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SUCCESS AT IELTS ACADEMIC WRITING

TIPS AND GUIDANCE FOR THE
IELTS ACADEMIC WRITING TEST

Success at IELTS Academic Writing

Anna Rowe

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Written by Anna Rowe.

Dear Reader

Welcome! I assume you're reading this book because you're preparing for the IELTS Academic Test. Writing is one of the four key components and for many students it's a particularly difficult part of the test. However, it's a crucial skill – particularly if you're applying to university in an English-speaking country. But don't worry; this book is here to help you. I've written this guide to help you find out what is important in the IELTS Academic Writing test and what you need to do in order to achieve a great band score. Work your way through this book, if necessary with the help of a good dictionary. Complete the exercises exactly how I ask you to complete them. Don't cheat yourself, but work hard on your answers and you will see progress.

The book is divided into three sections:

Tips: This is where you'll find answers to many questions I've been asked over the years by students. I've also outlined common mistakes students make and how you can avoid them. It's a good idea to read this section before you start on the guided practice questions.

Guided practice questions: There are six guided practice questions in this book, covering all question types in the IELTS Academic Writing test. It's best to do them in order.

Sample answers: When you have completed a guided practice question, compare it to the sample answer. This will help you assess your own work. It's a good idea to edit your original answer at this stage and see how you can improve it. All sample answers would achieve a band 8.5 or higher in IELTS, so if yours isn't quite as good, you may still be able to achieve the band you were hoping for.

I hope you enjoy this book and find it useful. Good luck with your exam!

Anna

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Tips for IELTS Academic Writing

Format of the Writing test

The Writing test is 1 hour long and will come after the Listening and Reading tests. There's sometimes a break between the tests and you might be able to get a coffee or have a few moments in the fresh air. Ask your test centre about it. Psychologically, it's always a good idea to know exactly how the day will run and your test centre should be able to give you exact information on how they administer the test.

Within the 60 minutes you have to answer two questions. You need to divide your time however you see fit. However, bear in mind that Task 1 is shorter than Task 2, so you probably need to allow around 15-20 minutes for Task 1 and 40-45 minutes for Task 2. Task 1 is worth $\frac{1}{3}$ of the marks and Task 2 is worth $\frac{2}{3}$ of the marks.

In Task 1 you will have to describe and interpret visual information, for example a graph or a diagram.

In Task 2 you need to discuss a problem, point of view or argument.

We will look at both tasks in detail in the Guided Practice section.

Word count

The word count is clearly stated on your test, so you don't need to memorise it, but you will need it to practise. You are expected to write at least 150 words for Task 1 and at least 250 words for Task 2, so in total you will have to write at least 400 words in 60 minutes.

In order to do well in the test, you'll need to know how much space 150 and 250 words take up in your handwriting. You won't have time to count words in your test, so simply count a few of your practice essays and see how many pages you'll have to write. The test paper is lined A4 paper. Use similar paper for your practice and you'll know exactly what you have to aim for.

Many students get very worried about the word count, but you really shouldn't. You'll need to write a minimum of 150 words or 250 words in order to give a full answer. Anything less than that and you're probably missing a lot of important points. Many students have the opposite problem. They would find it really easy to write too many words. You will not lose marks if you write a longer answer, but you don't have much time in the test. It's also really important that you check your work at the end. So train yourself to be concise. It's good practice, not just for the exam, but also for life.

British English/American English/slang

Students sometimes worry about whether they should be using British or American English. The truth is, it doesn't matter. Depending on where you've learned English, you may well be using a mixture of both or you may be using a more international English. That's all fine. However, you should be consistent in your spelling. If you spell *organize* in the American way ending in *-ize*, you should also spell *recognize* that way. If you spell *centre* the British way ending in *-re*, you should also spell *theatre* that way. But you can use *organize* (American English) and *theatre* (British English) in the same essay. Just remain consistent within each spelling rule.

Students ask me about slang all the time. They are worried that the assessors might not know it. The truth is, the assessors will most likely know the slang, but in the test slang is not appropriate in any of the tasks. You typically have to write in a formal, semi-formal or neutral style, so avoid all slang.

Timing

This is one of the hardest issues for most students. You have a lot to do in one hour. It will help you to have a clear strategy about how you will spend your time. Here's a suggested outline – feel free to adapt it to make it work for you.

Task 1

Read the instructions and look at the visual information. Highlight the information in the graph or diagram you want to include in your answer (2-3 minutes).

Write your answer (10-15 minutes).

Check your answer (2-3 minutes).

Task 2

Read the instructions carefully. (2-3 minutes)

Make a quick essay plan (in your head or on paper) to decide how you will present your argument, point of view or solution. (3-5 minutes)

Write your essay. (20-25 minutes)

Check your essay. (5-15 minutes)

Marking

The examiners are looking at four key areas in your written answers. These areas are content, communicative achievement, organisation and language.

Task achievement and response

The examiners check whether you have done what you were asked to do. For example, have you written an essay about childhood obesity and its causes and possible solutions, as you were asked in the question? Did you write a minimum of 250 words and did you answer the question fully?

Coherence and cohesion

The examiners think about whether your writing is logical and reads easily. Are your ideas in a sensible order? Is it clear whether something is a new argument, a counterpoint or an example?

Lexical resource

The examiners want to see you use a wide range of vocabulary. This includes accurate spelling.

Grammatical range and accuracy

The examiners want to see a high level of grammar used accurately. This includes punctuation.

Practicalities

You can write your answer in pen or in pencil. You'll have the question paper in front of you as well as the answer sheet. The examiners only look at what you've written on the answer sheet, so make sure you write on the answer sheet not the question paper! The answer sheet is lined A4 paper. I recommend that you write on alternate lines, leaving one line blank in between each line you write on. That way, you can easily cross out a word or part of the text and write the corrected version above it. The examiners are used to crossed out sentences and amendments on the text and they are adept at reading different handwriting.

