IELTS Writing

Book 4



Writing Task 2

Essay writing strategies, sample questions & model answers

Written by Jacky Spear

www.IELTSJacky.com

Essay writing strategies, sample questions & model answers

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Chapter 1

Writing Task 2

To get high marks in IELTS Writing Task 2, two things are essential. You need to:

- **Understand what the examiner is looking for.**
- **Learn the right techniques to write an effective essay.**

In this first chapter, we'll be looking at the general format of Task 2 questions and all the basic information that it's vital for you to know.

Once you have a good understanding of Task 2, I'll then show you step-by-step how to produce high scoring essays.

This chapter includes:

- **Task 2 question format**
- **Example question**
- **The 5 different types of questions**
- **Key information**
- **5 step essay writing strategy**
- **How to identify question types**

The Format

The format of Task 2 questions is always the same:

- **You will be given a statement on a topic of general interest.**
- **The statement will be a specific point of view, problem or argument related to the topic.**
- **You will be asked to respond to that statement.**

Here is a typical Task 2 question:

> *Nowadays, more people are choosing to socialise online rather than face to face.*
>
> *Is this a positive or negative development?*

The 5 Question Types

There are 5 different types of Task 2 essays that you could be asked to write:

- **Opinion Essays – Agree or Disagree**
- **Discussion Essays**
- **Problem Essays – Causes & Solutions**
- **Advantages & Disadvantages Essays**
- **Double Question Essays**

The sample question we've just looked at is an example of an 'advantages & disadvantages' essay. I'll show you how to decide what type of question you've been given after I've covered two other important things.

We'll begin with some key information that you need to know in order to achieve success in this part of the Writing test.

Key Information

1) You are required to write 250 words or more.

If you write less than 250 words, you are unlikely to get more than a Band 5 for 'task achievement' as you won't have fulfilled the marking criteria.

2) You should use a formal style of writing.

3) You have around 40 minutes to plan and write your essay.

4) Task 2 contributes twice as many marks to your overall score as Task 1.

5) It is recommended to do Task 2 first.

Most people do Task 1 first and overrun on the 20 minutes it should take them. This doesn't leave them enough time to do Task 2 properly. Since Task 2 is worth double the marks, they are, in effect, throwing away valuable marks.

How To Write An Effective Task 2 Essay

It is common to feel overwhelmed when you first read a Task 2 question and have little idea how to even begin to approach it. Hence, it's essential to have an effective strategy to tackle any question you might get.

Fortunately, because the question format is the same for all questions, you can use the same basic technique to write any Task 2 essay.

Here is my recommended 5 step approach.

Step-By-Step Strategy

This 5 step strategy can be used for any question.

1. **Analyse the question**
2. **Plan your answer**
3. **Write the introduction**
4. **Write 2 main body paragraphs**
5. **Write the conclusion**

This will give you a well-organised essay of 4 paragraphs.
I show you how to use this strategy with each of the 5 types of question in Chapters 9 to 13.

First thought, you need to be able to identify the different types of questions. This is important because in order to write a good essay, you need to understand exactly what the question asks you to do.

Once you fully understand the question:

- **You will know how to structure your essay.**
- **You will know what language to use.**
- **Both the planning & writing stages will be quicker & easier.**
- **You will give the examiner exactly what they want.**

How to identify the question type

Each of the 5 different types of Task 2 questions requires a different structure to create a high scoring essay. You will also need to use slightly different language.

Here are the 5 different types of essays again.

- **Opinion Essays – Agree or Disagree**
- **Discussion Essays**
- **Problem Essays – Causes & Solutions**
- **Advantages & Disadvantages Essays**
- **Double Question Essays**

Now for some examples to illustrate the difference between them. The language used in the questions will help you to recognise what type of question it is.

Opinion Essays

This type of question clearly asks for your opinion on the topic, although the language could vary as can be seen in the two examples.
You are required to state whether you agree or disagree with the statement and why.

Example 1

Some people think that more money should be spent on protecting endangered species while others think it is a waste of valuable money.

What is your opinion?

Example 2

Advances in technology and automation have reduced the need for manual labour. Therefore, working hours should be reduced.

To what extent do you agree or disagree?

Discussion Essays

It's easy to recognise discussion essay questions because the statement will include two opposing views and the question after it will ask you to 'discuss' them and, usually, to give your own opinion as well.

Example 1

Some people believe that school children should not be given homework by their teachers, whereas others argue that homework plays an important role in the education of children.

Discuss both views and give your own opinion.

Example 2

Some people think that exercise is the key to health while others feel that having a balanced diet is more important.

Discuss both sides and give your opinion.

Problem Essays – Causes & Solutions

This type of question starts with a statement stating the problem, then asks you to discuss the causes and the solutions or, sometimes, the causes or the solutions.

Example 1

Due to poorer countries experiencing a 'brain drain', they are seeing many professional, such as doctors and teachers, leaving to work in more developed countries.

What problems does this cause? What solutions can be suggested to deal with this situation?

Example 2

Many offenders commit more crimes after serving the first punishment.

Why is this happening, and what measures can be taken to tackle this problem?

Different language may be used in individual questions, as can be seen in these two examples. In Example 2, 'why' is clearly referring to the 'cause' of the problem, and 'what' refers to the 'solution'.

Advantages & Disadvantages Essays

This type of question can be worded in several different ways. It's common for synonyms of 'advantages' and 'disadvantages', such as 'benefits' and 'drawbacks', to be used. This can be seen in the second example.

Example 1

It is becoming increasingly popular to have a year off between finishing school and going to university.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of this?

Example 2

A lot of places in the world rely on tourism as a main source of income. Unfortunately, tourism can also be a source of problems if it is not managed correctly.

Describe the advantages and disadvantages of tourism in the modern world. Do you think that the benefits of tourism outweigh its drawbacks?

Double Question Essays

This is sometimes called a 'direct question' essay. This type of question has one statement with two different questions after it. The questions may or may not be linked.

Example 1

Today, more people are travelling to foreign countries than ever before.

Why is this the case? What are the benefits of travelling for the traveller?

Example 2

Most people agree that money cannot buy happiness.

Why is happiness difficult to define? How can people achieve happiness?

It's vital that you answer both questions.

