that the writing is not repetitive.

In terms of **task requirements**, the report is short because the introduction and conclusion sections are missing. However, the body of the report does describe the graph well.

Sample answer two

Now look at a better answer to this task. Notice how it follows the guidelines.

The graph compares the rate of smoking in men and women in Someland between the years 1960 and 2000. It can be clearly seen that the rate of smoking for both men and women is currently declining and that fewer women have smoked throughout the period.

In 1960, 600 men in every 1,000 was smoking. This number decreased gradually to 500 by 1974 and continued to decrease but more steeply to 250 in 2000. In contrast, the rate of smoking in women in 1960 was very low at only 80 in every 1,000. By 1968 this increased to 170, and increased again but more steeply to 320 in 1977. The rate of female smokers then remained stable at 320 until 1984 at which point the figures began to decline and had dropped to 200 by 2000.

In conclusion we can see that the rate of smoking in men dropped throughout the whole period but was always at a higher level than the female figures. The rate of smoking in women increased until 1977 but then decreased for the rest of the period.

Strategies for improving your IELTS score

Selecting information

In completing this task it is important that you describe the whole graph fully. However, this does not mean that you should note every detail. In most cases there will be too much information for you to mention each figure. You will therefore need to summarise the graph in meaningful segments, as we saw in the section on single line graphs.

Report structure

Like the single line graph, your report should be structured simply with an introduction, body and conclusion. Tenses should be used appropriately.

Use two standard opening sentences to introduce the graph and your report. These opening sentences should make up the first paragraph. Sentence one should define what the graph is about, that is the date, location, what is being described in the graph etc. For example:

The graph compares the rate of smoking between men and women in Someland between the years 1960 and 2000.

Notice that in the single line graph we said that 'the graph shows ...' but with two lines we can more accurately say 'the graph compares ...'

Notice the tense used. Even though it describes information from the past, the graph shows the information in the present time.

Notice that the sample opening sentence does not simply copy the words used on the graphic material. Copied sentences will not be assessed by the examiner and so you waste your time including them.

Sentence two (and possibly three) might sum up the overall trend. For example:

It can be clearly seen that the rate of smoking for both men and women is currently declining and that fewer women had smoked throughout the period.

Notice that the Present perfect tense is used. Here we are talking about the rate of smoking in the past and up to the present.

The body of the report will describe the graph or graphs in detail. You will need to decide on the most clear and logical order to present the material. Line graphs generally present information in chronological order and so the most logical order for you to write up the information would also, most probably, be from earliest to latest. Bar graphs, pie charts, etc are organised in different ways and so you need to decide on the organisation of each one.

Your report should end with one or two sentences which summarise your report or draw a relevant conclusion

Writing task one: bar graphs

Task description

You will be given one or more bar graphs. Your task is to describe the information given in the graph by writing a 150 word report. You are not asked to give your opinion.

You should spend around 20 minutes on the task.

What is being tested is your ability to:

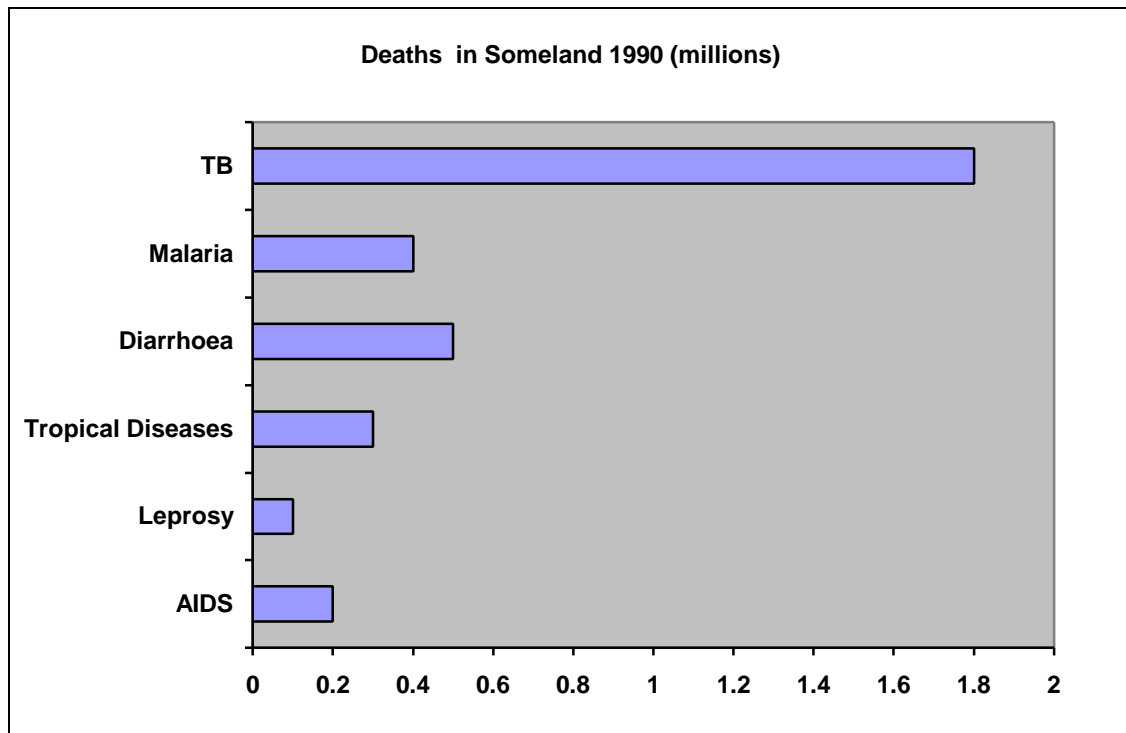
- ◆ objectively describe some graphic information
- ◆ compare and contrast
- ◆ report on an impersonal topic without the use of opinion
- ◆ use the language of graph description