Guided practice: Task 1A describing visual information

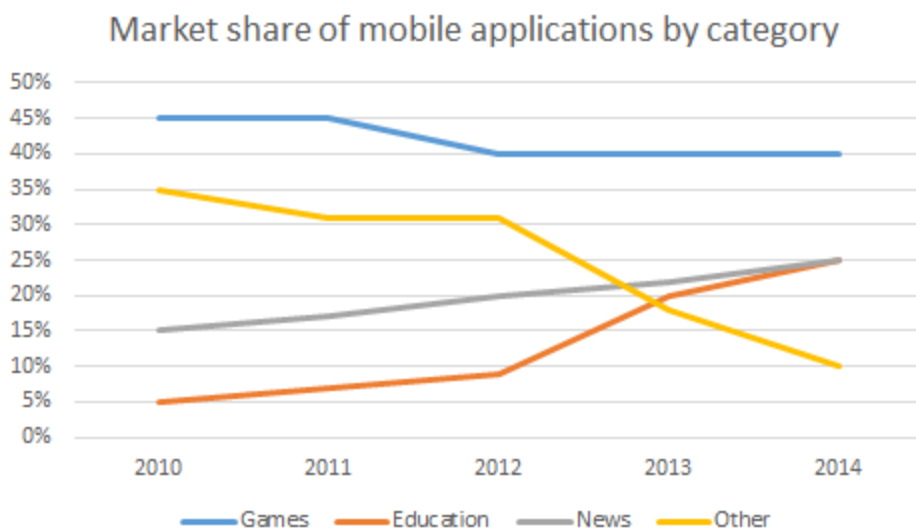
In Task 1 you are given some visual information (a graph, a chart, a table or a diagram) on which you have to base your essay. Read the question carefully and then answer these three questions:

- What does the visual information show?
- Which information should you include?
- Which **two** things do you need to do with the information given?

The chart below shows the percentage in market share of mobile applications globally over five years.

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

Write at least 150 words.



Now take a look at the answers. Did you have the same ideas?

- What does the visual information show?

This is a line graph. The title and task tell you that it shows the percentage in market share of mobile applications globally over a five-year period (from 2010-2014). It gives you the categories games, education, news and other.

- Which information should you include?

The question tells you to select and report the main features. Take a moment to look at the graph. ‘Other’ has a large share of the market, but we don’t know what ‘other’ is. The main focus here is the change in share of games, education and news. This should be the focus of your answer.

- Which **two** things do you need to do with the information given?

The question tells you clearly to summarise and make comparisons. If you fail to do this, you will not do well in the test.

Structure

Your answer should have a clear structure.

Introductory Sentence

In Task 1 you do not need a full introduction, but you need an introductory sentence. It should be short – about 20-30 words and should state what the visual information shows, for example *This line graph shows the changes in market share of mobile applications over a five-year period starting in 2010.*

Description

You then need to describe the visual information, in this case, the line graph. It is important that you include specific information (numbers and figures that you are given) as well as an explanation of how they relate to one another. You must include both and they must be accurate. Don’t say, for example, there is a sharp rise if there is only a small rise.

Summary

Your final paragraph should briefly summarise your description. You may also be able to include your own viewpoint or prediction here. If you do this, do it briefly and with caution. Don't make bold statements that are not true (~~*This graph clearly shows that educational apps will have a bigger market share than games in the future.*~~)

Language

You are asked to describe some factual information. This means the language you use should be neutral or formal (not informal). **Don't** use idioms (Educational apps ~~stepped up their game~~/increased markedly), phrasal verbs (Mobile applications have ~~taken off~~/become very popular), or contractions (Games ~~haven't~~/have not decreased much). Do not use first person plural (*I, me, my*) in Task 1.

In this particular task, you are asked to **describe change**. Here's some useful language for this type of task.

- *a sharp/small/steady/gradual increase in*
- *make big/small/steady/moderate gains in*
- *rise steadily/sharply/by 25%*
- *increase slowly/quickly/steadily*
- *remain at 5%*
- *start/end/remain at an impressive 75%/at a mere 3%*
- *lose/gain percentage points in market share*
- *drop slightly/by 10%*
- *fall steadily/sharply*
- *decrease by a fraction/markedly*
- *a sharp/small/steady/gradual decrease in*

Now write your answer. You've already spent time thinking about it. Set yourself a time limit of 20 minutes. When you have finished writing your answer, count your words and see if your essay is too long or short. Set the timer again and spend 10 minutes reading through your answer and check your spelling and punctuation (capital letters, apostrophes, commas, etc.). Read through your essay carefully and check subject-verb agreement, tenses, and word order as well as singular and plural nouns.

Ok, have you finished? Go to the sample answer and compare your writing.

Guided practice Task 1B: a bar chart

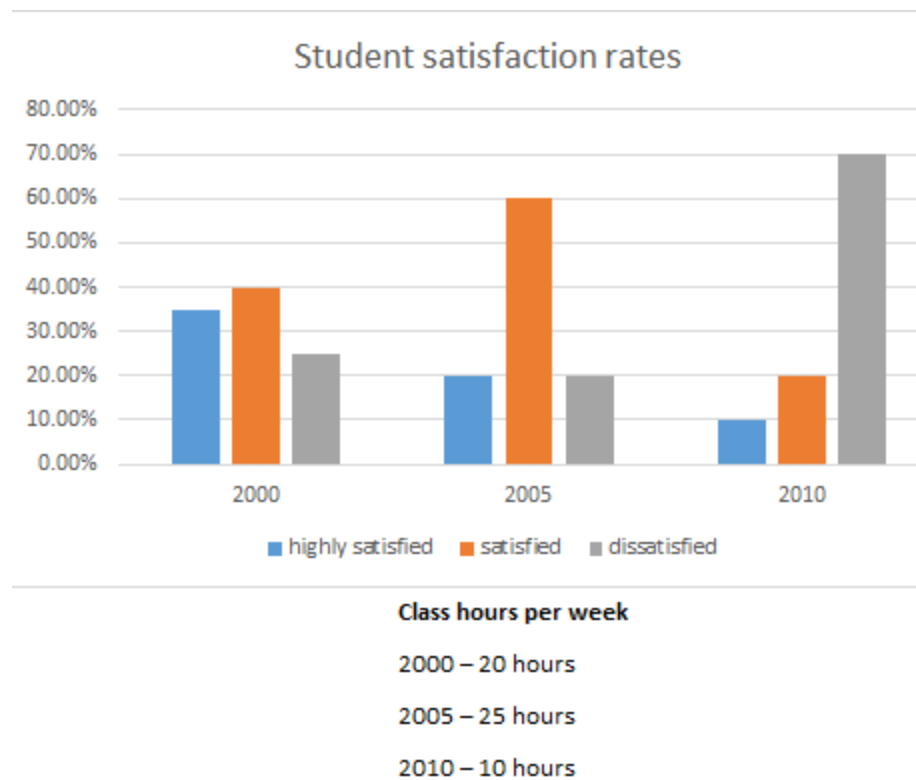
Here's the next practice task. Read the question carefully and then answer these three questions:

