

IELTS Academic Handbook

The whole exam on 18 pages: format, every section, question types, Writing and Speaking criteria, grammar traps and a study plan.

How to use it. Read pages 2–3 first: how the exam works and how to plan. Then open the section you are working on this week. Each page stands alone — print the one you need and keep it next to you while you practise.

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IELTS Academic: how the exam works

One-page cheat sheet · four sections, timing, scoring, what costs marks, how to prepare

Find where you stand section by section with a full test, then spend your time on the gap. One weak section is expensive: lifting it almost always beats polishing your strongest.

The exam as a whole (Academic)

Section	Length	What you do	Questions
Listening	about 30 minutes	listen to four recordings and answer as they play	40
Reading	60 minutes	read three passages and answer the questions on them	40
Writing	60 minutes	describe a graph and write an essay	2 tasks
Speaking	11–14 minutes	talk to an examiner: questions about you, a monologue from a card, a discussion	3 parts

Order and stamina

Listening → Reading → Writing back to back, no break: about 2.5 hours of continuous work. Speaking is separate — same day or within a week either side — always with a live examiner, even on a computer. You start Reading tired and write the essay after two hours: **practise full tests in one sitting**, not only sections in isolation.

Academic vs General Training

Listening and Speaking are identical. General Training differs only in Reading and Writing: everyday and workplace texts, a more forgiving Reading band scale, and a **letter** instead of a graph description in Task 1. This sheet is about Academic.

How answers turn into a score

- Each section: band **0–9 in steps of 0.5**.
- Listening, Reading:** correct answers out of 40 → band via a table. No penalty for a wrong answer — **never leave a field empty**.
- Writing, Speaking:** a human awards the band against four criteria, each weighted equally.

Overall = average of the four, rounded to the nearest 0.5, halves rounded up:

Average	6.25	6.75
Overall	6.5	7.0

Section by section — what costs marks

Listening · 4 parts × 10 questions

everyday conversation → *monologue about a place or service* → *discussion of 2–3 people about study* → *academic lecture*

- Harder as it goes. Plays **once**, no pausing or rewinding.
- Questions follow the order of the audio.
- Marks are lost on details, not understanding: one word over the limit, a missing plural, a date, a spelled-out name.

Reading · 3 passages, 40 questions, 60 min

- No extra time to transfer answers. Passages get harder from first to third.
- Questions are built on **paraphrase** almost every time — hunting for the same word will not work.
- Time discipline over speed: **~20 minutes per passage**; give up a hard question to win three easy ones.
- Each question type can be drilled on its own (T/F/NG and others).

Writing · 2 tasks in an hour

- Task 1:** graph, table, process or map, at least **150 words** — **20 min**.
- Task 2:** essay, at least **250 words**, worth twice as much — **40 min**. Hold this line firmly.
- Criteria: task response, coherence, vocabulary, grammar.
- Commonest low band = an unfinished job, not poor language: **no overview** in Task 1, **no clear position** in the essay.

Speaking · 11–14 min, fixed script

- Part 1:** short questions about you.
- Part 2:** two-minute monologue from a card, one minute to prepare.
- Part 3:** discussion of a broader topic connected to the card.
- The examiner follows a protocol and may cut you off mid-sentence — not a judgement on your answer.
- Four criteria: fluency and developed answers count for more than rare words. Developed answer → AREA (essays and Part 3).

Common traps

✗	✓
Leaving a Listening/Reading field empty	Always answer — no penalty
Only drilling sections separately	Full tests in one sitting train stamina
Polishing your strongest section	Lift the weakest — it drags the average
Matching words from question to passage	Look for the same meaning (paraphrase)
More than 20 min on the graph	20 / 40 — the essay is worth double

How to build your preparation

- Measure where you are with a **full test**.
- Pick out the **weak section**.
- Work on it **deliberately**, with your mistakes reviewed.
- Once a week**, another full test under exam conditions.

The theory about the format takes an evening to read; the score is moved by hours of practice.

Next: the section guides on the blog — Listening, Reading, Writing Task 1 and 2, Speaking, AREA, linking words.

Preparing for IELTS on your own on a small budget

One-page cheat sheet · target, diagnostic test, resources, weekly plan

You don't need every website, video and book. You need an honest picture of your level, a simple plan and regular full practice tests.

Four steps to start

1. Work out the score you need

Check the specific university or programme: overall band + minimum per section, e.g. 6.5 with no less than 6.0 in each. Check the test type: study usually needs **Academic**; work and migration often accept **General Training**. Aim to pass first time — preparing well is cheaper than a retake.

2. Take one full practice test first — not a textbook

Listening, Reading, Writing back to back, timer, no dictionary. It shows:

- your approximate band per section vs. your target;
- your weakest section — where most of your time goes;
- whether you have enough time and where you lose it.

Around **4.0 or below**? Too early for tests: strengthen grammar, core vocabulary and listening, come back in a couple of months.

3. Pick one resource per skill

Stick with it for **at least a month**. Don't jump between a dozen websites.

Format	official IELTS website — how each section works
Listening	podcasts and talks (e.g. BBC Learning English) daily, first with subtitles, then without
Reading	popular science articles (Academic style) — one a day, note new words
Writing, Speaking	write and speak yourself, with a timer; feedback matters most
Full tests	one platform, exam format, automatic scoring

4. Build a simple week

An hour a day beats five hours on Sunday.

A full test every week or two is your main benchmark. After every test write down your band for each section — after a month you'll see what is improving and what isn't.

Low energy on Friday? Five minutes on the Task 1 **overview** alone: the main features of a graph in two sentences, no numbers.

Sample week (for someone who studies or works) — print and tick

Day	What to do	Time	Wk 1	Wk 2	Wk 3	Wk 4
Mon	Listening: one part of a test + a podcast	45–60 min	☐	☐	☐	☐
Tue	Reading: one timed test passage + an article	45–60 min	☐	☐	☐	☐
Wed	Writing Task 2: an essay in 40 minutes	60 min	☐	☐	☐	☐
Thu	Speaking: timed answers out loud, recorded on your phone	30–45 min	☐	☐	☐	☐
Fri	Writing Task 1 + review of the week's mistakes	60 min	☐	☐	☐	☐
Sat	Full practice test in exam conditions	~2.5 hours	☐	☐	☐	☐
Sun	Rest or review new words	—	☐	☐	☐	☐

Band log — after every full test

Date	Listening	Reading	Writing	Speaking	Overall	Weakest / change next
Target						

Don't cut corners on Writing and Speaking

Listening and Reading can be fully self-taught: answers are clear-cut and the key shows where you went wrong. Marking your own essay is almost impossible. Options:

- a friend with a high score or a teacher — at least a few essays;
- a conversation club or a speaking partner;
- automated feedback against the IELTS criteria — cheapest, but a guide, not an examiner's mark.

How not to drown in materials

✗	✓
hunting for "the best website"	a decent resource you actually use
collecting PDF books (20 downloaded)	one test you complete
changing the plan by how you feel	max once a month, based on full test results

IELTS Listening: format, parts and question types

One-page cheat sheet · four parts, timing, every question type, marking

The recording plays once. Type each answer the moment you hear it — on computer only 2 minutes remain at the end. Use every pause to read ahead.

Format at a glance

Length	~30 min incl. reading pauses	Parts	4 × 10 = 40 questions
Checking	computer 2 min ; paper 10 min	Plays	once, no pause or rewind
Marks	1 per question → band 0–9	Academic / GT	the same test

Accents: British, Australian, North American and others. Part 1 easiest, Part 4 densest.

Correct answers → band (approx.)

Correct	Band	Correct	Band
39–40	9	23–25	6
37–38	8.5	18–22	5.5
35–36	8	16–17	5
32–34	7.5	13–15	4.5
30–31	7	10–12	4
26–29	6.5		

Scale varies slightly by test. 7.0 = miss 10; 6.5 = almost 14. Easy marks in Parts 1–2 beat chasing every hard one in Part 4.