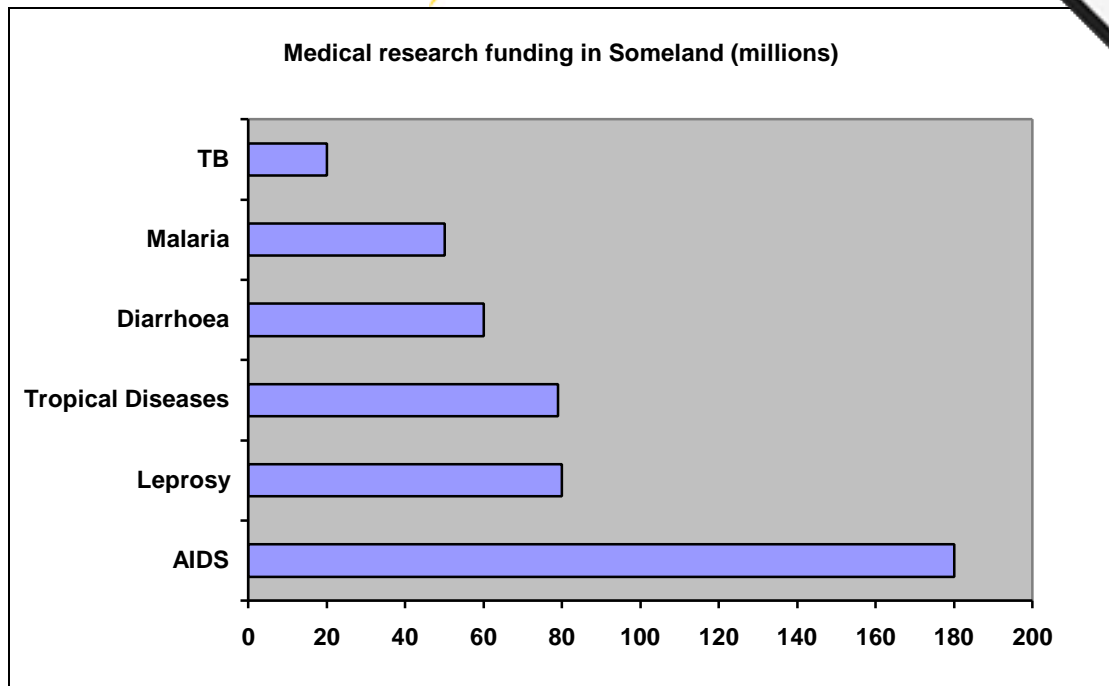
Sample task

You should spend about 20 minutes on this task.

Write a report for a university lecturer describing the information in the graphs below.

You should write at least 150 words.





Your task

Complete the Task One report exercise above. Spend only 20 minutes. Then look at the guidelines and the sample answer below.

Guidelines for a good answer

Does the report have a suitable structure?

- ◆ Does it have an introduction, body and conclusion?
- ◆ Does it include connective words to make the writing cohesive within sentences and paragraphs?

Does the report use suitable grammar and vocabulary?

- ◆ Does it include a variety of sentence structures?
- ◆ Does it include a range of appropriate vocabulary?

Does the report meet the requirements of the task?

- ◆ Does it meet the word limit requirements?
- ◆ Does it describe the graphs adequately?
- ◆ Does it focus on the important trends presented in the graphic information?

Sample answer one

The graphs compare the number of deaths caused by six diseases in Someland in 1990 with the amount of research funding allocated to each of those diseases. It can be clearly seen that the amount of research funding in many cases did not correlate with the seriousness of the disease in terms of numbers of deaths.

In 1990 there were around 0.2 million deaths from AIDS, 0.1 million deaths from leprosy, 0.3 million deaths from tropical diseases, 0.5 million deaths from diarrhoea, 0.4 million deaths from malaria and 1.8 million deaths from TB. These figures can be contrasted with the amount of funding allocated for each disease. In 1990 AIDS received 180 million dollars in research funding, leprosy 80 million dollars in research funding, tropical diseases 79 million dollars in research funding, diarrhoea 60 million dollars in research funding, malaria 50 million dollars and TB 20 million dollars in research funding.

In conclusion it is clear that funding allocation for disease research in Someland is not wholly determined by the number of deaths for which each disease is responsible in a given year.

Strategies for improving your IELTS score

Selecting information

In completing this task, it is important that you fully describe all of the graphic information given. However, this does not mean that you should note every detail. In most cases there will be too much information for you to mention each figure. You will therefore need to summarise the graph in meaningful segments. In other words, you will describe the significant trends in your report.

Report structure

Like the line graphs, your report should be structured simply with an introduction, body and conclusion. Tenses should be used appropriately.

Use two standard opening sentences to introduce the graph and your report. These opening sentences should make up the first paragraph. Sentence one should define what the graph is about, that is, the date, location, what is being described in the graph etc. For example:

The graphs compare the number of deaths caused by six diseases in Someland in 1990 with the amount of research funding allocated to each of those diseases.

Notice that in the single line graph we said that 'the graph shows... but with two bar graphs we can more accurately say 'the graphs compare ... '.

Notice that the Simple Past tense used. Even though it describes information from the past, the graph shows the information in the present time.

Notice that the sample opening sentence does not simply copy the words used on the graphic material. Copied sentences will not be assessed by the examiner and so you waste your time including them.