- What does the visual information show?
- Which information should you include?
- What could you compare in this task?

The chart below shows the satisfaction rates of undergraduate students at Norville University and the number of class hours undergraduates had to attend on average per week.

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

Write at least 150 words.



Now take a look at the answers. Did you have the same ideas?

- What does the visual information show?

This is a bar chart. The title and task tell you the student satisfaction rate of undergraduate students at Norville College in three different years (2000, 2005 and 2010). It also gives you the number of class hours students were attending in the respective years.

- Which information should you include?

The question tells you to select and report the main features. Take a moment to look at the chart. You could group satisfied and highly satisfied together. You definitely should include satisfaction rates in relation to class hours per week.

- What could you compare in this task?

The biggest dissatisfaction is in 2010 when there were only 10 hours of class time per week. So you could compare this fact to the situation in 2000 and 2005.

Language

Remember, your answer needs to be formal and factual. Include numbers and figures from the bar chart. You have to describe change again. In addition, you are also given a possible cause for the change (the class hours), so you may need language to describe cause and effect. Here is some more useful language for this type of task.

- *satisfaction rates plummeted/dropped dramatically*
- *students reported high/low satisfaction rates*
- *higher satisfaction may/might be due to*
- *this may/might be caused by*
- *fewer/more class hours could have an impact on*
- *fewer/more class hours may be contributing to*

Make a plan

Before you start writing your answer, make a plan. You will not have time to do this in the test, but it is good practice. Write down the main ideas you will include in each of these three sections.

Introductory sentence

Description

Summary

Now write your answer. Write it quickly – in only 10 minutes. When you have finished writing your answer, count your words and see if your essay is too long or short. Set the timer again and spend 10 minutes reading through your answer and check your spelling and punctuation (capital letters, apostrophes, commas, etc.). Read through your essay carefully and check subject–verb agreement, tenses, and word order as well as singular and plural nouns.

Now compare your essay to the [sample answer](#).

Guided practice: Task 1C a diagram

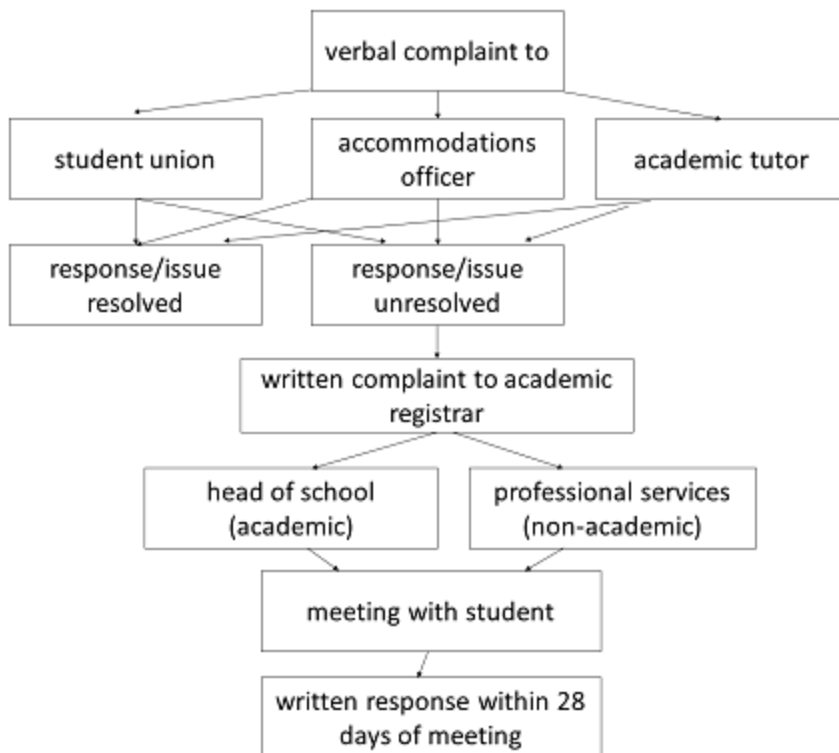
In this practice task you are given a process diagram. Read the question carefully and then answer these three questions:

- What does the visual information show?
- Which information should you include?
- Who are you writing for?

The diagram below shows how students can make a complaint at the University of Burwash.

Write a report for the university's website describing the process shown.

Write at least 150 words.



Now take a look at the answers. Did you have the same ideas?

- What does the visual information show?

This is a process diagram. It shows you the process of how a student can make a complaint and its possible different steps.

- Which information should you include?

You need to include the full process. You must describe all possible steps, however, you may be able to describe some steps very briefly.

- Who are you writing for?

The question tells you that you are writing for the university's website. That means your style needs to be neutral.

Structure

As with any other Task 1, your answer needs to have a clear structure, including a brief introductory sentence stating what the diagram shows. You will also need a description, however you will normally not be asked to summarise a process.

Language

As in other Task 1s, you are asked to describe some factual information. This means the language you use should be neutral or formal (not informal). **Don't** use idioms, phrasal verbs or contractions.

To describe a process you probably will have to use language describing the different stages. Here is some useful language.