For all 5 questions types, it's essential that you fulfil the task by fully answering the question. Failure to do so will severely affect your score no matter how good your essay is.

So, that's a general overview of Writing Task 2. You are now ready to learn the techniques needed to plan and write a great essay.

Chapter 2
The 5 Types of Task 2 Essay

In this chapter, we'll look at the 5 types of Task 2 essay in more detail and I'll give you an overview of the essay structure that I recommend you use for each one, with samples questions to help you recognise some of the different wording often used.

Use these structures a guide when essay planning, a vital step in the writing process. We'll be working through them step-by-step later.

Here's a reminder of the 5 main types of essay:

1) **Opinion Essays**
2) **Discussion Essays**
3) **Problem Solution Essays**
4) **Advantages & Disadvantages Essays**
5) **Double Question Essays**

Most questions fit one of these categories. However, questions can be written in many different ways which can make it difficult to determine which type they are.

First, here's the basic 4 part essay structure I showed you in Chapter 1.

1) **Introduction**
2) **Main Body Paragraph 1**
3) **Main Body Paragraph 2**
4) **Conclusion**

The sort of information you include in each of the 4 sections will vary depending on the question type and that's what I'm now going to outline for you.

These easy to learn structures will enable you to quickly plan and write any Task 2 essay.

They are not the only ones you could use but they are the ones I recommend because they're simple and give proven results.

1) Opinion Essays

These are sometimes called 'agree or disagree' or 'argumentative' essays and are one of the most common types of Task 2 question.

The first part of the question will be a statement. You will then be asked to give your own opinion about the statement. Here is some typical wording that might be used:

- **What is your opinion?**
- **Do you agree or disagree?**
- **To what extent do you agree or disagree?**

Here is an example of each:

1. *Space exploration is much too expensive and the money should be spent on more important things.*

   What is your opinion?

2. *A big salary is much more important than job satisfaction.*

   Do you agree or disagree?

3. *Advances in technology and automation have reduced the need for manual labour. Therefore, working hours should be reduced.*

   To what extent do you agree or disagree?

Key tips:

- **Choose one side of the argument.**
- **State your opinion clearly in the introduction.**
- **Keep the same opinion throughout the essay.**
- **Give reasons why you hold this view.**

It doesn't matter which side of the argument you take or even that you agree with it. Choose the one you can develop the best argument for.

Don't change your opinion part way through the essay and don't give reasons for the opposing idea.

Essay Structure

1) Introduction

- Paraphrase the question
- Give your opinion
- State two supporting reasons

2) Main body paragraph 1

- Topic sentence – outline 1st reason for supporting this view
- Explanation – explain this idea
- Example – give an example

3) Main body paragraph 2

- Topic sentence – outline 2nd reason for supporting this view
- Explanation – explain this idea
- Example – give an example

4) Conclusion

- Summarise opinion and key reasons

2) Discussion Essays

In discussion essays, you have to discuss both sides of an argument. Usually, you will be asked for your own opinion as well.

The easiest way to approach this type of question is to choose one point of view to agree with and one side to disagree with.

Here are 3 examples of discussion essay questions:

1. *Some people think that the government should provide free education at every level. However some say that individuals should pay for their university education.*

Discuss both views and give your opinion.

2. *Many people believe that all zoos should be closed, while others claim that zoos have a positive impact.*

Discuss both views and give your opinion.

3. *Many governments think that economic progress is their most important goal. Some people, however, think that other types of progress are equally important for a country.*

Discuss both these views and give you own opinion.

Key tips:

- **Develop both sides of the argument.**
- **Talk about the view you don't agree with first.**

A big mistake many students make is to fully develop only one point of view. This leads to an unbalanced essay and a low score for task achievement.

It is easier to begin by discussing the opinion you don't agree with and then present the reasons for your opposing view.

Essay Structure

1) Introduction

- Paraphrase the question
- Give your opinion
- State two supporting reasons

2) Main body paragraph 1 – Negative Viewpoint

- Topic sentence – outline the view you don't agree with
- Explanation – explain why this view is held by some people
- Example – give an example
- Your opinion – state whether you agree or disagree

3) Main body paragraph 2 – Positive Viewpoint

- Topic sentence – outline the view you do agree with
- Explanation – explain why this view is held by some people
- Example – give an example
- Your opinion – state whether you agree or disagree

4) Conclusion

- Summarise the key points and state your opinion

3) Problem Essays

These are sometimes called 'causes and solutions' or 'problems and solutions' essays. This type of question starts with a statement, then asks you to discuss the problems or causes and the solutions.

Key tips:

- **Don't list lots of causes and solutions.**
- **Choose just one or two and develop them fully.**
- **Be sure to link each problem/cause and its solution.**

A common mistake is for candidates to list all the problems/causes and solutions they can think of, not necessarily linking them together. They also fail to explain any of them in detail and don't include any examples.

The wording of this type of essay question can vary considerably. Here are 3 examples of problem essay questions:

1. *Overpopulation in many urban centres around the world is a major problem.*

What are the causes of this?

How can this problem be solved?

2. *Nowadays many people have easy access to computers and a large number of children play computer games.*

What are the negative impacts of playing computer games?

What can be done to minimize the bad effects?

3. *In spite of the advances in medicine, many people around the world still die of easily preventable diseases.*

Why is this the case?

What can be done about this problem?

Essay Structure

1) Introduction

- Paraphrase the question
- State 1 key problem/cause and related solution

2) Main body paragraph 1 – Problem or Cause

- Topic sentence – state the problem or cause
- Explanation – give detail explaining the problem or cause
- Example – give an example

3) Main body paragraph 2 – Solution

- Topic sentence – state the solution
- Explanation – give detail explaining the solution
- Example – give an example

4) Conclusion

- Summarise the key points and state your opinion

4) Advantages & Disadvantages Essays

The first part of the question will be a statement. You will be asked to write about **both** the advantages **and** disadvantages of the idea stated.

Here is some typical wording that might be used:

- **What are the advantages and disadvantages of….?**
- **Do you think the advantages outweigh the disadvantages?**
- **Discuss the advantages and disadvantages and give your opinion.**

Here are 3 examples of advantages and disadvantages essay questions:

1. *Space exploration costs tax payers an exorbitant amount of money each year.*

What are the advantages and disadvantages of spending money on space exploration?