Sentence two (and possibly three) might sum up the overall trend. For example:

It can be clearly seen that the amount of research funding in many cases did not correlate with the seriousness of the disease in terms of numbers of deaths.

Notice the tense used. Here we are talking about 1990.

The body of the report will describe the graph or graphs in detail. You will need to decide on the most clear and logical order to present the material. In this case it might be best to work through the diseases one by one.

Ideally your report should end with one or two sentences which summarise your report or draw a relevant conclusion.

Grammar and vocabulary

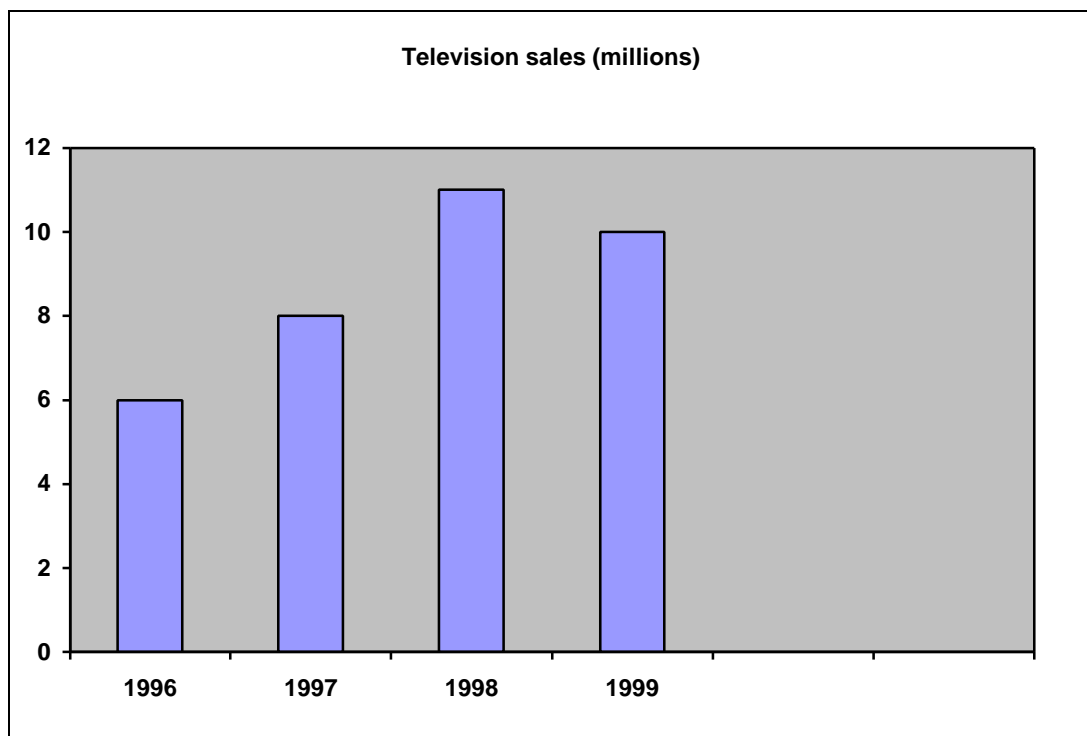
You will receive a higher mark if your writing uses a range of structures and vocabulary correctly rather than a limited number.

When describing some bar graphs you will sometimes use the same language as the line graphs. This will be the case if one axis of the bar graph gives a time scale. In that case, your report will generally describe the information in terms of time from the earliest event to the latest. For example:

In 1990 X fell.

In 1990 there was a rise in X.

Look at the following graph and read the description.



In this graph of Electro Inc's television sales between 1996 and 1999, we can see that purchases of televisions went up in 1996 and continued to rise steadily until 1998 when they dropped slightly.

In some cases, however, it will not be appropriate to describe the bar graphs in terms of time and different language will need to be used. For example, in the following graph we could not say:

In 1990 there was a rise in holiday makers from Indonesia.

because the word 'rise' implies that the graph also shows a lower number of holiday makers at an earlier time, which in fact it doesn't.



In this case we can say:

Someland was the most popular destination for holiday makers from Indonesia.

Writing task one: pie charts

Task description

You will be given one or more pie charts. Your task is to describe the information given in the graph by writing a 150 word report. You are not asked to give your opinion. You should spend around 20 minutes on the task.