- *First, ...*
- *Initially, ...*
- *The initial complaint/stage/task*
- *Then/After/the next stage ...*
- *If the issue remains unresolved, it is necessary to write to the academic registrar.*
- *If all parties come to a solution, there is no need to take further action.*
- *The final stage of the process is ...*

In this particular task, you are asked to describe a complaints process. Here's some useful language to talk about complaints.

- *a formal/an official complaint*
- *a verbal/a written complaint*
- *to put a complaint in writing*
- *to register/make/file/voice/lodge a complaint*
- *to handle/hear/investigate/respond to a complaint*
- *to have cause/ground for complaint*

Now write your answer. You've already spent time thinking about it. Set yourself a time limit of 20 minutes. When you have finished writing your answer, count your words and see if your essay is too long or short. Set the timer again and spend 10 minutes reading through your answer and check your spelling and punctuation (capital letters, apostrophes, commas, etc.). Read through your essay carefully and check subject–verb agreement, tenses, and word order as well as singular and plural nouns.

Now read the [sample answer](#).

Guided practice: Task 2A an essay discussing an argument, point of view or problem

For Task 2 you will have to write an essay. You should spend about 40 minutes in total on Task 2. In an essay you have to do one of the following.

- give a solution to a problem
- present and justify an opinion
- compare and contrast evidence, opinions and implications
- evaluate and challenge ideas, evidence or an argument

Read the essay question and decide which of the four points above you have to do in this practice task.

Write about the following topic.

“Pupils in secondary education are frequently formally assessed. This formal assessment hinders creativity for both teachers and pupils and should be reduced. Alternative methods of teaching and learning should be encouraged.”

To what extent do you agree or disagree?

Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your knowledge or experience.

Write at least 250 words.

In this task you have to present and justify an opinion (*to what extent do you agree or disagree*) and evaluate an argument (*Pupils in secondary educationshould be encouraged.*)

The topic

This essay question is about a particular aspect of education – formal assessment in secondary education and how it stops teachers and pupils

from being creative. It is important that you write about this topic. Don't write about other aspects of education or testing. A lot of IELTS candidates see one key word and start writing. Take a minute to really understand what the question is about, before you start writing.

Reason for writing

You will always be given a reason for writing. Here you need to explain why you agree or disagree with the statement. Notice how the question includes the phrase *to what extent*. This means you don't have to 100% agree or disagree. You can agree in part or write an essay that sees both aspects. It is up to you and there is no right or wrong answer.

Essay structure

Your essay should have a clear structure:

Introduction

Your introduction should be short – about 20-40 words and should state what your essay will be about, for example *This essay examines the mistaken claim that frequent formal testing of secondary school students impedes creativity in both teachers and students*. This introductory sentence clearly states what the essay is about and the writer has immediately taken a strong position (*the mistaken claim* – meaning the writer does NOT think that formal assessment hinders creativity).

Main body

The body of your essay should be one or two paragraphs. You must write about the topic that you are given. Do not write about a similar topic or a different topic, but answer the question exactly. The topics in the test are chosen carefully so they are broad enough that everyone can have an opinion on them. A key phrase in the instructions is *Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your knowledge or experience*. It is extremely important that you include reasons and relevant examples in order to give a full, clear answer. You should also make sure that your essay is organised logically. There is not one correct way of doing this, but a good place to start is this:

I agree/disagree because ...

- argument 1 supported by clear reasons and examples (weakest argument)
- argument 2 supported by clear reasons and examples
- argument 3 supported by clear reasons and examples (strongest argument)

Conclusion

Your conclusion should be very short and simply sum up your main argument.

Language

As in Task 1 the language you use should be neutral or formal (not informal). **Don't** use idioms (Formal testing ~~can be a double-edged sword~~/has several benefits as well as drawbacks), phrasal verbs (Educators ~~jump to conclusions too quickly~~/make their conclusions without time to reflect), or contractions (Formal assessment ~~shouldn't~~/should not be introduced too early). It's also not typical to use the first person singular (*I, me, my*) in essays, so avoid it if you can, even if you bring in your own experience.

Now write your essay. You've already spent time thinking about it. Set yourself a time limit of 40 minutes. When you have finished writing your essay, count your words and see if your essay is too short. Set the timer again and spend 10 minutes reading through your answer and check your spelling and punctuation (capital letters, apostrophes, commas, etc.). Read through your essay carefully and check subject–verb agreement, tenses and word order as well as singular and plural nouns.

Now compare your answer to the [sample answer](#).

Guided practice: Task 2B an essay discussing a problem

In this practice task you are presented with a problem and are invited to write an essay presenting a solution. Read the essay question and think about which information you would include. What is the topic you should write about?

Write about the following topic.

Obesity in people under the age of 18 is a problem increasingly faced by many countries. What are the causes for this and what could governments do to stop the rise in obesity?

Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your knowledge or experience.

Write at least 250 words.

The topic

Just as in the previous essay question, this task presents you with a specific topic. The topic is not *obesity*, but *the rise of obesity in people under the age of 18*. It is really important that you train yourself to spot the exact topic. That way, you are less likely to write about irrelevant aspects.

Reason for writing

The reason for writing in this question is simple. You need to discuss the causes of obesity in people under the age of 18 and suggest solutions to the problem.

Essay structure

As with all essays, you need to follow a clear structure. Problem/solution essays have a fairly fixed structure.

Introduction

Your introduction should be short and simply briefly state what the topic and aim of the essay is. For example, *Childhood obesity has been steadily increasing in many parts of the world. This essay aims to identify its main causes and present possible solutions.*

Main body

In a problem/solution essay, there are two possible structures for the main body. You can present a problem (in this essay this would be a cause of obesity in young people) and in the same paragraph offer a solution. In the next paragraph you present the second cause and the second solution, etc. An alternative is to write one paragraph giving all the causes and then one paragraph giving all the solutions. For extra practice, write this essay in both styles and see which one you like better.

Conclusion

Your conclusion should be very short and simply sum up your main argument. Do not include any new information in your conclusion, but summarise what you have already said.