The four parts

Part 1 — everyday conversation, 2 people

booking, signing up for a course, hire or delivery terms · form / notes

- **Dictation:** names spelled out, phone numbers in groups. Drill the alphabet by ear: A/E/I, G/J, B/V.
- **Corrections:** a date or price changes — write what the conversation settles on.
- Easiest 10: a misspelt easy word costs as much as a hard Part 4 one.

Part 2 — monologue, everyday topic

guide to a town, sports-centre rules, festival programme · maps, plans, MC

- On a map, find the **starting point** first ("we're at the entrance"). In the pause: north, entrance, labelled streets.
- Direction words: *opposite, next to, on the corner, at the end, just before*. Watch "not this one, the next one".

Part 3 — academic discussion, 2–4 people

students and a tutor on a project · MC, matching, flow-charts

- Note who is who before it starts — questions ask for one person's opinion.
- **Not the first mention:** one suggests, another objects, the tutor decides. The answer is the conclusion.

Part 4 — academic lecture

history of an invention, biology study, economic process · notes / table / diagram, 10 gaps

- Usually no pause inside — read all questions beforehand.
- Signposts: *first, another reason, however, finally* = next answer coming.
- Missed one? Jump to the next gap.

Question types — how to answer

Type	Tactic
Form / Note / Table Completion	Field sits in the text with the question number. Predict the gap first: number, name, noun, adjective. Check plural endings — the word must fit the sentence.
Sentence Completion	Wording almost never matches the recording — listen for the same meaning in other words.
Flow-chart Completion	Boxes follow the recording; completed boxes show where the speaker is.
Short-answer	A word or two or a number, not a sentence: often a quantity, time or name.
Map / Plan Labelling	Drag a name onto the map or tick a letter in a grid. Extra options in the list.
Diagram Labelling	Academic parts. See which parts are already labelled — the lecturer describes from them.
Multiple Choice	Single: 3 options, one right. "Choose TWO/THREE" from 5–7: each a separate mark, any order, can't tick more. Read options first, note how they differ.
Matching	Items heard in list order, features in any order; extra options stay unused. One of the hardest — unsure? give the most likely.

Marking — common losses

X	✓
answer longer than the limit (right meaning)	"ONE WORD AND/OR A NUMBER" = word, number, or both; article counts
misspelt word	exact letters; British / American usually both OK; numbers as digits
blank gap at the end	any guess — no penalty for wrong

How to prepare — checklist

- Whole section without stopping: 30 min of attention is a skill.
- Sort mistakes by cause: didn't hear, misspelt, over the limit, picked the first option mentioned.
- Replay hard bits with the transcript — see how the answer was paraphrased.
- Different accents: podcasts, lectures, news, not only British English.
- Practise on a computer: typing while listening and dragging labels.

IELTS Reading: format, timing and task types

One-page cheat sheet · 60 minutes, three passages, paraphrase, 14 task types

The question almost never repeats the passage. Find a key that cannot be paraphrased (name, date, number, term, place), locate the spot, then compare the meaning.

Format (Academic, computer)

Duration	60 min, no extra time to transfer answers
Passages	3, ~2,200–2,750 words in total, harder each time
Questions	40 (usually 13 + 13 + 14), 1 mark each
Scoring	correct answers → band 0–9; no penalty for wrong answers
On screen	right after Listening, no break; passage left, questions right; Review flag; highlight and notes via right click; no spell-checker

Timing — not equal thirds

Passage	Time	What is in it
1	15–17 min	facts, descriptions; easy to locate — lose nothing here
2	20 min	paragraphs A–H, tasks on text structure
3	23–25 min	densest; writer's views and reasoning

- Hard deadline per passage: move on even with empty fields.
- Max 1.5 min per question: best guess, flag Review, move on.

Paraphrase by sight

- **Synonyms:** purchase / buy, sufficient / enough, decline / fall
- **Word class:** the discovery of X / X was discovered; growing rapidly / rapid growth
- **Restructure:** A caused B / B was the result of A

Passage: *the population fell sharply* → question: *a dramatic decline in the number of inhabitants*.

Routine for one passage

- **2–3 min overview:** title, first sentence of each paragraph, last sentence; one phrase per paragraph.
- Read questions **as a group**.
- Locate by the key; read 2–3 sentences around it slowly.
- Answer, move on; next ordered answer is further down.

Order of answers

In text order: T/F/NG, Y/N/NG, all Completion, Short-answer, single-answer MC, Sentence Endings.

Any order: Matching Headings, Information, Features, MC with several answers — do these after the ordered tasks of the same passage. Unknown words are normal; if one is the gap word, just copy it.

Task types — tactics

Type	Key tactic
True / False / Not Given	FALSE needs a contradiction ; silence or a different topic = NOT GIVEN. Watch qualifiers: <i>all, only, the first, always vs many, one of, often</i> . Not from your own knowledge. Can't find it in a minute → almost always NG.
Yes / No / Not Given	The writer's views (Passage 3). "Some researchers believe X" ≠ the writer agrees. Evaluative words carry the position: <i>clearly, it is a mistake to, there is little evidence that</i> .
Matching Headings	Main idea, not a detail — spare headings are built from vivid details. Main idea is in the first/last sentence, or mid-paragraph after <i>however</i> . Easiest paragraphs first, cross off.
Matching Information	Details, often mid-paragraph; a paragraph can be used twice or not at all. Do it last. "Where is the reason given?" → <i>because, due to, led to</i> .
Matching Features	Mark every mention of each name first (capitals scan fast; surname / "the researcher" / "she"). One item can be used several times.
Sentence Endings	Filter endings by grammar first; check the meaning of the whole sentence.
Completion (sentence, note, table, flow-chart, diagram)	Decide the word class first (a + gap → singular noun). Limit is strict; hyphenated word = one. Copy letter for letter: <i>rivers</i> , not <i>river</i> .
Summary Completion	Find which 1–2 paragraphs it covers. With a list: synonym, grammar rules out half (<i>profit / profitable / profitably</i>). Without: exact copy.
Multiple Choice	Every wrong option is in the passage too. Form your own answer before reading options. Traps: true but answers another question; one word distorted (<i>always</i> for <i>often</i>).
Short-answer	<i>who</i> → name, <i>when</i> → date, <i>what material</i> → noun. Added articles count as words.

Marking

X	✓
a misspelt word	copied letter for letter
over the word limit	within it — an article counts
empty field at the end	most likely option — no penalty

Capitals don't matter; British and American spelling both accepted.

Prepare

- Full timed sections; analyse every mistake by cause.
- Paraphrase notebook: "question word / passage word".
- 15–20 min of academic reading daily; drill weak types (often T/F/NG, Headings); practise on a screen.

Correct answers → band (reference)

Correct	Band	Correct	Band
39–40	9	23–26	6
37–38	8.5	19–22	5.5
35–36	8	15–18	5
33–34	7.5	13–14	4.5
30–32	7	10–12	4
27–29	6.5		

Exact boundaries vary slightly by test. 7.0 = ten wrong allowed; 6.5 = thirteen. Do Passages 1–2 almost without losses — then half of Passage 3 is enough.

True/False/Not Given and other question types: practise one at a time

One-page cheat sheet · why test scores don't fix mistakes, the logic of each type, when to drill

A full test tells you how many answers were right, not why. You see the mistake but not the mechanism — so the next test repeats it.

Why a full-test score teaches you nothing

- Reading test: 28/40, band 6.5; questions 4, 9, 17, 23 wrong. The key says "the correct answer is **NOT GIVEN**" — not **by what sign** you could tell it from FALSE without guessing.
- Next test: Not Given again, reasoned exactly the way that went wrong.
- Ten tests in a row build **stamina and timing**, not the mechanics of a format. Those need an explanation — and a test has no time for one.
- **Rare types** (matching sentence endings, flow-chart completion) don't appear in every test. Wait for them and your first real meeting is on exam day.

What one-type practice gives you

Every question type has its own internal logic, and it can be put into words. An explanation sticks the first time if it sits **next to your own mistake** — while you still remember why you chose the other option.

Not "the correct answer is **NOT GIVEN**", but "the researchers believe the eye helps and could not test this directly — so the claim is not confirmed, but it is not denied either."