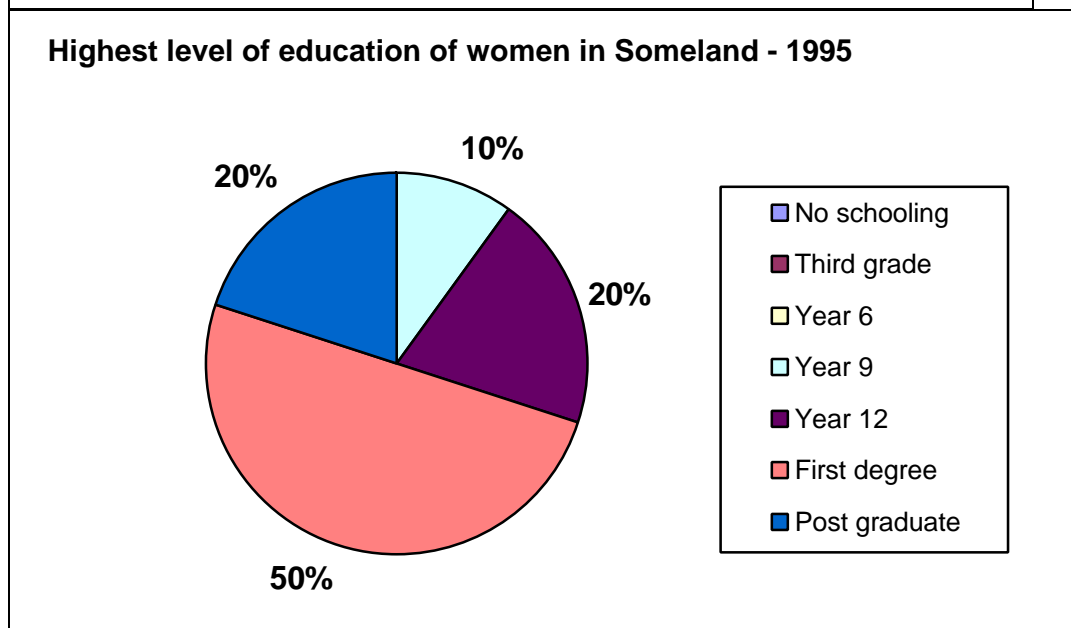
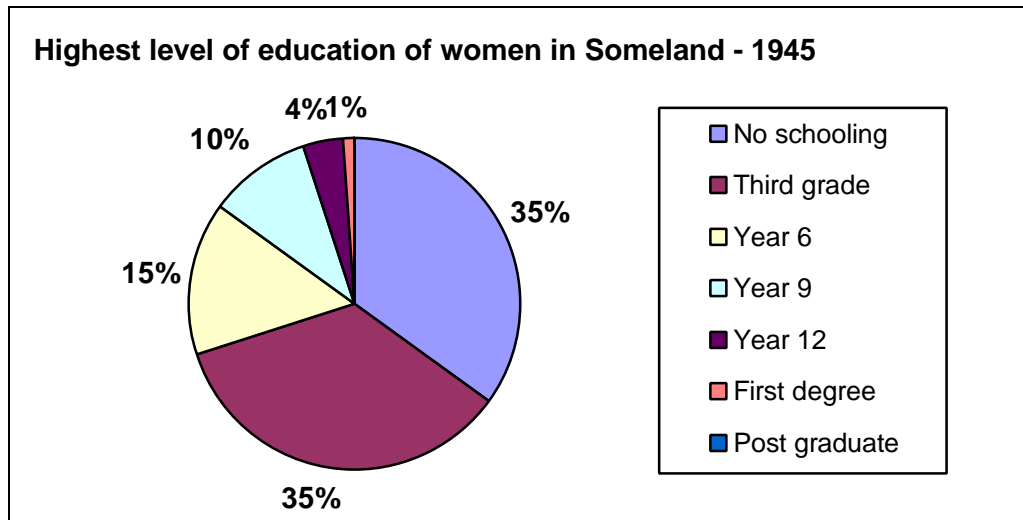
What is being tested is your ability to:

- ◆ objectively describe some graphic information
- ◆ compare and contrast
- ◆ report on an impersonal topic without the use of opinion
- ◆ use the language of graph description

Sample task

You should spend about 20 minutes on this task. Write a report for a university lecturer describing the information in the **two** graphs below.

You should write at least 150 words.



Your task

Complete the report exercise above. Spend only 20 minutes. Then look at the notes and the sample answer below.

Guidelines for a good answer

Does the report have a suitable structure?

- ◆ Does it have an introduction, body and conclusion?
- ◆ Does it include connective words to make the writing cohesive within sentences and paragraphs?

Does the report use suitable grammar and vocabulary?

- ◆ Does it include a variety of sentence structures?
- ◆ Does it include a range of appropriate vocabulary?

Does the report meet the requirements of the task?

- ◆ Does it meet the word limit requirements?
- ◆ Does it describe the whole graph adequately?
- ◆ Does it focus on the important trends presented in the graphic information?

Now read the sample answer. How well does it follow the guidelines?

Sample answer

The pie charts compare the highest level of education achieved by women in Someland across two years, 1945 and 1995. It can be clearly seen that women received a much higher level of education in Someland in 1995 than they did in 1945.

In 1945 only 30% of women completed their secondary education and 1% went on to a first degree. No women had completed post-graduate studies. This situation had changed radically by 1995. In 1995, 90% of women in Someland had completed secondary education and of those, half had graduated from an initial degree and 20% had gone on to post-graduate studies. At the other end of the scale we can see that by 1995 all girls were completing lower secondary, although 10% ended their schooling at this point. This is in stark contrast with 1945 when only 30% of girls completed primary school, 35% had no schooling at all and 35% only completed the third grade.

In conclusion, we can see that in the 50 years from 1945 to 1995 there have been huge positive developments to the education levels of women in Someland.

Teacher's comments on the sample answer

Here is what an IELTS teacher said about the sample answer.

The report **structure** is clear and well organised with an introduction, body and conclusion.

The candidate uses a variety of **grammatical structures and vocabulary** so that the writing is not repetitive.

In terms of **task requirements**, the report meets the word limit. Although the candidate has not included every figure presented in the charts, the answer does accurately reflect the content of the graphic material and gives a strong impression of the trend of change in the education of women which is the main point of the comparison of those particular charts.

The sample answer above is therefore a very good one.

Strategies for improving your IELTS score

Selecting information

In completing this task, it is important that you fully describe all of the graphic information given. However, this does not mean that you should note every detail. In most cases there will be too much information for you to mention each figure. You will therefore need to summarise the graph in meaningful segments. In other words, you will describe the significant trends in your report.

Report structure

As in the line graphs task, your report should be structured simply with an introduction, body and conclusion. Tenses should be used appropriately.

Use two standard opening sentences to introduce the graph or graphs and your report. These opening sentences should make up the first paragraph. Sentence one should define what the graph is about, that is the date, location, what is being described in the graphs etc. For example:

The pie charts compare the highest level of education achieved by women in Someland across two years, 1945 and 1995.