Language

Remember that you are writing for Academic IELTS. This means that you should use modal verbs to give your personal opinion instead of saying I think (~~*I think this will cause obesity to reduce / This measure might help to reduce obesity*~~). You also need to use the passive voice if appropriate (~~*Various factors have caused this. / This has been caused by various factors.*~~)

Now write your essay. You've already spent time thinking about it. Set yourself a time limit of 40 minutes. When you have finished writing your essay, count your words and see if your essay is too short. Set the timer again and spend 10 minutes reading through your answer and check your spelling and punctuation (capital letters, apostrophes, commas, etc.).

For extra practice, write your essay again, using a different essay structure.

Now compare your answer to the [sample answer](#).

Guided practice: Task 2C an essay discussing an argument

Here is another essay in which you have to discuss an argument. Read the task below and note down how you would approach this task.

Write about the following topic.

“University education should not be a universal right for all, but instead be reserved for the most academically brilliant minds of each generation.”

To what extent do you agree or disagree?

Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your knowledge or experience.

Write at least 250 words.

So, how would you approach this task? I hope that after having worked your way through this book so far, you have answered something like this.

1. Think about what the essay is about. What is the task asking me to do exactly?
2. Write an introductory sentence (or two), stating what my essay is about.
3. Think about how to structure the main body of my essay. Am I going to agree, disagree or do both? In which order will I present my arguments? How will I link my ideas together? Do I have examples and personal experience or knowledge for all my arguments?
4. Write the main body of the essay.
5. Write a short paragraph or sentence to summarise the main point(s) of my essay.
6. Check my essay, making sure I have not used *I, me, my*. Check I have used words and phrases different from the task and used the passive voice and formal or semi-formal vocabulary. Check my spelling.

Now follow your plan (or the one above) and write your essay. Allow yourself no more than 40 minutes for this task. Then compare your essay to the [sample answer](#).

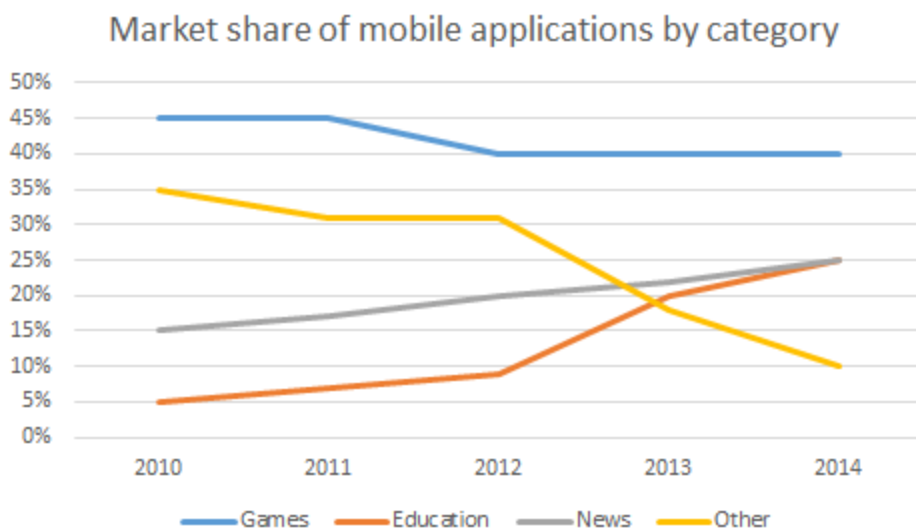
Sample answer: Task 1A describing visual information

Here's the question again.

The chart below shows the percentage in market share of mobile applications globally over five years.

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

Write at least 150 words.



Read the sample answer and comments below. Did you choose the same points? In which ways is your essay similar? What is different? Have a break (a few minutes or even a few days) and write the essay again. How has your essay changed?

Essay

This line graph shows the change in market share of mobile applications related to games, education and news between 2010 and 2014.

Comment: This opening sentence clearly summarises what the visual information shows. It rephrases the title of the chart slightly (*market share of mobile applications by category / market share of mobile application related to games, education and news*) and includes the time span given in the graph.

Games held 45% of the total market share around the world in 2010. Their success continued over the next year and only slightly dropped by 5% in 2012 where it remained until 2014. News apps held 15% of the global market share in 2010 and steadily rose over the following five years to achieve 25% in 2014. However, educational apps have made the biggest gains in market share. They started at a mere 5% in 2010, slowly increased to 9% by 2012 and then rose sharply to claim 25% of the total global market share of mobile applications.

Comment: In this paragraph the graph is described in detail. The writer first focuses on games, then on news and finally on education. This is not the in the same order as on the line graph. However, this order makes sense logically, as there is the least amount of change in relation to games and the most change in relation to education. Notice that lots of detailed information is included (percentages and years). There is also a lot of great language to describe change (*their success continued, only slightly dropped by 5%, where it remained until 2014, steadily rose over the following five years, to achieve 25%, made the biggest gains, started at a mere 5%, slowly increased to 9%, rose sharply to claim 25%*) There is also an element of comparison (*However, educational apps have made the biggest gains ...*).

This graph clearly shows that games have always been and remained the strongest player in mobile applications, having not lost much of their share to news or educational apps. However, educational applications in particular have increased dramatically and may eventually negatively impact the share of games in the future.

Comment: The final paragraph clearly summarises what the graph shows. The writer also makes a cautious prediction for the future (*...and may eventually negatively impact the share of games in the future*). You do not necessarily have to include your own view in a Task 1. However, as this Task 1 is about a fairly current situation, it's suitable to make this statement here. Notice how it is done very carefully (*may eventually*).