2. *Some experts believe that it is better for children to begin learning a foreign language at primary school rather than at secondary school.*

Do the advantages of this outweigh the disadvantages?

3. *Some countries have implemented mandatory community service programmes for young people. In these programmes, children aged 16 to 18 do charity work, help old people and work with animals.*

Discuss the advantages and disadvantages and give your opinion.

Each of these different types of questions fits into one of two slightly different essay structures which we look at in Chapter 12. For now, I'll give you the basic structure.

Essay Structure

1) Introduction

- Paraphrase the question
- Outline the view or views stated the statement

2) Main body paragraph 1 – Advantage

- Topic sentence – state 1 advantage
- Explanation – give detail explaining the advantage
- Example – give an example
- Result – state the result

3) Main body paragraph 2 – Disadvantage

- Topic sentence – state 1 disadvantage
- Explanation – give detail explaining the disadvantage
- Example – give an example
- Result – state the result

4) Conclusion

- Summarise the key points
- State your opinion if required

5) Double Question Essays

This type of question is sometimes called a 'direct question' or 'two questions' essay. It has one statement with two different questions after it. The questions may or may not be linked.

Key tips:

- **You must answer both questions fully.**
- **Don't confuse it with an opinion or a discussion essay.**
- **Be careful that you don't end up with too many ideas to write about.**

Here are 3 examples of double question essay questions:

1. *Success is often measured by wealth and material possessions.*

Do you think wealth is the best measure of success?

What makes a successful person?

2. *In education and employment, some people work harder than others.*

Why do some people work harder?

Is it always a good thing to work hard?

3. *Successful companies use advertising to make more sales.*

What can make an advertisement effective?

Do you think advertising is a bad thing or a good thing for society?

Essay Structure

1) Introduction

- Paraphrase the question
- Outline sentence – state your answer to both questions

2) Main body paragraph 1 – Answer question 1

- Topic sentence – state your answer
- Explanation – explain why you think this
- Example – give an example

3) Main body paragraph 2 – Answer question 2

- Topic sentence – state your answer
- Explanation – explain why you think this
- Example – give an example

4) Conclusion

- Summarise both questions and answers

Chapter 3
Understand and Analyse Task 2 Questions

A key reason for low scores in Writing Task 2 is the failure to answer the question properly. This can lose you several band scores.

Whilst your language skills may be good enough to earn you a Band 7 or 8, not fully answering the question could reduce your score to a Band 6 or even lower.

Students regularly make these 4 mistakes:

1) **They don't spend time carefully reading and analysing the question.**

2) They fail to recognise the type of question being asked.

3) They don't fully understand the question.

4) They write about the general topic rather than answering the specific question.

Points 2-4 are all a consequence of point 1 – not spending time carefully reading and analysing the question.

But why don't students read Task 2 questions properly?

The answer I nearly always get when I challenge students over this is that they don't have time as they feel that they need to start writing straight away to get their essay done in the 40 minutes allowed.

To be blunt, you don't have time not to carefully read and analyse the question. If you don't, you probably won't achieve the mark you need and will have to retake the exam.

The good news is, it's quick and easy to analyse and understand task 2 questions once you know how.

You just need to identify 3 different types of words:

1. **Topic words**
2. **Other keywords**
3. **Instruction words**

I'll show you how.

Analysing Task 2 Questions

So let's look at a typical Task 2 question.

Sample question

> *Students perform better in school when they are rewarded rather than punished.*
>
> *To what extent do you agree or disagree?*
>
> *Discuss both views and give your own opinion.*

The format of Task 2 questions is always the same:

- **You will be given a statement on a topic of general interest.**
- **The statement will be a specific point of view, problem or argument related to the topic.**
- **You will be asked to respond to that statement.**

Now we'll identify the 3 different types of words in our sample question.

1. Identify the topic words

The topics words are the ones that identify the general subject of the question.

> **Students perform better in school when they are rewarded rather than punished.**
>
> **To what extent do you agree or disagree?**
>
> **Discuss both views and give your own opinion.**

So, this question is about 'how students perform in school'.

Many people do this first step of the process and then write about the topic in general. This is a serious mistake and leads to low marks.

What we need to do now that we know the general topic, is to understand exactly what aspect of student performance we are being asked to write about.

2. Identify other keywords

The other keywords in the question tell you the specific topic you must write about. They define the opinion or opinions stated in the statement.

> **Students perform better in school when they are rewarded rather than punished.**
>
> **To what extent do you agree or disagree?**
>
> **Discuss both views and give your own opinion.**

By highlighting these words, it's easy to see that you are being asked your view on whether reward or punishment leads to better student performance. Your essay must only include ideas relevant to these keywords.

Now for the instructions on the type of essay you should write.

3. Identifying the instruction words

The instruction words tell you exactly what the examiner wants you to do. 25% of your marks are determined by how well you answer the question.

So, even if you have Band 8 language skills, you could drop down to a Band 6 overall score for failing to follow the instructions.

The instruction words are all the words that come after the question statement.

> **Students perform better in school when they are rewarded rather than punished.**
>
> **To what extent do you agree or disagree?**
>
> **Discuss both views and give your own opinion.**

Our sample question is an 'advantages and disadvantages' question. It requires you to write about ideas related to **both sides of the argument** and to **state your own opinion** on the topic.

That's it. We have analysed the question and know what specific questions we need to answer in our essay.

Here are the 3 different types of words highlighted together.

> **Students perform better in school when they are rewarded rather than punished.**
>
> **To what extent do you agree or disagree?**
>
> **Discuss both views and give your own opinion.**

This process should take you no more than 2 minutes in your exam. Make it the first thing you do. The more you practice it before your test, the quicker and easier it will become.

You can start right away with these sample Task 2 questions. Identify the 3 different types of words in each, then check your answers with my illustrations below.

Task 2 Practice Questions

Question 1

Some people think that one of the best ways to solve environmental problems is to increase the cost of fuel for cars and other vehicles.

To what extent do you agree or disagree?

Question 2

Nowadays, people have developed poor eating habits and do not eat a balanced diet.

What are the reasons behind this?

Question 3

Some people think that the internet has brought people closer together while others think that people and communities are becoming more isolated.

Discuss both sides and give your opinion.