Notice that in the single line graph we said that 'the graph shows' but with two charts we can more accurately say 'the pie charts compare'.

Note the tense used. Even though it describes information from the past, the graph shows the information in the present time.

Notice that the sample opening sentence does not simply copy the words used on the graphic material. Copied sentences will not be assessed by the examiner and so you waste your time including them.

Sentence two (and possibly three) might sum up the overall trend. For example:

It can be clearly seen that women received a much higher level of education in Someland in 1995 than they did in 1945.

Notice the Simple Past tense is used. Here we are talking about what happened in the past.

The body of the report will describe the chart or charts in detail. You will need to decide on the most clear and logical order to present the material. In this case it might be best to work through the charts one by one.

Ideally your report should end with one or two sentences which summarise your report or draw a relevant conclusion.

Grammar and vocabulary

You will receive a higher mark if your writing uses a range of structures and vocabulary correctly rather than a limited number.

Pie charts generally show figures in percentages and your language in writing the report should reflect this. You will talk about 'the percentage of graduates' or the 'proportion of people who completed secondary school'.

Make sure that you are confident with comparatives and superlatives used to compare and contrast and the language used to describe pie charts.

Comparing and contrasting

One syllable

Adjectives with one syllable form their comparatives and superlatives like this:

cheap	cheaper	cheapest
large	larger	largest
bright	brighter	brightest

Exceptions:

good	better	best
bad	worse	worst

Two syllables

Some adjectives with two syllables form their comparatives and superlatives like this:

pretty	prettier	prettiest
happy	happier	happiest

But many form their comparatives and superlatives like this:

striking	more striking	most striking
-----------------	----------------------	----------------------

Although some can form their comparatives and superlatives like this:

common	more common	most common
clever	more clever / cleverer	most clever /

cleverest

Three or more syllables

All adjectives with three or more syllables form their comparatives and superlatives like this:

attractive	more attractive	most attractive
profitable	more profitable	most profitable
expensive	more expensive	most expensive

IELTS Preparation

Exercise

What are the comparative and superlative forms of these adjectives:

	COMPARITIVE	SUPERLATIVE
accurate		
certain		
convenient		
correct		
dangerous		
happy		
likely		
modern		
new		
possible		
probable		
up-to-date		

IELTS Preparation

Describing one part of the chart

Starting with the adjective:

The highest The greatest The lowest The most A significant The smallest The largest	percentage of proportion of number of	women cars sold holiday makers	are employed in the X category are red come from Spain
--	--	---	---

Starting with the subject:

Red is the Professional is the Spain is the	most second/third most least	popular prevalent common	car colour employment category holiday destination
--	---	---	---

IELTS Preparation

Describing two parts of the chart

Starting with the adjective:

As many Twice as many Three times as many Not as many	red cars women holiday makers	are sold are employed in X come from X	as ...
More Far more Much more Many more A lot more Substantially more Considerably more Significantly more Slightly more Fractionally more			than

IELTS Preparation

Starting with the subject:

Blue cars are Women are Spain is	as quite as just as nearly as almost as not as	common popular prevalent	as ...
	more much more far more substantially more considerably more slightly more fractionally more less much less far less considerably less fractionally less		than ...

Writing task one: tables

Task description

You will be given one table of figures. Your task is to describe the information given in the graph by writing a 150 word report. You are not asked to give your opinion. You should spend around 20 minutes on the task.

What is being tested in your ability to:

- ◆ objectively describe the information presented in a table
- ◆ compare and contrast
- ◆ report on an impersonal topic without the use of opinion
- ◆ use language appropriate to the description of tables

Sample task

You should spend about 20 minutes on this task. Write a report for a university lecturer describing the information in the table below. You should write at least 150 words.

Hours of leisure time per year in Someland							
	Teens	20s	30s	40s	50s	60s	70s +
Watching TV/videos	1,200	700	400	500	600	700	1,100
Socialising with 4 or less people	150	150	300	250	250	200	200
Socialising with 4 or more people	350	350	50	50	25	25	25
Individual exercise	150	100	200	200	50	75	150
Group exercise/sport	450	350	200	150	50	0	0
Cinema	100	75	50	25	25	50	75

Your task

Complete the Task One report exercise above. Spend only 20 minutes. Then look at the notes and the sample answer below.

Guidelines for a good answer

Does the report have a suitable structure?

- ◆ Does it have an introduction, body and conclusion?
- ◆ Does it include connective words to make the writing cohesive within sentences and paragraphs?

Does the report use suitable grammar and vocabulary?

- ◆ Does it include a variety of sentence structures?
- ◆ Does it include a range of appropriate vocabulary?

Does the report meet the requirements of the task?

- ◆ Does it meet the word limit requirements?
- ◆ Does it describe the whole report adequately?
- ◆ Does it focus on the important trends presented in the table?

Sample answers

We will now compare two sample answers, one better than the other. How well does each one follow the guidelines?

Sample answer one

The table shows how people in different age groups spent their leisure time in Someland. It can be clearly seen that the amount of leisure time available varied considerably across the age groups.

Teenagers in Someland spent 1,200 hours a year watching TV and those in the over 70s group spent 100 hours less at 1,100. They spent 150 hours on socialising with 4 or less people compared with 200 hours at the other end of the scale. They spent 350 hours socialising with 4 or more people compared with 25 hours. The teenagers spent 450 hours on group exercise but retired people didn't do any.

In conclusion, we can see that in Someland the teenagers and retired people prefer to spend their free time in different ways.