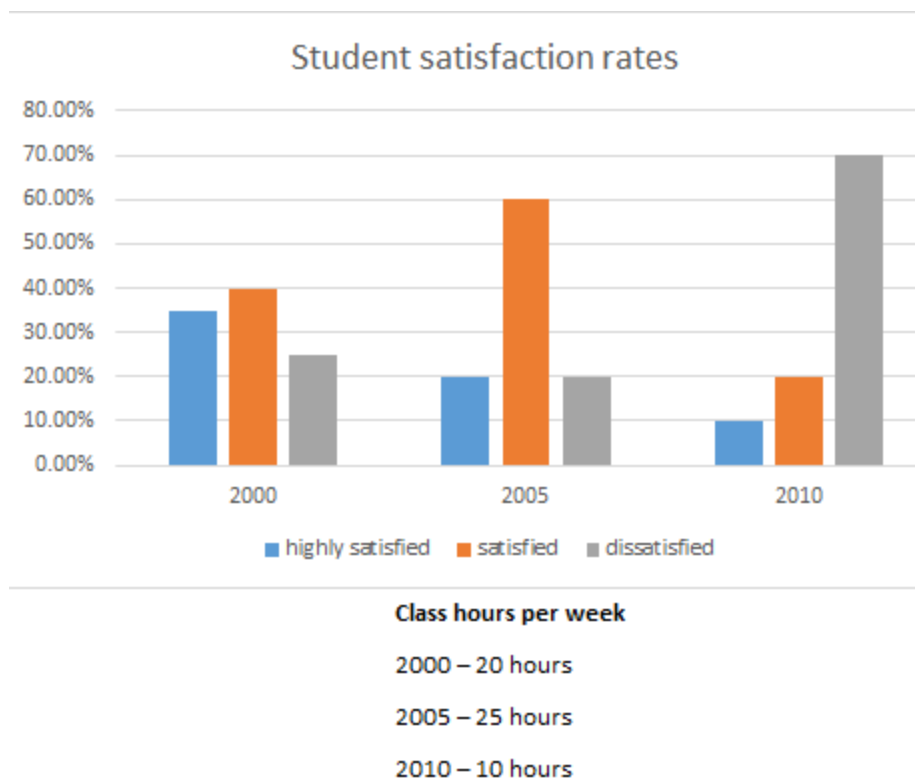
Now go back and try the next [practice activity](#).

Sample answer: Task 1B a bar chart

Here's the question again.

The chart below shows the satisfaction rates of undergraduate students at Norville University.

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



Write at least 150 words.

Read the sample answer and comments below. Did you choose the same points? In which ways is your essay similar? What is different? Have a break and write the essay again. How has your essay changed?

Essay

This bar chart shows how undergraduate students at Norville University reported satisfaction rates for 2000, 2005 and 2010. The hours students attended classes in those years are also listed.

Comment: The two introductory sentences briefly state the two main aspects of the graphic – the bar chart and the extra information on class hours.

In 2000 and 2005 overall satisfaction rates were very high (75% and 80% respectively), although more students reported being highly satisfied in 2000, as opposed to simply satisfied. In 2010, satisfaction rates plummeted to only 30%, representing a 45% and 50% drop respectively. Classroom hours increased from 20 hours per week in 2000 to 25 hours per week in 2005, but then decreased considerably to only 10 hours per week in 2010.

Comment: In this paragraph, the writer first describes the satisfaction rates. For ease of reporting, the writer grouped ‘satisfied’ and ‘highly satisfied’ together. The writer clearly compares the differences in satisfaction rates (*plummeted to only 30%, representing a 45% and 50% drop respectively*). The change in classroom hours is also clearly described. Notice the word *respectively*. If you write *75% and 80% respectively*, you are saying that 75% refers to the first year you mention in the **previous sentence** (2000) and 80% refers to the next year you mention (2005).

This chart **appears to show** a strong link between student satisfaction and classroom hours. Having only 10 hours class time per week **seems to have a negative impact** on students’ well-being and sense of achievement. The overall highest satisfaction rate was reported in 2005, when class hours peaked at 25 per week.

Comment: The final paragraph summarises and interprets what the bar chart shows. It links the class hours to the satisfaction rates. As it is an interpretation, the writer does this carefully. Look at the phrases in **bold**. It is much better to write *it appears to* or *it seems to* than *it is*. Read the underlined sentence. Notice how the two facts (satisfaction rates/class hours) are linked here, without making a strong statement. The writer doesn’t say *This is definitely caused by ...* because we don’t know whether it is or not.

Now go back and try the next [practice activity](#).

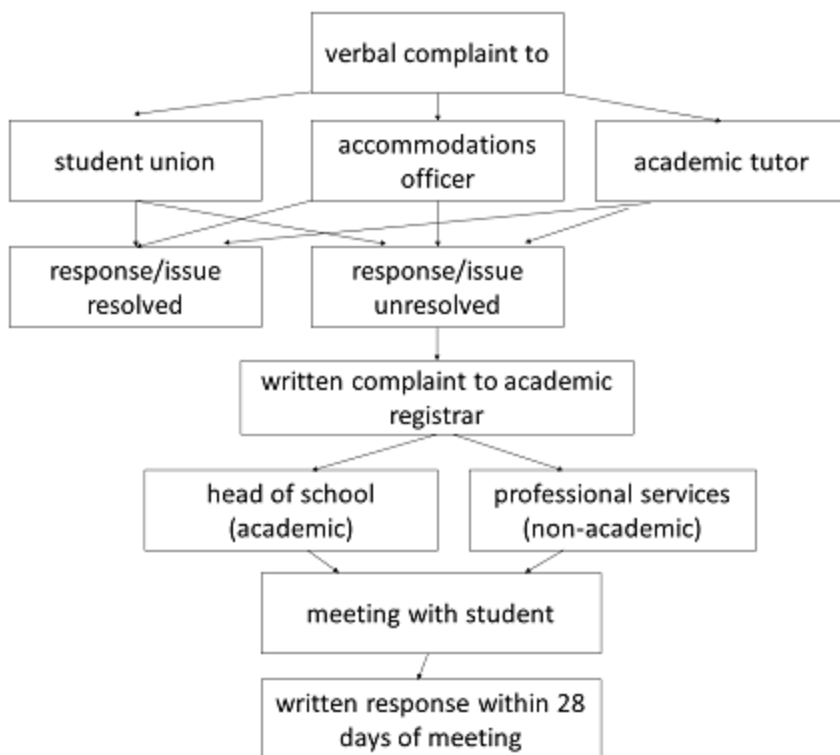
Sample answer: Task 1C a diagram

Here's the question again.

The diagram below shows how students can make a complaint at the University of Burwash.

Write a report for the university's website describing the process shown.

Write at least 150 words.