The logic of each type — the rules that save a band or so

True / False / Not Given

Hedging — **believe suggest may** — usually means the claim is not settled. A statement that makes such an idea **certain** is more often **NOT GIVEN** than FALSE: the text doesn't deny it, it simply never asserts it.

Matching headings

A **yet** or **however** in the middle of a paragraph → the heading almost always belongs to the **second half**. The first half is the bait.

Sentence completion

Read the words around the gap. If the sentence already says *minutes*, then **✗ thirty minutes** is three words and scores nothing — though right in substance. **✓ thirty**.

Matching features

"You may use any letter more than once" is not a polite formality. The habit of avoiding a letter you've already used costs real marks.

Common mistakes

✗	✓
Reading the key and moving on to the next test	Find which question type the mistakes were in; drill that type
Choosing the heading from the paragraph's first sentence when a "however" follows	Match the heading to the part after "however"/"yet"
Repeating a word already in the sentence ("thirty minutes ... minutes")	Check the word limit with the words around the gap
Never reusing a letter in matching features	Reuse letters when the instructions allow it
Meeting a rare format for the first time in the exam	Try it in advance on five questions

A mini-drill

- A short text + **one group of questions** of a single format.
- About **five minutes**, no timer, stop at any point.
- Same screen mechanics as the exam: drag headings, drag words from the box, a letter is taken by one question unless the task says otherwise.
- After checking: **a reason under every answer**.
- Limits: short practice texts, not a 900-word passage — no stamina. Reading types only for now.

When to drill — checklist

- ☐ **After every practice test:** one drill of the type you got wrong — while you remember your thinking.
- ☐ **Before a rare format:** matching features, summary completion with a word list — on five questions, not in the exam.
- ☐ **On the road and in gaps,** alongside vocabulary — one drill ≈ a few metro stops.
- ☐ **Not instead of full tests:** timing, fatigue and spreading 60 minutes are trained only by a whole section.

IELTS Writing: format, criteria, timing

One-page cheat sheet · both tasks, four criteria, the 60-minute plan

Complete the task first, then polish it. Impressive words earn a quarter of the band; too few words, no position in the essay or a missing overview knock out a whole criterion at once.

Two tasks in 60 minutes — one timer, you choose when to switch

Task	What to write	Min words	Time	Weight
Task 1	Description of a chart, table, process diagram or map — what is shown, overall picture + key figures, no reasons or opinions	150	20 min	one third
Task 2	Essay: a clear position, 2–3 developed arguments with examples, a conclusion	250	40 min	two thirds

Task 2 counts twice as much: 6.0 for the chart + 7.0 for the essay rounds to 6.5 (and the other way round too) — but the chart costs more effort.
When time runs short, the essay saves you.

The four marking criteria — equal weight, task band = their average

Criterion	What earns the marks (our summary)
Task Achievement (T1) / Task Response (T2)	Did you answer what was asked? T1: an overview, key figures, every category mentioned. T2: clear position, developed arguments, examples, every part of the question answered. The penalty for too few words sits here.
Coherence & Cohesion	One idea per paragraph, clear order, linking words where they belong (not in every other sentence), references back without repetition.
Lexical Resource	Precise words, natural collocations, variety without straining, spelling and word formation.
Grammatical Range & Accuracy	Different sentence types, correct tenses, articles, agreement, punctuation. Variety <i>and</i> the share of error-free sentences count.

Band 6

Task broadly done, with gaps: overview contains figures and inaccuracies; arguments named but not developed; linkers present but mechanical; errors noticeable, meaning clear.

Band 7

Everything asked for fully done; logical paragraphs; precise words with occasional slips; most sentences error-free. **The difference is completeness and care, not rare words.**

How to split the hour

Min	What you do
0–3	T1: read the picture, note key facts, split into two groups.
3–15	T1: write four paragraphs from the list, without going back.
15–20	T1: check figures against the picture, fix typos. Then never return.
20–24	T2: plan — position, two ideas, one example each.
24–53	T2: write from the plan. Halfway: is body 1 finished and does it have an example?
53–60	T2: three passes — spelling, articles, sentence fragments.

Chart or essay first — both work: **20 min for the chart, not a minute more.**

Task 1 in brief

7 picture types: line, bar, pie, table, two pictures, process, map.
Four paragraphs: intro in your own words · overview with no figures · two paragraphs of data and comparisons. No conclusion.
X describing how the chart is built · numbers in the overview · explaining causes · confusing % with percentage points.

Computer format

- **Word counter** under the answer box — 240 words are visible at once, no fooling yourself.
- **No spellchecker.** Know your typical mistakes and look for them deliberately.
- Cut / copy / paste work, paragraphs move easily. **X** Task wording pasted into the answer does not count towards the total.
- Timer always visible; the section closes when it runs out — no “submit early” button.

Task 2 in brief

5 question types: agree/disagree · discuss two views · advantages/disadvantages · problem/solution · two direct questions.
Four paragraphs: intro with your position · two bodies “idea, explanation, example” · conclusion, no new ideas. Aim for **280–320 words**.
X wrong question answered · no position in the intro · ideas listed, not developed · journalistic tone · fragments.

Vocabulary — learn by function, not from “100 clever words” lists

- **With its collocation:** not *significant* but a *significant increase in*; not *demand* but *demand for*. Half of vocabulary errors are the right word in the wrong company.
- **With its family:** rise — a rise, grow — growth, sharply — a sharp.
- **In pairs:** doubled — halved, rose — fell, advantage — drawback, support — oppose.
- **Own mistake list:** your 10–15 persistent errors (*government, belive*).
- **Use it the next day:** a word not used within a week is forgotten. 3–5 new words per essay is enough.
- **Countability:** spending, information, advice, research, equipment — no plural. **X** *spendings*
- **Read academic texts** (Reading passages) and note phrases: *is widely regarded as, plays a key role in, there is growing evidence that*.
- More → **Trends** and **Linking words** sheets.

Practise: timed texts + a review of mistakes after each. **2–3 texts a week, one of them a Task 1, and once a week both tasks back to back in 60 minutes** under exam conditions.

IELTS Writing Task 1: graphs, tables, processes, maps

One-page cheat sheet · structure, timing, tenses, mistakes

Write nothing except what is drawn: the overall picture, the figures that confirm it, comparisons. No causes, opinions, conclusions or recommendations.

Answer structure: four paragraphs

Paragraph	Sent.	Words	Rule
Intro	1	~25	Task in your own words: what, where, when. No "this report summarises".
Overview	2–3	~40	Main trend + how the data groups. No figures.
Body 1	3–4	~55	First group, every statement with a number.
Body 2	3–4	~55	Second group, numbers + comparison with the first.

No conclusion. Under 150 words = you missed data.

20 minutes

Min	What you do
0–3	Find extremes and the overall trend; list facts, split into two groups ("rose/fell", "large/small", "before/after").
3–15	Write the list top to bottom, one line = one sentence. Don't go back.
15–18	Check: no figures in overview? every category? every number, year, "doubled"?
18–20	Typos, articles, % vs points, repeated verbs.

Seven task types

Type	What to look for	Key grammar
Line graph	Overall trend, peaks and dips, crossings, where growth sped up or slowed	Past Simple, verbs of movement
Bar chart	Largest / smallest, contrasts, what swapped places	Comparative structures
Pie chart	Which share dominates, how shares changed	a quarter, a third, accounted for
Table	Pick 5–7 key numbers, extremes and totals — don't copy everything	As for a graph
Two pictures	A paragraph for each + a linking sentence	According to the picture types
Process	How many stages, start and end, two phases?	Present Simple passive, sequence
Map	What appeared, disappeared, moved, which direction	Passive (past/future), location words

Overview frames — no numbers

- **Opposite groups:** Overall, A and B declined steeply, whereas C, D and E increased.
- **Different speeds:** Overall, every category rose over the period, though X did so far more steeply than Y.
- **Dominance:** Overall, X was the most common category throughout the period, followed by Y.
- **Change of leader:** Overall, group A lost ground to group B, which overtook it during the period.
- **Turning point:** Overall, the figures rose until 2010, after which the trend reversed for most categories.