Our sample question is an 'advantages and disadvantages' question. It requires you to write about ideas related to **both sides of the argument** and to **state your own opinion** on the topic.

That's it. We have analysed the question and know what specific questions we need to answer in our essay.

Answers

Did you identify these words?

Topic words

Other keywords

Instruction words

Question 1

Some people think that one of the best ways to solve environmental problems is to increase the cost of fuel for cars and other vehicles.

To what extent do you agree or disagree?

Question 1 is about 'environmental problems' and, more specifically, the idea that increasing the cost of fuel will help to solve them.

In your essay, you must either agree or disagree with this statement. You are not required to discuss both sides of the argument.

Question 2

Nowadays, people have developed poor eating habits and do not eat a balanced diet.

What are the reasons behind this?

Question 2 is about 'poor eating habits' and, more specifically, the relationship between poor eating habits and an unbalanced diet. In your essay, you must say how these two things are related.

You are not required to state whether or not you agree with this statement, but to take the view that it is true.

Question 3

Some people think that the internet has brought people closer together while others think that people and communities are becoming more isolated.

Discuss both sides and give your opinion.

Question 3 is about ‘the internet’ and, more specifically, whether it brings people closer together or makes them more isolated. In your essay, you must write about both sides of the argument and say which view you believe to be true.

If you didn’t identify the same keywords as me, spend a few minutes going through this section again to be sure that you fully understand it.

Chapter 4
Planning a Task 2 Essay

It is essential that you understand how to plan your Task 2 IELTS essay. In this chapter, you will learn:

- **4 reasons why you must plan your essay**
- **4 simple steps of essay planning**
- **4 strategies for generating ideas**
- **4 part essay structure**

Each year, many high level students fail to get the Band 7 or 8 score they are capable of achieving simply because they didn't plan their Task 2 essay.

In case you are one of the people who insist that they don't have time to plan, here are four key reasons why you should.

4 Reasons Why You Must Plan Your Essay

1) Planning saves you time

If you plan your essay before you start writing, you will already know what you are going to say and won't need to keep stopping to think about the next idea. This means that you will be able to write much faster than if you don't have a plan.

You only need to spend 5 minutes in the planning stage. That leaves a full 35 minutes to write and check your essay.

2) Planning results in a more relevant answer

Remember, 25% of your marks are for task achievement. This includes,

- **Answering all parts of the question**
- **Presenting relevant ideas that are well-developed**
- **Having clear supporting points to extend the main idea**

A common mistake in IELTS essay writing is the failure to answer all parts of the question.

Part of the planning process involves thinking up ideas to include in your essay. Taking the time to analyse the question and focus on generating a few key ideas with relevant examples will ensure that you answer the question fully.

3) Planning results in a better structure

Another 25% of the marks are for coherence and cohesion. This includes,

- **Organizing your ideas into a logical order**
- **Having a separate paragraph for each main idea**
- **Linking your paragraphs appropriately**

You can have the best ideas in the world, but unless you can develop them into a well-structured essay, you will not score highly for coherence and cohesion.

The examiner needs to be able to understand what you are saying and see a clear progression of relevant ideas. Without a plan, this is difficult to achieve.

Trying to write an essay without planning it first is like going on a journey without a map. You'll probably reach your destination eventually but you'll undoubtedly take a random route with a few false turns along the way. It would certainly be extremely difficult for anyone else to follow your meandering path.

Spending a few minutes planning your essay will give you an easy to follow map taking you right through from your introduction to your conclusion. The result will be a well-structured essay and a very happy examiner.

4) Planning results in fewer grammatical errors

With your ideas and essay structure planned out before you start writing, you will have more time to focus on getting your grammar right. Fewer grammatical errors means more marks.

You should also be left with enough time at the end to check your essay for mistakes and to correct them.

Now that you understand why you must plan your Task 2 essay, we're going to look at how to plan it.

The 4 Simple Steps of IELTS Essay Planning

- **Analyse the question**
- **Generate ideas**
- **Record synonyms**
- **Plan the structure**

Analyse the Question

The number one mistake many students make is not answering the question properly.

The way to avoid this is to carefully analyse the question before you do anything else. I've just shown you how to do this in Chapter 3.

To help you learn the strategy, I'll go over the main points again, with a different essay question.

First, here's a reminder of the 4 key mistakes students regularly make:

1. **They don't spend time carefully reading and analysing the question.**

2. **They fail to recognise the type of question being asked.**

3. **They don't fully understand the question.**

4. **They write about the general topic rather than answering the specific question.**

Next, the quick and easy method of analysing and understanding Task 2 questions.

You just need to identify 3 different types of words:

1. **Topic words**
2. **Other keywords**
3. **Instruction words**

This is a typical essay question with the different types of words highlighted.

Sample question:

In some **poorer areas** of **large cities** people are too **afraid to leave their houses** at **night time** due to a **fear of crime**.

What are the **causes** of crime in those areas and **what can be done** to tackle those problems?

Topic words

The **topics words** are the ones that identify the general subject of the question.
So, this question is about 'fear of crime'. We now need to know what aspect of 'fear of crime' we are required to write about. For this information, we look at the other key words.

Other keywords

The **other keywords** in the question tell you the specific topic you must write about. They define the opinion stated in the statement.

Here they are, isolated from the statement:

- large cities
- poor areas
- afraid to leave their houses
- night time

These are the only aspects of 'fear of crime' that you should write about. Do not write about 'crime' or 'fear of crime' in general or you will be given a low mark for task achievement.

Instruction words

The **instruction words** are all the words that come after the question statement. They tell you exactly what the examiner wants you to do. For example,

> What are the **causes** of crime in those areas and **what can be done** to tackle those problems?

25% of your marks are determined by how well you answer the question.

Our sample question is a 'causes and solutions' question. It requires you to give clear ideas on both the causes of this aspect of crime fear and some possible solutions.

A common mistake is to write about just one side of the issue, e.g. just the causes, or to not fully develop both sides, resulting in an unbalanced essay.

How To Generate Ideas

With only a few minutes to come up with the ideas to write about, you need an idea generation strategy that works well for you and that you have practiced beforehand.

We all think in slightly different ways so what works for one person might be completely the wrong method for someone else. Different techniques can also work well for different question types so it's worth having two methods that you can use confidently. You'll then be ready for whatever type of question you get.