Read the sample report and compare it to your own answer. How is it similar? How is it different? Underline all the verbs in the sample answer and check their meaning in a dictionary if necessary. Can you include any of them in your own report to improve it?

Report

This diagram explains how students can lodge a complaint at the University of Burwash.

Comment: The first sentence briefly states what the diagram shows. Notice how the writer has changed *make a complaint* to *lodge a complaint*. Always paraphrase the words you are given in the question, if you can.

The initial complaint should be made directly to the student union, the accommodations officer or the academic tutor, depending on the nature of the complaint. At this stage students should speak in person to the correct body. All three bodies will reply in person and may be able to come to a solution.

Comment: The first stages of the complaint procedure are described here. Notice the use of the passive (*the initial complaint should be made*). This makes the report formal and professional. From the previous sentence it is clear that students are making the complaint, so it's not necessary to repeat this. The writer added some detail which is not taken directly from the diagram (*all three bodies will reply in person*). You can add extra detail to give a fuller answer, as long as it doesn't contradict any information you are given. The underlined phrases are useful collocations with *complaint*.

If, however, the student is not satisfied with the solution or the relevant body cannot offer a suitable solution, it is necessary for students to write down their complaint and submit their letter to the academic registrar. All academic complaints will then be escalated to the head of the school. Any other complaints will be brought to the attention of the relevant professional services. The head of the school or the professional services team will set up a meeting with the person filing the complaint. All relevant parties will be present and any documentation must be brought to the meeting. The head of the school or professional services then have 28 days to respond to the complainant in writing to resolve the issue.

Comment: This part of the report describes the stages that need to be taken if the complaint isn't resolved immediately. Look at the underlined sentences. They all rephrase the information you are given in the diagram. Notice that not many words are taken directly from the diagram. It's important that you don't simply repeat what you read, but instead you have to put it into your own words. Again, some detail is added (*All relevant parties will be present and any documentation must be brought to the meeting*). This doesn't contradict any information that you are given, so it's fine to include this.

Now go back to the next [practice activity](#).

Sample answer: Task 2A an essay discussing a point of view

Here is the question again. Look at the underlined words in the question. They are all important points in the argument and should be agreed or disagreed with. Have you included all of them in your essay?

Write about the following topic.

“Pupils in secondary education are frequently formally assessed. This formal assessment hinders creativity for both teachers and pupils and should be reduced. Alternative methods of teaching and learning should be encouraged.”

To what extent do you agree or disagree?

Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your knowledge or experience.

Write at least 250 words.

Now read the sample answer and comments. As you read, think about your own essay. Looking at the sample answer, what changes would you make? Remember, it does not matter whether you agree, partially agree or disagree with the statement.

Essay

This essay discusses the role of formal testing in secondary schools, the impact it has on creativity in schools and whether it would be useful to replace formal assessment with alternative methods of teaching and learning.

Comment: The introductory sentence states what the essay is about by rephrasing the key ideas from the question (*formal assessment / formal testing, secondary education / secondary schools, hinders creativity / the impact it has on creativity*). The writer also does not take a position, yet. She simply asks *whether it would be useful to replace formal assessment with alternative methods of teaching and learning*.

In the UK, pupils are formally tested regularly from when they enter secondary education at age 11. Exams become increasingly important from ages 14 to 18. Teachers are required to prepare their students for the exams, which are set by the government. This has led to a situation where most teachers focus on the same aspects of a subject, as this is the aspect that is most likely to be tested. Creativity is not valued or encouraged as individuals and schools are measured by the outcome of this formal assessment.

Comment: In this paragraph the writer describes the situation in her country to put the discussion in context (*In the UK ... by the government*). The explanation of what is happening is then followed by an explanation of the effect this has had on education (*This has led to a situation ...*). This paragraph establishes that overall the writer agrees with the point of view presented in the question. Notice the underlined verbs. They are all in the passive. The passive voice is commonly used in academic essays.

In many contexts pupils would benefit from fewer set exams. As the exams are set by the government, they do not focus on local or current issues. However, it would be more engaging for pupils to deal with topics that are directly relevant to them, for example, a school in London could focus on different aspects of history than a school in Glasgow. Pupils would still gain a better understanding of history, but through events relevant to their situation. Teachers would have to be more creative to find suitable topics to cover, which may engage them more in their profession.

Comment: In this paragraph the writer moves on to her next argument and gives examples of why it would be better to have fewer formal exams. Look at the underlined words and phrases and notice how she gives her personal opinion without saying *in my opinion* or *I think*. A clear way of showing in an academic essay that you are giving your own opinion is by using modal verbs, such as *would*, *may*, *could* and *might*. This language shows that the writer is thinking of possible solutions to a problem.

There is also ample evidence that too much formal assessment has a negative impact on teenagers' well-being. Formal testing, whilst encouraging for some, causes anxiety and stress in many and does not help their learning.

Comment: The writer introduces her next argument, stating *there is ample evidence*. Of course, in the exam it is not possible to cite sources and find examples. The writer remembers hearing about some studies and includes her knowledge in her essay. We don't know if this is necessarily true, but it doesn't matter. In Task 1 your answers are based on facts that you are given. In Task 2, you can bring in your own ideas and facts you remember. No one will check whether you are 100% right.

While it is important to grade students to help them make future choices with regards to further education or employment, teachers and policy makers should aim to find alternative testing methods which support good learning and teaching.

Comment: The short conclusion acknowledges that formal assessment has its place (it is important to grade students to help them make future choices), the writer concludes that this could be achieved without too much formal testing. This is a suitable conclusion for this essay, as the writer is clearly agreeing with the statement given in the question.

Remember, your essay may be very different. Maybe you think that formal testing is incredibly important and beneficial to students and teachers. That is absolutely fine, as long as you have given examples and evidence, just as the writer of this essay has.

Now try the next [practice activity](#).

Sample answer: Task 2B an essay discussing a problem

Here is the question again.

Write about the following topic.

Obesity in people under the age of 18 is a problem increasingly faced by many countries. What are the causes for this and what could governments do to stop the rise in obesity?

Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your knowledge or experience.