Body paragraph = a group, not a list

1. Topic sentence, no numbers: *Turning to the mobile devices, all three categories rose.*
2. Largest member + figures: *Smartphone ownership rose dramatically, from 5% to 96%.*
3. Second, tied to first: *Laptops followed a similar pattern, though from a considerably lower base.*
4. Closing comparison: *Even at its lowest point, laptop ownership remained well above tablet ownership.*

Glue: *by contrast* · *followed a similar pattern* · *The same was true of Z* · *..., whereas Y fell* (whereas never starts a sentence).

Sentence patterns, steepness levels and vocabulary for change → see the **Describing trends** cheat sheet. Rule: % axis, 45%→65% = **20 percentage points**, not "a 20% increase".

Typical mistakes

- ✗ "The table has three columns and five rows" → write about the numbers.
- ✗ "The share grew" → ✓ "...from 12% to 31%". No figures: criterion drops to 5.
- ✗ "almost double" for "more than double"; wrong year or line.
- ✗ missed category → ✓ *Transport was the only category to remain broadly stable, edging up from 12% to 14%.*
- ✗ "As we can see from the graph" · copied intro (doesn't count) · repeated overview.

Tense is chosen by the dates

Situation	Tense · example
The picture	Present Simple: <i>The chart shows...</i>
Past years	Past Simple: <i>Coverage rose from 3% to 61%.</i>
No dates	<i>Housing accounts for 30% of spending.</i>
Future years	<i>is projected to reach 90%</i>
"By a year"	Past Perfect: <i>By 2020, the share had risen to 98%.</i>
Process	Present passive: <i>The wood is cut, dried...</i>
Map	<i>The factory was demolished.</i> / planned: <i>A car park will be built.</i>

✗ **has grown** (no "now", only dates) · ✗ **was growing** (data are points).

Process · map · shares

- **Process:** *At the first stage, the clay is dug out... Once the bottles have been collected, they are washed... After being dried for 24 hours... In the final stage... Mind the first stage, consists of.*
- **Map:** *The woodland to the south of the river was replaced by a car park.*

Checklist before Task 2

- ☐ Four paragraphs, intro in your own words.
- ☐ Overview: separate paragraph, no numbers, with grouping.
- ☐ ≥3 numbers and ≥1 comparison per body paragraph.
- ☐ Every category, including the unchanged one.
- ☐ Past years → Past Simple.
- ☐ No "because", "I think" or conclusion.
- ☐ Counter ≥150, ideally 170–190.

The overview in IELTS Writing Task 1

One-page cheat sheet · six questions, no-numbers wording, frames

Two sentences, 40–50 words, no numbers. Without a separate overview paragraph, Task Achievement rarely goes above 5 or 6 — however well the figures are described.

What it is — and is not

- **Answers:** if you had one sentence, what would you say about this picture? 2–3 observations visible from two metres away.
- **Where:** second paragraph, right after the intro (at the end is allowed, but risky).
- **No numbers:** no %, no “doubled”, no “fivefold” — a multiple is a number too.
- **No reasons or opinions:** ~~X because of new technology~~
- **Not about the layout:** ~~X The graph has four lines and the x-axis shows years.~~

Test: remove every number. Still true about the data → overview. Empty → body detail.

Six questions to ask the picture (first 2–3 min)

1. **Overall direction.** All rise, all fall, or mixed? Compare only start and end.
2. **Highest and lowest.** At the start, end, whole period. The single highest point is almost always worth mentioning.
3. **Biggest change.** Judge by start–end difference, not slope (slope depends on axis scale).
4. **Peaks and troughs.** Rose then fell? A turning point is a separate observation.
5. **Change of leader.** Lines cross? Leader ended behind = almost certainly the headline.
6. **Groups.** Which behave alike? Groups become your two body paragraphs.

Worked example — households with four types of internet connection, 2000–2020

Type	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020
Dial-up	18%	34%	12%	3%	1%
Fixed broadband	1%	22%	55%	66%	61%
Mobile broadband	0%	4%	26%	52%	74%
Fibre	0%	0%	2%	14%	43%

Scrap-paper answers: 1 three rose, dial-up fell almost to zero · 2 highest point mobile 2020; dial-up led at start · 3 mobile, from nothing to three quarters · 4 dial-up peaked 2005, fixed peaked 2015 · 5 leader changed twice · 6 “peak and decline” (dial-up, fixed) vs “growth only” (mobile, fibre).

Overview (Qs 1, 2+5, 6)

Overall, dial-up almost disappeared, while the three faster types spread rapidly, and by the end of the period mobile broadband had become the most common connection. It is also clear that dial-up and fixed broadband both peaked and then declined, whereas mobile broadband and fibre never fell.

→ Sentence 1: direction + leader at the end. Sentence 2: grouping, which sets up the body (para 1: the two that peaked; para 2: the two that kept rising). Peak years, exact %, crossing dates stay in the body.

Words for main features without numbers

Say	How
Highest	X was the most common / widespread; accounted for the largest share; had the highest figure throughout
Lowest	X was the least common; remained the smallest category; played only a minor role
Direction	rose / fell over the period; the overall trend was upward; all categories except X increased
Peak	X peaked and then declined; rose at first before falling back
New leader	X overtook Y; replaced Y as the most common; the ranking had reversed
Biggest	the most dramatic change / the steepest rise / by far the largest increase
Stability	remained relatively stable; changed little over the period
Groups	A and B followed a similar pattern, whereas C and D...

almost, nearly, far, by far, most are fine (judgements). Prefer *at the beginning / by the end of the period, throughout* to years.

Common mistakes

- ~~X Overall, mobile broadband rose to 74%.~~ — a body sentence.
- ~~X The graph shows four types of connection over twenty years.~~ — intro, not overview.
- ~~X Dial-up fell. Fixed broadband rose. Mobile rose...~~ → ✓ *the three faster types spread*
- ~~X factual error in the most visible place: “rose equally”, “more than doubled” for 6→11.~~
- ~~X missed change of leader · reasons · overview repeated in the body · semicolon join → whereas / while.~~

Other picture types

- **Bars, two years:** what rose, fell, did the order change? *Overall, walking and cycling lost ground to the car, which became the most common way of getting to school.*
- **Bars, no time:** leader, laggard, groups. *Overall, the youngest group was the most active in every category, while participation fell steadily with age.*
- **Pies:** *Overall, housing replaced food as the largest item of spending, while the remaining categories changed only slightly.*
- **Table:** highest and lowest in each column — the overview is whatever repeats.
- **Process:** *Overall, the process consists of eight stages, beginning with the collection of used bottles and ending with the production of new ones.*
- **Map:** *Overall, the area changed from farmland into a residential district, with most of the new building in the north.*

Practise in 5 minutes

Take a graph, set a timer: **3 min** for the six questions, **2 min** for two sentences. Then check:

- ☐ No numbers (not even “doubled”).
- ☐ Every claim true against the picture.
- ☐ No missed change of leader or peak.
- ☐ Grouping that sets up the two body paragraphs.

Ten such rounds a week do more than three full answers. Full Task 1 structure → **Task 1** cheat sheet.

Describing trends in IELTS Writing Task 1

One-page cheat sheet · sentence patterns, prepositions, strength, shape

Variety comes from switching sentence frames, not from hunting for rarer verbs. Save the strong words for the strongest changes on the graph.

Four sentence patterns — one fact, four ways

1. Verb + adverb — the workhorse, ~2/3 of sentences

Streaming revenue rose dramatically after 2012.

Adverb after the verb: fell steadily, not steadily fell.

2. There was a + adjective + noun — max once a paragraph

There was a dramatic rise in streaming revenue after 2012.

Pairs: sharply → a sharp · steadily → a steady · slightly → a slight

3. X saw / experienced + noun — good to open a paragraph

Streaming saw a dramatic rise after 2012.

Make the category the subject, not the year.