There are 4 main techniques for generating ideas for your Task 2 essay:

- **Brainstorming**
- **Mind-mapping**
- **Friends technique**
- **Examples method**

Brainstorming

This is where you analyse the question and quickly jot down as many related ideas as come into your head as possible.

The drawback with this method is that you can end up with lots of ideas but not enough time to sort them and pick out the most relevant ones before you have to start writing.

Mind-mapping

Mind-mapping is similar to brainstorming but will help you to organize your thoughts as they come to you by relating each though to a specific part of the question.

You can still have the problem of too many ideas but many students use this method successfully, especially those who already have experience of creating mind maps.



Friends Technique

This is the method I prefer. It allows you to take a step back from the stress of the exam situation and think more calmly.

Here's how it works. Imagine you are chatting with a friend and they ask you the question in a casual conversation. What answers would you give them off the top of your head? Plan your essay around these ideas.

Doing this will help you to come up with simple answers in everyday language rather than straining your brain to think of amazing ideas using high level language, which isn't necessary.

Example method

Sometimes you can use this technique on its own but for many questions, it's a method that will help you generate ideas to support the main points in your essay. Examiners love relevant examples.

All you do is to think of specific examples related to the question. These can come from your own experience or be something you've read or heard about. You should be reading newspapers, magazines and topical websites as part of your general exam preparation so you may well have seen an article, study or report that you could use as an example.

You can even make up examples or tweak real examples to better fit the question. The examiner isn't going to check your facts but they must, of course, be plausible.

Our sample question on 'fear of crime', is a topic often covered in the media. Or maybe you know someone who's afraid to go out at night because of local crime.

Once you've thought of an example, ideas to include in your essay should come to you easily.

You'll find illustrations of how to use these four techniques in the chapters on the individual question types.

Vocabulary for Your Task 2 Essay

Before I move on to talking about the structure of your Task 2 essay, I want to look briefly at vocabulary.

You need to cover as much as possible in the planning stage and this includes vocabulary. You don't want to be searching your brain for the right words while you're writing your essay. The writing stage is the time for focusing on grammar and linking your ideas.

You don't need to use complex, high level words and phrases to get a high mark but you do need to use appropriate, topic-related vocabulary and to avoid repeating the same words many times over.

This is particularly true of the vocabulary included in the question. So, you need to think about possible synonyms you could use.

I'll use our sample question as an illustration. I've added the colour coding again because it's the key words that you'll want to find alternatives for.

Sample question:

> In some **poorer areas** of **large cities** people are too **afraid to leave their houses** at **night time** due to a **fear of crime**.
>
> What are the **causes** of crime in those areas and **what can be done** to tackle those problems?

Here are just a few relevant synonyms:

poor area – deprived neighbourhood, impoverished locality

city – metropolis, urban area

night time – after dark

cause – reason for, source of, origin of

what can be done – solution, answer to the problem

Write down synonyms as you analyse the question and choose which ideas to include in your essay.

How to Structure Your Essay

The final step in the planning process is to set out the structure, that is, to organise your ideas so that they flow logically from one to the next and answer all parts of the question.

Most essays should have 4 paragraphs. As we've already seen, each of the 5 types of question requires a slightly different structure. We'll look at these again in the step-by-step lessons on how to write each type of essay.

For now, here's an overview of the 4 paragraph essay structure:

1) Introduction: Paraphrase the question
If required, state your opinion

2) Body paragraph 1: Main idea
Explanation
Example

3) Body paragraph 2: Main idea
Explanation
Example

4) Conclusion: Summary of main ideas
If required, restate your opinion

This structure is easy to memorise. Once it's fixed in your mind, all you need to do is to fill in each part with your ideas. With all this planning done, the actual writing of your essay will be fairly straightforward.

This may seem a lot to do in the 5 minutes planning time you should allow for it but it's very doable if you get in lots of practice before exam day. Start slowly as you learn how to plan your essay and gradually speed up until you can complete all the steps in around 5 minutes.

We're nearly ready to start the writing process but first, you need to understand how your essay will be marked.

Chapter 5
Task 2 Marking Criteria

To get a high score in the IELTS Writing exam, you need to know exactly what the examiner wants. So, the first step to achieving success is to understand the marking criteria.

Once you understand this, you can focus on developing the rights skills and techniques needed to meet the criteria.

In this chapter you will:

- **Gain an understanding of the 4 marking criteria.**
- **Find out what you need to do to get a high score.**
- **See examples of good and poor answers.**
- **Learn some common mistakes to avoid.**

We'll start with an overview of the 4 marking criteria. Here are the 4 skill areas you'll be assessed on.

The 4 Marking Criteria:

- **Task Achievement**
- **Coherence and Cohesion**
- **Vocabulary (Lexical Resource)**
- **Grammar**

Each carries 25% of the marks.

We'll now look at each of these criteria in turn. Don't worry if the detail seems complex or overwhelming. I'm going to break it down and make it easier for you to understand. I'll also show you exactly what you need to do get a good score.

We're going to focus on Bands 6 - 8 as these are the levels most students are aiming for.

Task Achievement

Task achievement is your ability to answer the question properly.
To score well for task achievement, you must do 3 things:

- **Answer the actual question asked (i.e. don't just write generally about the topic).**
- **Answer all parts of the question.**
- **Clearly express your opinion and support it with well-developed ideas and, ideally, examples.**

These bullet points are a summary of the marking criteria for Task Achievement shown in the table below.

Task Achievement Marking Criteria

Band	Descriptors – Task Achievement
8	• sufficiently addresses all parts of the task • presents a well-developed response to the question with relevant, extended and supported ideas
7	• addresses all parts of the task • presents a clear position throughout the response • presents, extends and supports main ideas, but there may be a tendency to overgeneralise and/or supporting ideas may lack focus
6	• addresses all parts of the task although some parts may be more fully covered than others • presents a relevant position although the conclusions may become unclear or repetitive • presents relevant main ideas but some may be inadequately developed/unclear

The easiest way to understand these criteria is through some examples. I go into far more detail on all the marking criteria in the chapters on the individual question types, so don't worry if they don't make full sense here. See this as an overview.

We'll now consider the 3 key marking criteria in relation to the following question.