Write at least 250 words.

Now read the sample answer without looking at the comments. Which structure did the writer follow? When you have answered the question, read the essay again, but this time also read the comments.

Essay

Childhood obesity, defined as obesity in those under the age of 18, is of great concern in many countries around the world. This essay aims to discuss its main causes and present solutions.

Comment: The brief introduction states what the topic of the essay is, defines the term *childhood obesity* and outlines the aims of the essay.

One reason why obesity in young people is increasing is that many have access to **cheap, high-calorie food options**. This shift has happened over the last 50 years. Once sugary, fatty foods were seen as a luxury and were reserved for special occasions. Now inexpensive biscuits, crisps and chocolate bars are available everywhere and make for an easy snack option. In order to stop children eating these types of food in excessive quantities, governments should introduce legislation to ban **certain foods** from schools. Perhaps a tax on **calorie-laden convenience foods** would also prevent parents from buying these for their children.

Comment: In the first paragraph the writer discusses the first cause of obesity (access to cheap, high-calorie food options). Look at the underlined sentences. They give examples of what the writer means. Then, the writer presents a possible solution to this problem. A good sentence offering a solution to a problem is *In order to stop ... governments should...*

Another reason is that the foods listed above are all advertised directly to children. The marketing campaigns of most **sweets and candies** are aimed at young people. Popular TV or movie characters, such as the Minions or Star Wars are used to promote **sugary drinks** and **unhealthy foods**. This is very appealing, particularly for young children who may not fully understand the power of advertising. Governments should restrict advertising of **these products**. Just as advertising of tobacco is heavily regulated, the same should apply to the food and drinks industry.

Comment: In this paragraph the writer discusses another cause, namely advertising. Again, clear examples are given (Minions, Star Wars). Finally, a solution is presented (regulate the advertising of the foods and drinks industry). Look at the **words in bold** in paragraph one and two. These are all ways of saying *unhealthy foods and drinks which are high in calories*.

In addition to consuming unhealthy, high-calorie foods and drinks, young people also do not exercise enough. Lifestyles have changed dramatically over the last few decades. Many children lead more sedentary lives than previous generations would have, preferring to spend time in front of a screen rather than outdoors. Governments should prioritise sports in and out of schools. Physical education should be part of the curriculum every day and sports facilities should be very cheap or even free for children.

Comment: The final argument the writer outlines is related to exercise. Read the first sentence of the paragraph again. It makes a clear link between the previous two paragraphs and this one (*In addition ...*). Always link your ideas together in an essay. This paragraph follows the same structure as the previous two: problem, example, solution.

If governments would follow the three suggestions outlined above it might just be possible to halt the rise in obesity in young people.

Comment: The very brief conclusion simply summaries what the writer has already said.

Now try the next [practice activity](#).

Sample answer: Task 2C an essay discussing an argument

Here's the question again.

Write about the following topic.

“University education should not be a universal right for all, but instead be reserved for the most academically brilliant minds of each generation.”

To what extent do you agree or disagree?

Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your knowledge or experience.

Write at least 250 words.

Now read the sample answer and the comments. Compare them to your own essay. Be critical with yourself and write down at least two things you could improve if you were to write this essay again. Write the same essay again tomorrow or in a few days' time and compare your answer then. Have you improved?

Essay

Some people argue that not everyone should have a right to tertiary education, but that only the best students of a cohort should be able to access it. This essay examines the reasons for and against this argument.

Comment: The first sentence rephrases the argument in the question. Notice how *university education* changes to *tertiary education* and *the most academically brilliant minds of each generation* changes to *the best students of a cohort*. It is a really useful exercise to practise rephrasing essay questions, as you are able to write an introduction much more easily if you are able to do this. The writer then states what she will discuss in this essay (*examines the reasons for and against this argument*).

One reason why **one might argue that** university education should be restricted is that there is a cost attached to providing education. If university

is free or heavily subsidised, this cost is born by the community, which usually means the tax payer. **It could be seen as** an investment by the tax payer into the future – for example to provide society with future doctors, educators and scientists. **Looking at the question from this angle**, it makes sense to only invest in the most outstanding minds. This should yield a better return, meaning it will cost less to educate only those who a society thinks will provide the most value.

Comment: The writer starts by giving a reason to support the argument. The essay is kept impersonal (no *I, me, my*) by using the phrases in **bold**. The argument is explained clearly – (1) there is a cost to education, (2) this cost is paid for by the tax payer, (3) the tax payer can then see their payment as an investment and only wants to invest in the best. Notice that by building up an argument logically, there is no need to use words like *furthermore, moreover, in addition*, etc. A lot of IELTS students overuse these words. Look at your own essay and see if you can rewrite it using these linking words only 2-3 times in your whole essay.

However, this line of reasoning ignores several important factors. **First of all**, how can society insure that those brilliant students indeed serve the community as a whole once their education is complete? They may not feel morally obliged to use their skills in this way, but instead land lucrative positions abroad. **Secondly**, how is the decision made who to invest in? Will certain subjects become more important than others? **Even more importantly**, why would a society deprive anyone – regardless of their academic aptitude – of learning? There are many examples of people who did badly at school, yet later achieved greatness, such as Albert Einstein and Thomas Edison. But a university education can be life changing, even for those who may not go on to become leaders in their fields.

Comment: This paragraph begins with *however*. The writer is now presenting several reasons why the argument supporting the statement is not good. This is a common way of making your point in English. You first present your weaker argument and then you contradict that point by presenting your stronger arguments. Look at the words in **bold** and see how the writer builds up her arguments in this paragraph. There is also a lot of high-level vocabulary in this paragraph. Look at the underlined words and phrases and check them in your dictionary if necessary. If you want to achieve band 7.5 or higher, you need to be able to use this type of language.

Education at any level, but particularly tertiary education, should not be merely seen as an investment. Its purpose is for students to have the space and time to ask questions, find answers and expand their minds. Therefore it should never be restricted to the few.

Comment: The conclusion sums up the main point the writer wants to make. She believes that university education should be a right for all. She expresses her viewpoint without saying *In my opinion* or *I think*.