4. Participle tail — a second figure, no new sentence

...took off after 2012, reaching \$760 million by 2020.

reaching / rising to / falling to / peaking at. Must continue, not contradict.

Prepositions with numbers

Prep.	Meaning · example
from ... to	start and end: fell from \$820m to \$90m
to	end value: rose to \$760m
by	size of change: fell by \$60m
at	a level: peaked at \$330m; stood at \$30m in 2000
of	size after a noun: a fall of \$60m
in	what changed: a rise in streaming revenue
by + year	no later than (Past Perfect): by 2020, streaming had overtaken CDs

Multiples — learn in pairs

Rise	Fall
doubled	halved
more than doubled	more than halved
tripled / trebled	fell to a third of its 2000 level
rose sevenfold	fell to a ninth of its original level
was twice as high as	was half the figure for

Check the arithmetic: 90 → 380 is *more than quadrupled*. Axis in %: 45% → 65% is **20 percentage points**, not “a 20% increase”. No multiples in the overview.

Size, then thing: an increase of \$120m in download revenue. **X reached to · peaked on** → **reached \$760m · peaked at \$330m / in 2012**.

How strong — measure against the start value, not the angle on the page

How strong	Rise	Fall	Adverb / adjective
Several times over	surged, soared, rocketed, took off	plummeted, plunged, collapsed	dramatically / a dramatic
Clearly	rose, increased, climbed, grew	fell, dropped, declined, decreased	sharply, considerably, significantly
Moderately	rose steadily, climbed gradually	fell steadily, declined gradually	steadily, gradually, moderately
A little	edged up, crept up, rose slightly	edged down, dipped, fell slightly	slightly, marginally
Not at all	remained stable, stayed flat, levelled off, held steady — only if the line did not move at all		—

Shape of the line

- **Accelerating:** growth accelerated / gathered pace
- **Slowing:** growth slowed / lost momentum / began to level off
- **Peak and fall:** peaked at X in 2012 before falling back
- **Low and recovery:** hit a low of X, then recovered / bottomed out
- **Fluctuation:** fluctuated between A and B — one word plus the range
- **Plateau:** rose until 2015, after which it levelled off at around A
- **Two halves:** rose sharply to a peak of \$330m in 2012 **before falling** to \$60m by 2020

Comparing lines

- Streaming saw **by far the steepest** increase of the four.
- Vinyl **followed a similar pattern**, though from a much lower base.
- CDs fell, **whereas** streaming rose. (not at sentence start)
- Streaming **overtook** CDs between 2012 and 2016.
- The gap **narrowed / widened**; the lines **converged** at ~\$300m.
- Streaming earned **over eight times as much as** CDs.

Strong sentence = movement + shape + comparison, ~20 words.

Common mistakes

X	✓
rose by \$760m when you mean the end value	rose to \$760m — same only if the start was zero
an increase of sales · There was a sharply rise	an increase in sales · a sharp rise
soared for 25 → 45 · remained stable for 12 → 10	rose steadily · dipped slightly
every year in turn · has grown · ...because of smartphones	start, end, turning points · grew (past years) · no reasons not on the graph

Grammar for IELTS Writing Task 1: tenses and the passive

One-page cheat sheet · Grammatical Range & Accuracy · ~~struck out~~ = wrong, [is] = missing

The years on the graph choose the tense. About the graph itself → Present (The chart shows...). About past data → Past Simple (Sales rose...).

Which tense

On the graph	Tense	Example
Years in the past	Past Simple	Car ownership rose steadily.
Years in the future	Present Simple passive + to · Future Simple	The population is expected to reach 9 million. · Demand will double.
Past and future	Past Simple, then a forecast	Sales fell until 2020 but are predicted to recover.
No dates: process, machine, shares	Present Simple	The water is filtered and then stored.
"Then and now" map	Past · Present · Present Perfect for changes	There was a farm. · The village has a school. · The farm has been replaced.

Irregular trend verbs

Base	Past	3rd form
rise	rose	risen
fall	fell	fallen
grow	grew	grown
stand	stood	stood
overtake	overtook	overtaken
become	became	become
spend	spent	spent
lead	led	led

-ed spelling: dropped, planned · studied, varied · stayed · decreased · levelled off (UK) / leveled off (US)

-s with he/she/it: The diagram illustrates · The number of stages is · Each stage takes

The passive: be + 3rd form

Tense	Form	Example
Present	is / are done	The bottles are washed.
Past	was / were done	A bridge was built in 2005.
Pres. Perfect	has / have been done	The trees have been cut down.
Future	will be / is expected to be done	A car park will be added.

- **Factory process** → passive. Active only if a machine or person is named: A machine cuts the sheets.
- **Natural process** → active: The eggs hatch. Water evaporates. Passive only if something acts on it: The rock is worn down by wind.
- **No passive** for rise, fall, happen, occur, remain. rise (by itself) ≠ raise (someone does it).
- **Order of steps:** first, next, then, once, after, finally · Once the grapes have been picked, they are crushed. · After being stored, the wine is bottled.

Typical mistakes → fixed

X	✓	X	✓
The graph ~~showed~~ that sales rose.	The graph shows that sales rose.	The clay ~~[is]~~ heated.	The clay is heated.
Sales ~~has rose~~ in 2010.	Sales rose in 2010.	Prices ~~raised~~ sharply.	Prices rose sharply.
The number of cars ~~were~~ 2 million.	The number of cars was 2 million.	A school ~~has been built~~ in 2005.	A school was built in 2005.
Unemployment ~~was decreased~~ .	Unemployment decreased.	Demand will ~~doubles~~ .	Demand will double.

Three-question check for every verb

1. **When?** Finished past date → Past Simple. Future date → is expected to / will. No dates or about the graph → Present Simple. Change up to today, no date → Present Perfect.
2. **Who does the action?** Changes by itself → active. Someone does something to it → passive (be + 3rd form).
3. **Is the form right?** -s with he/she/it · 2nd form in Past · 3rd form after has and be · the number ... was.

IELTS Writing Task 2: the band 7 essay

One-page cheat sheet · question types, structure, timing, style, checking

An IELTS essay is a strict genre, not free composition. Keep to the scheme and you get 6.5–7.0 without rare words. Task 2 = two thirds of the Writing band → give it 40 minutes.

Five question types — first minute: underline what is asked and how many parts

Type	How to recognise it	What the answer must contain
Agree or disagree	To what extent do you agree...	Clear position from paragraph 1 + arguments for it. Partly agree → say with what. “only / all / always” = invitation to argue.
Two views	Some people think... others believe... Discuss both + your opinion	A paragraph for each view, fairly; your opinion in the introduction and again in the conclusion.
Advantages / disadvantages	Do the advantages outweigh...? / What are...?	Both. “Outweigh” → a yes or no and why.
Problem and solution	Problems (or causes) + what can be done	Specific problems/causes and solutions linked to them — not consequences instead of causes.
Two direct questions	e.g. Why is this happening? Positive or negative?	An answer to both, usually a paragraph each.

Four paragraphs, always · aim 280–320 words

Paragraph	Words	What goes in it
Introduction	~40–50	Question in your own words + position/plan. No “in the modern world”, no history, no rhetorical questions.
Body 1	~90–100	Topic sentence · 2 sentences why · 1 specific example.
Body 2	~90–100	Same scheme, second idea/view. Opens with a contrasting link.
Conclusion	~40–50	Restate position, weigh the sides. No new ideas.

Under 250 = automatic penalty. Two developed arguments beat five merely named.

Timing: 40 minutes

- **0–4 min — plan, not text.** Underline the question, decide position, two ideas + a specific example for each.
- **4–33 min — write from the plan.** At minute 20: is body 1 finished, with an example? If not, insert it now.
- **33–40 min — check** in three passes, 1.5–2 min each.
- No plan after 3 min → take a simpler position. Clarity is marked, not originality.

Body paragraph = idea → explanation → example

- **Topic sentence:** one idea, stated directly.
- **Explanation:** why is this so? what follows?
- **Example:** a country, city, case, known phenomenon. “Many people think” is not one.

Practise it as **AREA** (Answer, Reason, Example, Answer again) — see the AREA cheat sheet.