Sample question:

> *Some people think that newspapers are the best way to learn news. However, others believe that they can learn news better through other media.*
>
> *Discuss both views and give your opinion.*

1) You are required to write about the two opposing views on the best way to learn news. Do not write about news in general.

2) You must answer all parts of the question, that is, you must write about both views and also give your own opinion. If you don't fully cover all these elements, your mark could drop to as low as a Band 5.

3) Your own opinion on the best way to learn news must be clearly stated in your essay and supported with relevant ideas and/or explanations. Include specific examples if you can.

Next, here are samples from a good and a poor answer to a question asking for solutions to the problem of criminals reoffending.

1) Poor answer

The best thing that can be done is to train prisoners in skills that will help them to get jobs when they are released. Then they can earn money and won't need to be criminals any more. They should also be taught respect for other people rather just being influenced by the poor moral behaviour of the other prisoners they are mixing with every day.

2) Good answer

A lack of rehabilitation is a prime reason that offenders commit further crimes when they are released from prison. The morals and new skills they learn in jail come mainly from other criminals, which equips them for a life of further crime when they enter society again. In addition to this, the difficulty offenders have in finding employment leads to financial hardship and the temptation to reoffend.

A recent study undertaken at the University of Reading shows strong evidence that retraining prisoners in workplace skills, and helping them to find jobs when their sentence is over, can decrease their likelihood of committing a crime again by over 30 per cent. In prisons where inmates are supported in learning correct moral behaviour, this figure goes up by another 10 per cent.

Both answers have two clear ideas but in the first answer, they are not well-developed. The second answer has more detailed explanations and also includes a relevant example to back up the ideas.

It is fine to make up an example if you can't think of a real one, although it must, of course, be plausible. This one is completely fictitious.

Remember that the IELTS Writing exam assesses your ability to understand and use language effectively, not your factual knowledge. There are many subjects, such as this one, that you are unlikely to know much about. The examiners know this and they are not going to check up to see if the facts stated in your example are genuine or made up.

So, to summarise task achievement, check that you have:

- **Answered the question being asked.**
- **Answered all parts of the question.**
- **Stated your opinion and support it with well-developed ideas and, ideally, an example.**

Cohesion and Coherence

Cohesion and Coherence are your ability to organise and present your ideas so that your essay is easy to read and understand.

To score well for Cohesion and Coherence, you must do 4 things:

- **Write an essay with clear ideas that are easy to understand.**
- **Organise ideas and information logically.**
- **Progress clearly from one idea to another.**
- **Use cohesive devices to link ideas, sentences and paragraphs.**

These bullet points are a summary of the marking criteria for Cohesion and Coherence shown in the table on the next page.

Cohesion and Coherence Marking Criteria

Band	Descriptors – Cohesion & Coherence
8	• sequences information and ideas logically • manages all aspects of cohesion well • uses paragraphing sufficiently and appropriately
7	• logically organises information and ideas; there is clear progression throughout • uses a range of cohesive devices appropriately although there may be some under-/over-use • presents a clear central topic within each paragraph
6	• arranges information and ideas coherently and there is a clear overall progression • uses cohesive devices effectively, but cohesion within and/or between sentences may be faulty or mechanical • may not always use referencing clearly or appropriately • uses paragraphing, but not always logically

It can be helpful to look at the two parts of this marking criteria individually to give a better understanding of their significance.

Coherence refers to how well the examiner can understand what you write.

Several things can affect this, such as,

- **Grammar mistakes**
- **Use of inappropriate words and phrases**
- **Illogical ordering of sentences and ideas**

If the examiner can't easily read your essay and follow your ideas, you will get a low mark for coherence.

We'll come on to vocabulary and grammar when we consider the marking criteria specifically related to them. Here, we'll focus on the third bullet point – how you order your sentences and ideas.

Poor paragraph structure, with ideas set out seemingly randomly, is a common and serious mistake made by many students.

Read these two examples and see if you can identify why one is poor and the other good.

Sample question:

> *It is better for students to work before their university study.*
>
> *Do you agree or disagree?*

1) Poor answer

I agree that it is better for students to work before their university study. This is because they can earn money to help their finances when they go to university and also, they meet lots of new people.

Learning workplace skills is another good reason for students to work before taking up university study. Some of the people they meet may help them find work when they leave university. They also learn new social skills and get work experience.

2) Good answer

Taking up employment before studying at university has many advantages for students. The most important of these is the practical experience of the workplace that they will gain. As well as learning new job skills, their social skills will also improve as they interact with other employees.

Furthermore, they may make valuable contacts that will be useful when they come to look for a job once their studies are complete. Being able to earn money to help finance their course is an added benefit because many undergraduates find it difficult to make ends meet while they are at college.

Both answers contain the same ideas but in the second answer, these flow far better from one to the other than in the first answer where the ideas are set out randomly.

A major problem with answer 1 is the repetition of vocabulary, especially vocabulary used in the question. The first sentence repeats the question word for word whilst in answer 2 the question is paraphrased, as it should be. Using appropriate synonyms wherever possible will earn you good marks.

Cohesion refers to your ability to link ideas, sentences and paragraphs using cohesive devices.

These are linking words and phrases such as:

- **also**
- **as well as**
- **especially**
- **furthermore**
- **because**
- **therefore**
- **for example**
- **although**
- **in contrast**
- **such as**
- **however**
- **similarly**

In our poor sample answer, there is practically no use of cohesive devices but they are used well in the good answer.

Here they are, highlighted.

> Taking up employment before studying at university has many advantages for students. The most important of these is the practical experience of the workplace that they will gain. **As well as** learning new job skills, their social skills will **also** improve as they interact with other employees. **Furthermore**, they may make valuable contacts that will be useful when they come to look for a job once their studies are complete. Being able to earn money to help finance their course is an added benefit **because** many undergraduates find it difficult to make ends meet while they are at college.

A mistake that many students make in their Writing exam is to overuse cohesive devices, thinking that using them in every sentence will gain them marks. This is wrong. It leads to them being used inappropriately which results in a loss of coherence. This is as serious a problem as underusing them.

Vocabulary / Lexical Resource

Lexical Resource means vocabulary so refers to the words and phrases you use in your essay.