Teacher's comments on sample answer one

Here is what an IELTS teacher said about the sample answer.

The report structure is clear and well organised with an introduction, body and conclusion.

The candidate uses repetitive grammatical structures and vocabulary which would bring the mark down considerably. The tense used is not appropriate as there is no indication on the table that the figures refer to the past. Also the reader doesn't know who is being referred to in the two sentences on socialising. The word 'prefer' in the conclusion is inappropriate because the table does not give any indication of people's reasons for spending their time on one activity rather than another. Someone may choose indoor rather than outdoor activities because of their health although they would prefer to go outside.

In terms of **task requirements** the report has serious problems. Although in writing about a table you will have the difficulty of there being too much information to put into a 150 word report, you can't solve this problem by ignoring whole sections of the table. In this case the candidate simply compared two age levels and ignored the rest.

Sample answer two

Here is an example of a better answer to this task. Notice how it follows the guidelines.

The table shows how people in different age groups spend their leisure time in Someland over the course of a year. It can be clearly seen that the amount of leisure time available varies considerably across the age groups and that people of different age levels have very different ways of spending their leisure time.

According to the figures, as people age in Someland their social lives reduce. Teenagers and people in their twenties spend on average 500 hours per year on socialising and 350 hours of that time is with a group of more than 4 people. Although the total hours of socialising in their 30s, 40s, 50s and 60s is fairly constant (between 300-350), socialising with more than 4 people drops dramatically to 50 hours in the 30s and 40s age groups and only 25 from 50 years old. Group and individual exercise follow a similar pattern.

People of all ages spend a good part of their leisure time on entertainment such as TV/video viewing and cinema. In both cases, teenagers and retired people spend around twice as much time as those who are at working age. Home entertainment ranges from just over a thousand hours for teenagers and retired people and an average of 600 hours for everyone else. Cinema accounts for 100 hours of the teenagers and retired people's leisure time and 25-50 hours for the rest.

In conclusion we can see there is a significant trend towards solitary and smaller group activities as people grow older and that teenagers and retired people spend a lot more time on entertainment than those of working age do.

Strategies for improving your IELTS score

Report structure

Like the line graphs your report should be structured simply with an introduction, body and conclusion. Tenses should be used appropriately.

Use two standard opening sentences to introduce the table and your report. These opening sentences should make up the first paragraph. Sentence one should define what the table is about; that is, the date, location, what is being described in the graphs etc. For example:

The table shows how people in different age groups spend their leisure time in Someland over the course of a year.

Notice that the sample opening sentence does not simply copy the words used on the graphic material. Copied sentences will not be assessed by the examiner and so you waste your time including them.

Sentence two (and possibly three) might sum up the overall trend. For example:

It can be clearly seen that the amount of leisure time available varies considerably across the age groups and that people of different age levels have very different ways of spending their free time.

Notice the tense used. In this case there is no date given and so we must take the table information as being current now.

The body of the report will describe the information presented in the table in detail. You will need to decide on the most clear and logical order to present the material. Generally you will choose one of the categories given in the table; that is, the age or activity in the example task above. Your choice would depend on whether you could see the most significant trends occurring by age group or by activity. In this case distinguishing the age group is your primary concern in describing this table, and you would do this by highlighting some differences between the activity preferences of the age groups.

Ideally your report should end with one or two sentences which summarise your report or draw a relevant conclusion.

Grammar and vocabulary

You will receive a higher mark if your writing uses a range of structures and vocabulary correctly rather than a limited number.

Selecting your information

In completing this task it is important that you cover all of the information given. However, this does not mean that you should note every detail. In tables there is invariably too much information for you to mention each figure. You will therefore need to summarise the table in meaningful segments. In other words, you will describe the significant trends in your report.

To see the trends in a table, start by finding patterns under the horizontal and vertical headings. In the sample task you would analyse the age groups and activities. We can see that at different times in their lives Someland people have more or less free time and their priorities for how they spend their free time are different. In analysing the activities we can look for which age groups spend more time on individual or group, cheap or expensive, home or outdoor, strenuous or restful activities. By describing trends in this way, we can avoid having to describe every age group across every activity.

Writing task one: processes

Task description

You will be given a diagram of a process. Your task is to describe the information given in the diagram by writing a 150 word report. You are not asked to give your opinion.

What is being tested

Task one questions asking you to describe a process rarely appear on the IELTS test. They are different from table, graph and chart description because they test your ability to:

- ◆ describe each important stage in the process and expand where necessary
- ◆ link your descriptions of each stage
- ◆ use the present simple passive

As process tasks can vary widely, it is essential that you look at a lot of examples in IELTS preparation books.

You should spend around 20 minutes on the task.