Model: “Universities — only job skills, or broad education? Discuss both views + opinion”

Introduction (restate + position)

Some people argue that universities should concentrate on the skills employers need, while others believe that higher education should cover a broad range of subjects regardless of their practical value.

This essay discusses both views and argues that a combination of the two serves students best.

Conclusion (restate + weigh, nothing new)

In conclusion, while practical training gives graduates an immediate advantage, a broad education protects them over a whole career. In my view, universities should build degrees around a professional core but require students to take courses outside their field.

Linking words: 6–8 per essay, max one per sentence

Contrast · However · On the other hand · Although X, Y · Nevertheless
Consequence · Consequently · As a result · ..., which means that
Others' view · Proponents of X argue that · It is often claimed that
Own view · In my view · I believe that · On balance

As a *result*, not “the”. *Meanwhile* = at the same time, not “whereas”. Full rules: Linking words cheat sheet.

Formal style

✗ Conversational	✓ Formal
kids, stuff, a lot of, huge	children, materials, many, considerable
I think · But/And/Also, at the start	In my view · However/Moreover/In addition
don't, can't · get better, go up	do not, cannot · improve, increase
you (the reader) · always, everyone	people, one · tend to, is likely to

Check in three passes

- **1. Spelling — your own list** of 10–15 words (government, believe, their/there). No spellchecker.
- **2. Articles and small grammar:** article on every singular countable; *demand for*; fewer/less; passive with 3rd form; no comma between subject and verb.
- **3. Fragments and register:** a sentence starting with Which/And/But/Because → attach it with a comma. Finite verb in every sentence? No new idea in the conclusion?

✗ And as a result less risk for them. → ✓ As a result, they face a lower risk.

Typical mistakes

- Wrong question: own view instead of two; consequences instead of causes
- No position in the intro, or it changes by the end; under 250 words
- Ideas listed, not developed; no specific example; both views in one paragraph
- New idea or meta-conclusion (“In this essay we discussed...”)
- a cars, this skills, less cars; real-word typos: carer/career, cases/causes

Linking words in IELTS Writing

One-page cheat sheet · Coherence & Cohesion

A linker does not create logic, it labels it. Band 6: many, mechanical, sometimes wrong. Band 7: accurate, varied, and part of the linking done without linkers.

Three types — three sentence patterns

1. Adverbs — new sentence

however, therefore, moreover, in addition, as a result, nevertheless, in contrast

X. However, Y. default
X; however, Y. short, close ideas
X. Y, however, Z. after the subject
~~X~~ X, however Y — comma splice (Grammar)

2. Conjunctions — + clause

although, even though, while, whereas, because, since, so, but, unless, if

Although X, Y.
Y although X. no comma
X, whereas Y. compare two facts
~~X~~ Although X, but Y — one per contrast

3. Prepositions — + noun

despite, in spite of, because of, due to, owing to, as a result of, in addition to, instead of

Despite the high cost, ...
Despite being expensive, ...
due to the storm
~~X~~ despite of · due to prices are high

One idea, three ways — this is your range

Meaning	Adverb	Conjunction	Preposition
Contrast	Fees are high. However, demand is growing.	Although fees are high, demand is growing.	Despite high fees, demand is growing.
Cause → result	Fuel became cheaper. As a result, car use rose.	Car use rose because fuel became cheaper.	Car use rose due to cheaper fuel.
Addition	Cycling is cheap. In addition, it improves health.	Cycling is not only cheap but also healthy.	In addition to being cheap, cycling improves health.
Comparison	Cities grew. In contrast, villages shrank.	Cities grew, whereas villages shrank.	Unlike cities, villages shrank.

Mix-ups the examiner spots at once

~~X~~ Don't write	Why	✓ Write
Meanwhile, private schools are expensive.	meanwhile = at the same time	However, / By contrast,
On the contrary, villages shrank.	rejects the previous claim, doesn't compare	In contrast, / By contrast,
On the other hand, it is also cheap.	introduces the other side, not one more point	In addition, / Moreover,
Moreover, some people disagree.	moreover continues the same line; this is a turn	However, / Nevertheless,
As a result of, the air is cleaner.	preposition — needs a noun	As a result, ... / As a result of the ban, ...
Even if many people use cars, ...	even if = hypothetical	Even though ...
Besides, ... / Also, ... (sentence start)	too informal	In addition, / Moreover,
On my opinion · According to me · From one side	direct translation	In my view, · On the one hand ...

Cohesion without linkers (band 7+)

- **This / these + noun:** This policy... These changes... — never a bare *This*
- **Such + noun:** Such measures are rarely popular.
- **..., which** means that / leads to... — a result without *Therefore*
- **Synonyms:** young people → the younger generation → teenagers

Before you hand in — 30-second check

- Is there a real contrast / result behind every linker?
- 6–8 linkers per 270 words — about one every 2nd–3rd sentence
- Adverb → full stop before it; preposition → noun after it
- Each contrast word appears at most once or twice

The AREA method for IELTS Writing and Speaking

Weak paragraph = a claim, then straight into a story — or a claim and a reason with nothing to show it. AREA closes the gap: the same four steps on paper (Task 2 body paragraphs) and out loud (Speaking Part 3).

The four steps

Letter	What it does	Question it answers
Answer	The main point, tied directly to the question	What do you think?
Reason	Explains why it is true — the mechanism, not the same idea in other words	Why?
Example	One specific, believable case that shows the reason	What does it look like in real life?
Answer again / Alternative	Writing: back to the question — the point is proved. Speech: often a short nod to the other side.	So what?

AREA is a teaching scheme, not an exam requirement. The examiner marks whether the idea is **developed**, the sentences **connect** and the answer **addresses the question** — AREA is the shortest route to all three.

Writing: Task 2 body paragraphs 1 and 2 — one idea per paragraph

Q: University education should be free for all students. To what extent do you agree or disagree?

A: The strongest argument for free university education is that it gives talented students from poor families the same chance as everyone else.

R: When tuition fees are high, many capable young people do not apply at all, not because they lack ability but because they are afraid of years of debt. **E:** For instance, a school-leaver from a village may be the best mathematician in her class, yet a loan of several thousand dollars can make a degree look like an impossible risk to her family. **A:** Removing fees would therefore allow universities to choose students by their ability rather than by their parents' income.

Four sentences, about 90 words — exactly the Task 2 body paragraph length.

Mistakes AREA fixes in writing

Mistake	✗ What it looks like	✓ Fix
Example instead of a reason	A claim, then a story about a friend — just an anecdote	Add the Reason: without it the example proves nothing
Reason with no example	Sounds right but stays abstract	Show the examiner you developed the idea
A “general” example	For example, many people... — another generalisation	One person, one place, one situation
Invented statistic	A made-up percentage	A believable situation is safer — nobody can check facts in the exam
On the topic, off the point	A sentence about universities that does not support the paragraph's point	Check each sentence against the paragraph's point, not the essay's topic (costs Coherence and Cohesion)

Speaking Part 3 — full AREA, last A = Alternative

Q: Should university education be free?

A: I think it should, at least for students who can't afford it. **R:** Otherwise a lot of clever young people simply don't apply, because the idea of a big loan scares their families. **E:** I know a guy from my school who was brilliant at physics, but he went straight to work because his parents couldn't take that risk. **Alt:** Of course, someone has to pay for it, so maybe it should depend on the family's income rather than being free for everyone.

- Yes-or-no answer = direct road to 6.0. Expected: 4–6 sentences of reasoning.
- Examiner asks “Why?” / “Can you give an example?” → your answer was too short.
- The caveat shows what earns a high band in Part 3: seeing both sides.
- A personal example is fine if it illustrates the general idea, not replaces it.

Parts 1 and 2

Part 1 — short ARE (2–3 sentences): full AREA becomes a monologue; Part 1 needs a conversation.

Do you like cooking? — Yes, quite a lot. **(A)** It helps me switch off after work. **(R)** Last weekend I tried making plov for the first time, and it actually turned out well. **(E)**

Part 2 — the cue card points do the work. AREA helps at most in the last sentence: why it mattered.