To score well for Lexical Resource you must:

- **Use a wide range of vocabulary.**
- **Use it correctly and appropriately.**
- **Use topic specific vocabulary.**

Here are the marking criteria for Lexical Resource.

Vocabulary Marking Criteria

Band	Descriptors – Lexical Resource
8	• uses a wide range of vocabulary • fluently and flexibly to convey precise meanings • skilfully uses uncommon lexical items but there may be occasional inaccuracies in word choice and collocation • produces rare errors in spelling and/or word formation
7	• uses a sufficient range of vocabulary to allow some flexibility and precision • uses less common lexical items with some awareness of style and collocation • may produce occasional errors in word choice, spelling and/or word formation
6	• uses an adequate range of vocabulary for the task • attempts to use less common vocabulary but with some inaccuracy • makes some errors in spelling and/or word formation, but they do not impede communication

We touched a little on vocabulary when looking at Cohesion and Coherence and I'm going to use the same sample answers to illustrate good and bad use of Lexical Resource. Here they are again.

1) Poor answer

I agree that it is better for students to work before their university study. This is because they can earn money to help their finances when they go to university and also, they meet lots of new people.

Learning workplace skills is another good reason for students to work before taking up university study. Some of the people they meet may help them find work when they leave university. They also learn new social skills and get work experience.

2) Good answer

Taking up employment before studying at university has many advantages for students. The most important of these is the practical experience of the workplace that they will gain. As well as learning new job skills, their social skills will also improve as they interact with other employees.

Furthermore, they may make valuable contacts that will be useful when they come to look for a job once their studies are complete. Being able to earn money to help finance their course is an added benefit because many undergraduates find it difficult to make ends meet while they are at college.

Answer 1 uses a very limited range of vocabulary with the same words, such as 'work' and 'university' being used frequently. This shows a lack of knowledge of topic vocabulary.

Answer 2 makes good use of synonyms for topic related words. For example,

- **work** – employment, job
- **university** – college
- **students** – undergraduates
- **studies** – course

As already mentioned, the question statement must be paraphrased in your essay, as in answer 2. Answer 1 repeats it using the same words and sentence structure. This will be given a low mark.

The use of a wide range of vocabulary in answer 2 also leads to better developed ideas.

Many students make the mistake of thinking that you need to use long, complicated words to score well. This is not the case. You just need to use the right words correctly. You must also be able to spell them correctly.

If you read answer 2 again, you'll notice that it doesn't contain any advanced, complex vocabulary. Rather, it uses appropriate, everyday words and phrases to express the writer's opinion.

The correct use of collocations is also important. These are words combinations that sound right together. In answer 2, the collocation 'valuable contacts' has been used. However, the collocation doesn't work with most synonyms of the word 'valuable', for example,

Correct	**Incorrect**
• **valuable contact**	• **expensive contacts**
	• **costly contacts**

When learning a new word, be sure to learn its common collocations too.

So, to summarise Lexical Resource, make sure that you:

- **Use a wide range of vocabulary**
- **Use it appropriately**
- **Use synonyms to vary your vocabulary**
- **Use topic related words**
- **Know correct collocations**
- **Check your spelling**

Chapter 6
Writing the Introduction

For a great score in the Writing test, you need to impress the examiner from the very first sentence. This chapter will show you how.

In it you'll learn:

- **Why the introduction is so important**
- **The 3 part structure**
- **4 common mistakes to avoid**
- **How to write a great introduction**

Why the Introduction Is So Important

Beginning your essay well will immediately start stacking up the marks for both Task Achievement and Coherence and Cohesion.

A good introduction does several things:

- **It gives an excellent first impression.**
- **It shows the examiner that you understand the question.**
- **It gives the examiner a brief overview of what you'll cover in the rest of the essay.**
- **It focuses your thoughts and keeps you on track while writing.**

The 3 Part Structure

A good introduction has a simple 3 part structure:

- **Paraphrased question**
- **Thesis statement**
- **Outline statement**

This structure can be used for any type of question. It should:

- **Have 2-3 sentences**
- **Be 40-60 words long**
- **Take 5 minutes to write**

Before I show you how to write good introductions, I want to flag up some common errors students make to help you avoid them.

4 Common Mistakes

1) Not being specific enough

It's tempting to start your essay with a general statement about the topic of the question. Don't do this. You need to be very specific. Here's an illustration of a poor opening sentence.

> **Question:**
> Everybody should become a vegetarian because eating meat can cause serious health problems.
>
> To what extent do you agree or disagree?

Bad first sentence:

These days, many people are worried about their health and changing their diet is one way that they try to improve it.

This is not a question about health in general but one specifically about becoming a vegetarian for health reasons.

A good first sentence will paraphrase the question, that is, it will state the same information using different language and often, a different sentence structure as well.

We'll be looking at paraphrasing and an example of a good first sentence later in this lesson.

2) Not writing a thesis statement

A thesis statement is a summary of the main idea of your essay. When the examiner reads it, they will instantly know whether or not you have understood the question correctly. It also acts as an outline for the rest of your essay.

This makes the thesis statement the most important sentence in your essay. If you get it right, you will have got off to the perfect start.

There's an easy to remember formula for writing thesis statements which we'll be studying in a minute. For now, here's an example relating to our sample question.

Thesis statement:

This essay agrees that the world's population should stop consuming meat due to the related health risks.

Note the use of synonyms to paraphrase the question.

3) Not stating your opinion

Task 2 Writing tasks generally require you to give your opinion. Usually, this will be clearly stated in the question. For example, the instruction might say,

- **To what extent do you agree or disagree?**

  or

- **Discuss both views and give your own opinion.**

In other questions, it won't be so clear that this is what you should do.

For example,

- **What are the advantages and disadvantages of tourism in the modern world?**

However, your opinion – the main idea of your essay – is still required. If you always include it in the introduction, as well as throughout your essay, you won't go wrong.

4) Using inappropriate language

For Task 2 essays, you must use formal language. Most students understand this.

However, many candidates make the mistake of trying to use clever or complex language to add interest or to show off their high-level language skills.

Keep tight control of your language. This is a very short essay and you don't have the time or space to get carried away with elaborate words and phrases.

Get the information across quickly and succinctly using everyday language that includes topic words and their synonyms.