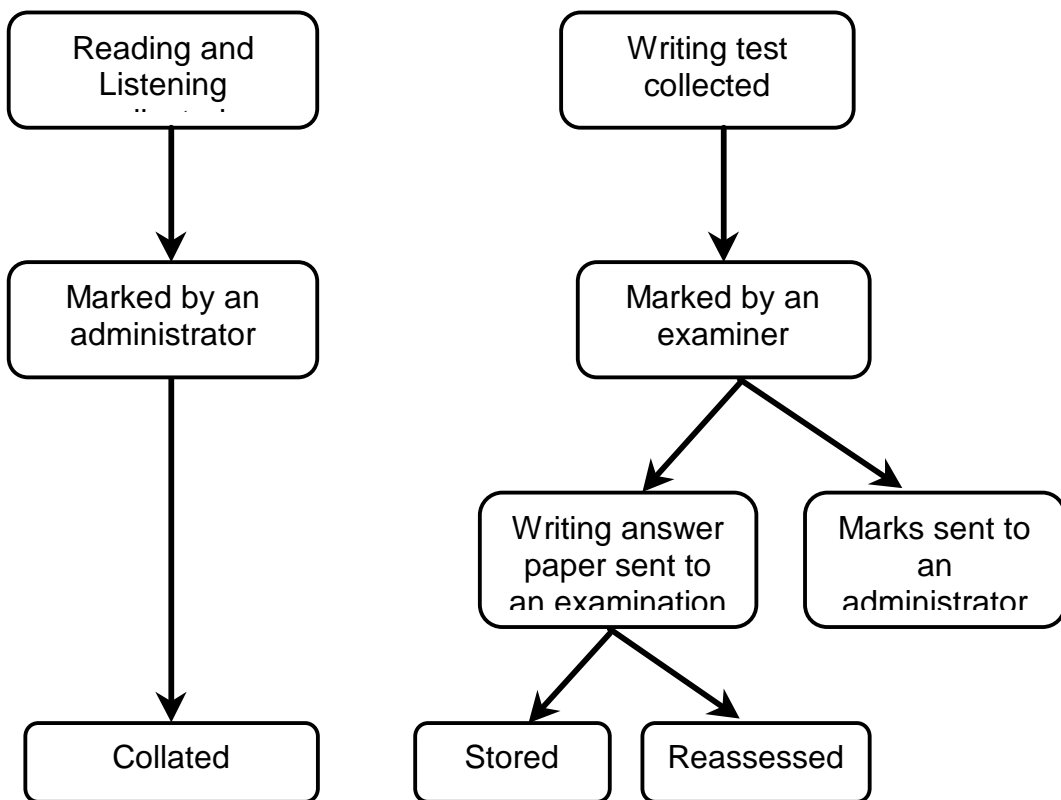
Sample task

You should spend about 20 minutes on this task.

The flow chart below shows how national examination papers are marked in Someland.

Write a report for a university lecturer describing the information below.

You should write at least 150 words.



Your task

Complete the Task One report exercise above. Spend only 20 minutes. Then look at the notes and the sample answer below.

Guidelines for a good answer

Does the report have a suitable structure?

- ◆ Does it have an introduction, body and conclusion?
- ◆ Does it include connective words to make the writing cohesive within sentences and paragraphs?

Does the report use suitable grammar and vocabulary?

- ◆ Does it include a variety of sentence structures?
- ◆ Does it include a range of appropriate vocabulary?

Does the report meet the requirements of the task?

- ◆ Does it meet the word limit requirements?
- ◆ Does it describe the whole process adequately?

Sample answer

The sample task given is simplified for the sake of explaining this kind of report task clearly. In a genuine test you can expect the process to be more complex.

The flow chart shows the marking procedures for national exam papers in Someland.

After the papers are collected, the Reading and Listening papers are marked by an administrator and then collated. The writing papers are treated differently. After collection, the writing papers are marked by an examiner. The marks are then sent to an administrator for collation while the exam papers are sent to an examination board. The board either stores the papers or reassesses them.

Strategies for improving your IELTS score

Meeting the task requirements

When you begin the writing test, look at the illustration (flow chart, diagram etc) and try to work out what the important stages are, the order they occur and any obvious reasons for the order. Your report must include every stage shown in the diagram or flow chart.

When looking at the illustration, be careful to distinguish stages which happen concurrently. (A is performed at the same time as B) and others which are alternatives (either A or B is performed). The flow chart given in the Sample Task demonstrates this problem. Look at the stages for the writing test. In the second stage we can see that the writing paper is marked by an examiner. It is then sent to the examination board while at the same time the marks are sent to an administrator. These events occur concurrently. In the final stage, the papers are either stored or reassessed. These events are alternatives.

It may happen that the diagram does not make much sense to you at first glance. Look for a starting point and follow through the stages in your mind before beginning to write. If it's still not making sense, then go on to Task Two but make sure that you give yourself 20 minutes to complete the report before the end of the writing test time. It often happens that our brains can sort problems out for us even when we are focusing on something else.

Report structure

Like the line graphs, your report should be structured simply with an introduction, body and conclusion. Tenses should be used appropriately.

Use one standard opening sentence to introduce the report. This opening sentence will make up the first paragraph. You should state simply what the process is. For example:

The flow chart shows the marking procedures for national exam papers in Someland.

Notice that the sample opening sentence does not simply copy the words used in the task instructions. Copied sentences will not be assessed by the examiner and so you waste your time including them.

The body of the report will describe the process in a logical order.

A conclusion will generally not be necessary in this kind of report.

Grammar and vocabulary

You will receive a higher mark if your writing uses a range of structures and vocabulary correctly rather than a limited number.

If the flow chart is simple and linear then you may be able to link the stages together by simply using some of the following transition signals.

To begin with

First of all

First

Secondly, thirdly, etc

Then

Next

After that

Finally

If the process is more complex, as in the example above, then you may need to also use these words

Alternatively

Otherwise

In addition

At the same time

Concurrently

Using the present simple passive

The passive is associated with an impersonal formal style. It is often used in notices, announcements and describing processes. Compare the following sentences:

Active: The examiner marks the test paper

Passive: The test paper is marked

The two sentences have the same meaning but the emphasis is different. In the active sentence we are more interested in the person or thing doing the action (the agent).

In the passive sentence we are more interested in the person or thing affected by the action. If we want to mention the agent we use **by**:

The test paper is marked **by** the examiner

But often the agent is not important.

IELTS Preparation

The passive is not another way of expressing the same sentence in the active. We choose the active or passive depending on what we are more interested in. In the first sentence we are more interested in the examiner. In the second sentence we are more interested in the test paper.