How to practise

- Learn it on paper first: there you can mark each sentence and see the gap (no example, a reason repeating the answer, a drifting sentence).
- **1. Name the roles** in someone else's paragraph: A, R, E or A.
- **2. Find the odd one out** — often on the topic but off the point.
- **3. Every few days, write your own** for a Task 2 question.
- **4. Speaking:** one Part 3 question a day — in writing, then out loud without looking. After a couple of weeks the scheme kicks in on its own.

Paragraph checklist

- ☐ Sentence 1 answers the question directly
- ☐ The reason explains why — not the answer reworded
- ☐ One specific, believable example — no invented numbers
- ☐ Last sentence returns to the point (speech: a caveat)

Full essay plan, timing and linking words: see the Writing Task 2 and Linking words cheat sheets.

IELTS Speaking: the three parts, criteria, how to prepare

One-page cheat sheet · answer length, cue card, Part 3 patterns, band 6 vs 7

The examiner is a host working from a script, not someone to convince. Extend every answer, keep talking until stopped, and let pauses fall between ideas — not inside a sentence.

Format in brief

- **11–14 min**, one-to-one with an examiner, audio-recorded; same day as the written sections or within a week.
- **3 parts**: short questions · cue-card monologue · abstract discussion. Same for Academic and GT; computer test still has an examiner.
- **Score**: whole band on 4 criteria, average rounded to 0.5.
- The examiner keeps time by the clock: being cut off mid-sentence is the procedure, not a judgement.

Part 1 · 4–5 min · short questions

ID check, then 3 topics × 3–4 questions: work/study, home town, then everyday (food, weather, transport, music, gifts, sleep...)

- **2–3 sentences**: answer + reason + detail/example.
- "Do you like cooking?" "Not really, to be honest. I can cook a few basic dishes, but after work I'd rather order something. At weekends, though, I sometimes make *plow* for the family."
- Naturalness over correctness; memorised answers are obvious.
- Answer in the tense of the question.
- Didn't understand? "Sorry, could you say that again?" (once or twice; words are not explained).

Part 2 · 3–4 min · cue card: 1 min to prepare, 1–2 min to speak, then 1–2 short questions

The card: "Describe a..." + three prompts under "You should say:" + "and explain why...". Topics: a person, place, event, object, experience. Truthfulness is not tested — an invented trip is fine.

The preparation minute

- Keywords, 2–3 per prompt, not sentences.
- Choose in 10 seconds the example you have **most to say** about.
- Leave room for "explain why" — the richest sentences.

Talking for two minutes

- Prompts = your plan: *The first thing I should mention is... What made it special was... Looking back, the reason I...*
- One concrete scene, not a list; keep going until stopped.
- Show past forms: *had been*, *was going to*, *used to*, *would have*.

Part 3 · 4–5 min · discussion about people and society — where 7.0 is decided

Type	Example	Answer plan
Opinion	Should governments fund the arts?	position → reason → example → concession, "having said that..." (AREA)
Comparison	How is family life different from 50 years ago?	then → now → why it changed
Reasons	Why do people move to big cities?	2–3 reasons: "the main reason is... another factor is..."
Prediction	Will people still read books in 30 years?	"I imagine..., it's likely that..., unless..."
Evaluation	Is it good that children use tablets?	pros → cons → where you stand

- Talk about people: "In my country, most families..."; personal example only to illustrate.
- **4–6 sentences**. Follow-ups "Why?" / "Can you give an example?" mean it was short.
- "That's a difficult one. I suppose it depends on..." buys seconds; silence buys nothing.
- Don't refuse: "I've never thought about it", then a version anyway.

Typical mistakes

- ✗ *Do I think cities will grow? Yes, I think cities will grow.* →
- ✓ *Whether they'll keep expanding? I'd say so, yes.*
- ✗ memorised answers · monologue in Part 1 · too quiet or fast · silence after "I don't know" · yes/no in Part 3.

The four criteria — band 7 vs band 6

Criterion	Band 7	Band 6 / what lowers it
Fluency & Coherence	flows without noticeable effort; flexible linking. Thinking pauses OK even at 8	talks at length but loses coherence, repeats, self-corrects; pauses to find a word or verb form
Lexical Resource	collocations, less common words used appropriately; paraphrases when a word won't come	enough for extended answers, precision suffers; memorised idioms out of context pull it down
Grammar Range & Accuracy	complex sentences often, mostly error-free	complex structures attempted, errors usually don't block understanding
Pronunciation	understood without effort — intelligibility, not accent	wrong stress (comFORTable, deVELOpment), flat intonation, "letter by letter" words

6.0 → 7.0: what changes

	6.0	7.0
Extension	one sentence each	3 in Part 1, 5 in Part 3
Pauses	inside a sentence	between ideas
Complex	"If I would have..."	mostly right
Linking	firstly, secondly, in conclusion	well, actually, the thing is, I mean, having said that
Abstract	back to personal	causes and consequences

Preparing alone — checklist

- **Record and transcribe** 2 min on a cue card.
- **Bank of 10–15 stories** (trip, person, decision, skill, place, gift, failure): 5–6 keywords + one unusual detail.
- **1 + 2 minute drill** against a timer, one card a day.
- **Vocabulary by topic**: 20 topics × 10 phrases you'd use — "become part of everyday life", not "ubiquitous".
- **Shadowing**: podcast, 1-second delay, 10 min a day.
- **Five structures** (e.g. conditionals, which/who, passive, used to) in every Part 3 answer.

The indefinite article a/an in IELTS

One-page cheat sheet · Grammatical Range & Accuracy

The main rule: a singular countable noun never stands alone. Something must come before it: a/an, the, my, this, every, one... — or switch to the plural.

Bare noun → fixed

✗	✓
Child needs attention.	A child needs... / Children need...
Government should build hospital.	The government should build a hospital.
It is good idea.	It is a good idea.
I am student.	I am a student.

Three-question check for every bare noun

1. **Countable?** one problem, two problems — yes; *one information* — no → no a.
2. **Singular?** If not → no a.
3. **Already the / my / this / every...?** If not → it needs a/an (or the, if specific and known).

Then check the **sound** of the next word: a or an. An “articles only” pass over a finished essay takes a couple of minutes.

When to use a

- **First mention:** A recent study found... → *The study*...
- **Jobs, roles, classification:** My father is an engineer. Tashkent is a big city. She works as a nurse. (but: He was elected president.)
- **a + adjective + noun:** a (very) serious problem
- **Intensifiers:** such a long day · what a waste · quite a popular idea · too big a risk (essay: no “of”)
- **Numbers:** a hundred, a thousand, a dozen · a third of students · half an hour · a lot of, a number of, a wide range of
- **a number of ≠ the number of:** A number of students **are**... · The number of students **is**...
- **“Per”:** twice a week · 60 km an hour · \$5 a kilo ✗ **twice in a week**
- **Task 1 trends as nouns:** There was a sharp rise / a slight decline / a peak of 40% ✗ **There was sharp increase**

A or an — by sound, not by letter

Vowel letter, consonant sound → a	Consonant letter, vowel sound → an
a university · a European country · a useful tip · a one-way ticket · a unique chance	an hour · an honest answer · an MBA · an SUV · an 8% increase · an 11-year-old

It looks at the **next word**: an apple → a red apple · a university → an old university · an 18% rise · a 25% rise

When a is wrong

Uncountable — no a, no -s:

information, advice, research, evidence, knowledge, progress, equipment, furniture, homework, news, traffic, accommodation, money, transport, pollution, behaviour, unemployment, weather, work

a useful advice	useful advice / a piece of advice
a research shows	research shows / a study shows
What a nice weather!	What nice weather!
I found a work	I found a job

Both, different meaning: experience / an experience · paper / a paper · education / a good education

- **Plurals:** a problem → problems / some problems
- **One determiner only:** ✗ **a my friend** → **a friend of mine / one of my friends**
- **Meals:** have breakfast, after lunch (but a quick lunch)
- **by + transport:** by car, by bus (but in a car)
- **What kind of job...?** — no a

Pairs people mix up

- **a few / few:** I have a few friends (some) · Few people use it (hardly any) — same for a little / little
- **a / one:** one brother and two sisters — when the number matters
- **a / the:** A man came in. The man was tall.

Fixed phrases with a

make a decision · make a mistake · have a look · take a break · take a risk · have a chance · play a role in · as a result · as a rule · for a while · for a long time · all of a sudden · on a daily basis · it's a pity · have a headache · have a cold

Quick test — a, an or nothing?

1. My sister is ___ architect.
2. There was ___ significant increase in ___ unemployment.
3. I go to the gym three times ___ week.
4. It takes ___ hour to get to work.
5. ___ few people agree with this idea, so it is rarely discussed.
6. He is ___ honest and ___ hard-working person.

Answers: 1 an architect · 2 a significant increase, unemployment (no article) · 3 a week · 4 an hour · 5 Few (hardly anyone) · 6 an honest, no second article

The article the and no article (Ø) in IELTS

One-page cheat sheet · Grammatical Range & Accuracy · ~~struck out~~ = extra, [the] = missing

The main rule: general idea → no article (Ø society, Ø education, Ø children). Specific, already known, one of a kind → the (the society we live in, the internet).

Typical mistakes → fixed

X	✓
~~The~~ society should help ~~the~~ old people.	Society should help old people / the elderly.
~~The~~ education is the key to ~~the~~ success.	Education is the key to success.
[The] government should invest...	The government / Governments should...
[The] number of students increased.	The number of students increased.
[The] environment is under threat.	The environment is under threat.

Three-question check for every noun

1. **Does the reader know which one?** Mentioned before, one of a kind, defined in the sentence, superlative → **the**.
2. **If not — one of many?** Singular countable → **a/an**.
3. **If not — a general idea?** Plural or uncountable → **Ø**.

Then scan the special cases: the environment, the government, the internet, the number of, the UK — and Ø in go to school, at university, by car.

When to use the

- **Second mention:** A new law was passed. The law banned... · a sharp rise → the rise
- **One of a kind:** the sun, the world, the internet, the media, the environment, the economy, the public, the government, the police
- **Defined in the sentence:** the quality of education in rural areas · the people who live near airports · the cost of living (but a lack of, a number of)
- **Superlatives, ordinals:** the most important, the first step, the only solution, the same, the next generation · one of the most serious problems
- **the number of ≠ a number of:** The number of tourists **was** 3m · A number of tourists **were** unhappy
- **the + adjective = a group:** the elderly, the young, the poor, the unemployed ~~X the elderly people~~
- **Whole class (formal):** The smartphone has changed... = Smartphones have changed... ~~X Smartphone has changed~~
- **Instruments:** play the piano · **sport:** play Ø football · on the radio, but on Ø TV, by Ø email

Names

With the	No article
the UK, the USA, the UAE, the Netherlands · the Amu Darya, the Aral Sea, the Pacific, the Kyzylkum · the Alps, the Tian Shan · the United Nations, the University of Cambridge	Ø Uzbekistan, Ø China · Ø Tashkent · Ø Lake Issyk-Kul, Ø Everest · Ø Asia · Ø Cambridge University

When the is wrong

- **General plurals and uncountables:** Ø students, Ø money, Ø health, Ø crime, Ø unemployment, Ø nature, Ø life, Ø pollution
- **Most = the majority:** Ø Most people agree (the most = the greatest number)
- **Meals, languages, subjects, illnesses:** have Ø breakfast · speak Ø English · study Ø history · Ø diabetes (but the history of Samarkand)
- **One determiner only:** ~~X the my friend, the Tashkent's metro~~ → my friend, Tashkent's metro / the Tashkent metro

Purpose vs building

go to Ø school · at Ø university · in Ø hospital (UK) · go to Ø work · at Ø home · go to Ø bed	went to the school to meet the teacher · the university is near the metro · visited him at the hospital
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Pairs people mix up

- Ø nature (the natural world) · the nature of the problem (essence)
- Ø life in Ø cities · life in the city (vs the countryside)
- Ø next year (from now) · the next year (after a past event)
- at Ø night · in the evening, in the morning

Writing Task 1

The chart shows... · the proportion of households · the number of visitors · the amount of energy · the figure for coal · in the 1990s · over the period · by the end of the year · the highest figure · the lowest point — **but** in the overview: Overall, Ø coal remained the main source of energy in Ø Germany.

Quick test — the, a/an or nothing?

1. ___ government should spend more on ___ public transport.
2. ___ number of cars has doubled since 2010.
3. ___ elderly often feel lonely.
4. My brother is at ___ university in ___ UK.
5. ___ pollution is one of ___ most serious problems in ___ world.
6. ___ Amu Darya flows into ___ Aral Sea.

Answers: 1 The government, Ø public transport · 2 The number of (+ has) · 3 The elderly · 4 at Ø university, the UK · 5 Ø Pollution, the most, the world · 6 The Amu Darya, the Aral Sea

IELTS vocabulary on your commute, with no internet

One-page cheat sheet · what to learn on the road, what to skip, a weekly routine

An hour or more a day on the road is 6–8 hours a week. Reading passages and essays don't fit a shaking phone — words do.

Don't do on the road

X	Why
Full tests, timed sections	Reading and Listening need quiet and 30–60 uninterrupted minutes. A test broken by a stop scores below your real level and spoils your statistics.
Essays	250 words on a shaking phone is a chore; an essay without a review of its mistakes teaches almost nothing.
Random "100 words for IELTS" videos	No context, no repetition — gone in a week. In the metro they won't even load.

Do: vocabulary

Vocabulary splits well into 2–3-minute pieces and needs no quiet. **Five cards per station.** Over a week those bursts add up to more than an hour of real work on words — as much as an evening lesson.

Otherwise flashcards become a game for its own sake: the three conditions below.

Three conditions for useful flashcards

1. Words from exam texts

Common words you already know; really rare ones hardly come up. Most useful: **mid-frequency** words from academic Reading passages and Listening lectures: proportion · absorb · sediment · scarce · deliberate

2. Repeat until learned

Not a single pass. A word sticks when you recognise it **several times in a row**. One right answer means nothing. Rule of thumb: **three correct in a row** = learned; one mistake — the count starts over.

3. Spell it, not just recognise it

In Listening and Reading a misspelt answer is a wrong answer.
X recieve → ✓ receive — costs a mark.

From easy to hard: three ways to drill a word

Mode	What you do	What it trains
Learn new words	English word → pick the translation out of five	Recognition. Wrong options of the same part of speech, so guessing by form doesn't work.
Reverse	Translation → pick the English word out of five	Recall rather than recognition — what Writing and Speaking need.
Spell it	Translation → type the word yourself	Spelling. Any typo is a mistake and resets that word's streak.

Small portions, many repeats

- Work through a small set (**seven words**: one common, one rare, five mid-frequency), not the whole list.
- A word comes back every few cards until learned; a learned word leaves, a new one takes its place.
- So every word is repeated many times in one ride, not once a week.
- Want a calm look at the translation and example? Turn off auto-advance after a right answer.

Tie words to your tests

- After every Listening and Reading, spend **two minutes** ticking the words you didn't know.
- Train those first: your own gaps, not an abstract list.
- Learned words you feel you've forgotten — return them to training.

Fitting it into the week

When	What	Why
Morning, on the way to class	Learn new words, 10–15 cards	A fresh head takes new words easily.
Evening, on the way home	Reverse, on the same words	Recall is harder than recognition — that's what makes them stick.
Once or twice a week	Spell it	Slow, but catches the typos that cost marks in the exam.
After every Reading / Listening	Tick unknown words (2 min)	They move to the front of the queue.
Once a week	A full test — at a desk, not on the road	Still the main reference point; the commute won't replace it.

Checklist

☐ Words from exam texts, mostly mid-frequency	☐ Unknown words from every test added to my list
☐ Three in a row before a word counts as learned	☐ No tests or essays on the road
☐ Spelling drilled, not just recognition	☐ Offline: open the word list once online before going underground