Subject	is / are	past participle	(by agent)
The test paper	is	marked	(by the examiner)

PREPARING FOR IELTS WITH HOLMESGLEN INSTITUTE

Writing task two

Description of task

You will be given a discussion topic. Your task is to write a 250 word essay on that topic. You should spend around 40 minutes on the task.

What is being tested is your ability to:

- ◆ Present a point of view with convincing evidence
- ◆ Challenge an alternate point of view
- ◆ Focus on the topic and avoid irrelevancies
- ◆ Communicate in a style that is easy to follow and cohesive.
- ◆ Use English accurately and appropriately

Sample task

You should spend about 40 minutes on this task.

Present a written argument to an educated reader with no specialist knowledge of the following topic:

Television has had a significant influence on the culture of many societies. To what extent would you say that television has positively or negatively affected the cultural development of your society?

You should write at least 250 words

Use your own knowledge and experience and support your arguments with examples and relevant evidence.

Your task

Complete the task 2 exercise above. Spend only 40 minutes on the task, then look at the notes and sample answer below.

Sample answer

It has been around forty years since television was first introduced into Australian households and people today still have mixed views on whether it has a positive or a negative influence on the society.

Many people believe that television damages culture. It promotes the stronger cultures of countries such as Britain and North America and weakens the cultures of less wealthy countries. This is because the stronger, wealthier countries are able to assert their own culture by producing more programs that are shown widely around the world. These programs then influence people, particularly young people, in the countries where they are shown.

Also, because television networks need to attract large audiences to secure their financial survival, they must produce programs which are interesting to a broad range of people. In Australia this range is very broad because we are a multicultural society and people of all ages like to watch television. To interest all these different people, most television programs are short in length, full of action and excitement, do not require much intelligence or knowledge to understand, and follow universal themes common to all cultures, such as love and crime. Television programs which concentrate on or develop themes pertinent to one particular culture are not so successful because they interest a smaller audience.

Nevertheless we much acknowledge that television does have some positive effects on the cultures within a society as well. People who do not live within their own culture can, in a limited way, access it through the multicultural station on the television. For example, Aboriginal children who have grown up in white families, or migrants and international students living in Australia, can watch programs from their own culture on the television.

In conclusion, I hold the view that television promotes and strengthens those cultures that are wealthy and influential while it weakens the cultures that are already in a weakened position.

Teacher's comments

Here is what a teacher said about the sample answer:

The essay has a clear introduction which poses the problem. Three paragraphs which makes relevant points on the topic and a conclusion which sums up the main point of the whole essay. The grammar and vocabulary are rich and varied. It is therefore a very good answer.

Strategies for improving your IELTS score

The style of essay required for Task 2 of the IELTS writing test is standard to academic courses. There are several published textbooks available to assist you to improve your writing skills for this part of the test.

Structure and cohesion should be evident at the essay level, within and between paragraphs and within and between sentences. Structure and cohesion have a very important effect on the readability and clarity of your essay as a whole.

The structure of your essay should show a clear development from introduction, through your points and on to the conclusion. Your essay needs to have an introduction, body and conclusion.

Structure and cohesion should also be apparent within and between paragraphs. Each paragraph will typically contain a topic sentence which states the main point of your paragraph. The topic sentence is usually the first one. This will be followed by the evidence which supports the point of the paragraph. The final sentence will typically lead into the point of the following paragraph.

A good essay will also have structure and cohesion within and between sentences. It is important that you are confident using linking devices such as relative clauses, connectives and transition signals.

Connecting sentences

A. Use connectives such as the following with verb phrases. For movements in the same direction use 'then' and 'and' and 'then continued its upward / downward trend more ...'.

Disconnected sentences

After that it rose gradually to 5,000 by 1952. And then it went up to 15,000 by 1954.

Connected sentence

After that it rose gradually to 5,000 by 1952, then more steeply to 15,000 by 1954

Connected sentence

After that it rose gradually to 5,000 then continued its upward trend more steeply to 15,000.

Exercise

Connect these sentences using 'then', 'and' and 'then continued its upward/downward trend more ...'.

It dropped swiftly to 1,000 in 1998. Then it went down slowly to 900 in '99

It slowly decreased to 100. Then it quickly dropped to 15.

It increased substantially at the beginning of the year. It increased gradually at the end of the year.

For contrasting movements use ' but '

Disconnected sentences

It rose to 35,000 by 1960. After that it fell to 12,000 by 1962.

Connected sentence

It rose to 35,000 by 1960 but later fell to 12,000 by 1962

Exercise

Connect these sentences using 'but'.

It fluctuated around 100 in 1999. Then it levelled out in the year 2,000.

It went down to 15,000 in 1960. Then it climbed back to 2,000 in 1961.

B. Use connectives such as the following with noun phrases. Use 'which was followed by', 'which led to', 'which preceded'

Disconnected sentences

There was a fall to 6,000 by 1968. Then an increase to 8,000 by 1970.

Connected sentence

There was a fall to 6,000 by 1968 which was followed by an increase to 8,000 by 1970.

Connected sentence

There was a fall to 6,000 by 1968 which led to an increase to 8,000 by 1970.

Connected sentence

There was a fall to 6,000 by 1968 which preceded an increase to 8,000 by 1970.

Exercise

Connect these sentences using 'which was followed by', 'which led to', 'which preceded'.

There was a sharp rise to 900 in 1991. Then there was a gradual decline to 800 in 1992.

There was a slight drop to 90. Then there was a more marked decline to 50.

It reached a peak at Christmas. Then it dropped back to the November levels of 500.