Most importantly, use the language correctly. The more complex you make it, the more errors you are likely to make.

We'll now go through the process of writing an introduction step-by-step.

How To Write a Great Introduction

Here's a reminder of the 3 part structure you should use for all task 2 Writing tasks.

- **Paraphrased question**
- **Thesis statement**
- **Outline statement**

Paraphrased question

Start your introduction by paraphrasing the question.

Question:

Some young people are leaving the countryside to live in cities and towns, leaving only old people in the countryside.

Do you think this is a positive or a negative development?

Example: The migration of the younger generation to urban areas is leaving many rural locations populated predominantly by the elderly.

Note the use of synonyms for many of the keywords, e.g.

- **young people** – younger generation
- **countryside** – rural locations
- **cities and towns** – urban areas
- **leaving** – migration
- **old people** – the elderly

You don't have to replace them all but do so where possible without making the sentence sound awkward.

It's fine to repeat one or two words. Don't spend too much time trying to think of synonyms or use ones you are not 100% sure are correct.

Thesis statement

The thesis statement states your opinion on the topic. In most instances, you simply need to decide whether to agree or disagree with it and to reiterate the main idea of the statement.

Example: This essay argues that the loss of young people from the rural landscape has problematic consequences.

This thesis statement states the opinion of the writer and paraphrases the question again in a way that makes this view clear.

Outline statement

Finally in the introduction, you must outline the two main points that you'll cover in the rest of the essay. This acts as a guide to the examiner and also helps to keep you focused and on track as you write.

Do it in one sentence, or you can add them onto the end of the thesis statement if appropriate.

Example: The two most serious are, the depletion of the rural workforce and the loss of local education facilities.

These two ideas will become your two main body paragraphs.

- **Main body paragraph 1** – the depletion of the rural workforce.
- **Main body paragraph 2** – the loss of local education facilities.

The Finished Introduction

Now, let's pull the whole introduction together.

> **Question:**
> *Some young people are leaving the countryside to live in cities and towns, leaving only old people in the countryside.*
>
> *Do you think this is a positive or a negative development?*

Introduction:

The migration of the younger generation to urban areas is leaving many rural locations populated predominantly by the elderly. This essay argues that the loss of young people from the rural landscape has problematic consequences. The two most serious are, the depletion of the rural workforce and the loss of local education facilities.

These three sentences exactly follow the 3 part structure and also avoid the common mistakes.

This short paragraph would be an excellent introduction to an essay on this topic.

Chapter 7
Writing the Main Body Paragraphs

In this chapter you'll learn:

- **The 3 part structure**
- **3 common mistakes to avoid**
- **How to write great main body paragraphs**

Many students make essay writing more difficult than it needs to be. I aim to make it as simple as possible and to give you easy to follow the step-by-step instructions that will help you get the score you need.

Task 2 essays should be made up of 4 sections:

1) **Introduction**
2) **Main Body Paragraph 1**
3) **Main Body Paragraph 2**
4) **Conclusion**

Having written an essay introduction in the last chapter, we're now going to add the two main body paragraphs. These are also known as supporting paragraphs because the information they contain supports, or backs up, the statements made in the introduction.

The 3 Part Structure

Each of the 4 sections of a Task 2 essay has an easy to remember structure that will help you to write high-scoring essays. An important part of your preparation for the exam is to learn these structures so that they come quickly to mind in the test.

For Task 2 main body paragraphs, the structure has 3 parts:

- **Topic sentence**
- **Explanation**
- **Example**

If you can't think of an example, you can add a further explanation instead but be aware that examiners do love examples.

The Question

Here's the question we began answering in Chapter 6.

> *Some young people are leaving the countryside to live in cities and towns, leaving only old people in the countryside.*
>
> *Do you think this is a positive or a negative development?*

And, here's the introduction we wrote.

> The migration of the younger generation to urban areas is leaving many rural locations populated predominantly by the elderly. This essay argues that the loss of young people from the rural landscape has problematic consequences. The two most serious are, the depletion of the rural workforce and the loss of local education facilities.

The final sentence of this carefully structured introduction is called the 'outline statement'.

Outline statement:
The two most serious are, the depletion of the rural workforce and the loss of local education facilities.

It outlines the two main points that will be covered in the rest of the essay.

These two ideas will become the two main body paragraphs.

- **Main body paragraph 1** – the depletion of the rural workforce.
- **Main body paragraph 2** – the loss of local education facilities.

3 Common Mistakes

Before we move on to writing these two main body paragraphs, you need to be aware of three common errors that students make. Knowing these will help you to avoid making them yourself.

1. **Having too many ideas**
2. **Having undeveloped ideas**
3. **Not including explanations or examples**

For Writing Task 2, you are require to write a short essay of around 250-300 words. If you have too many ideas, you won't have time to develop each of them fully. You will lose marks for this and there are certainly no extra marks for including lots of different ideas.

All you need is 1 or 2 ideas for each paragraph and to fully develop them.

So, how do you fully develop your ideas? You simply,

- **explain what they mean**
- **support them with good examples**

I'll now show you how to do this.

How To Write Great Main Body Paragraphs

The structure of a good supporting paragraph:

- **Topic sentence**
- **Explanation sentences**
- **Example**

Topic Sentence

The overriding objective is to give the examiner what they want to see. A happy examiner means high marks.

Your essay must firstly, answer the question, and secondly, be structured in such a way that the ideas flow logically from one to another. Achieving this will gain you a high score for task achievement and cohesion and coherence.

The topic sentence plays an important role here. It states the main idea, acting as a signpost for what is to come next, that is, what the paragraph will be about.

That's all it needs to do so it doesn't need to be complicated.

Let's look at our question again and the topic we identified as the main idea for main body paragraph 1.

> *Some young people are leaving the countryside to live in cities and towns, leaving only old people in the countryside.*
>
> *Do you think this is a positive or a negative development?*

- **Main body paragraph 1** – the depletion of the rural workforce.

You will already have your ideas ready from when you planned your essay. Now they need to be formed into a sentence.

Here's an example topic sentence for main body paragraph 1.

Topic sentence 1:

When 18-30 year olds move to towns and cities in search of new opportunities, they leave behind an ageing population to do all the work.

The idea of the rural workforce being depleted is expressed clearly in simple language. This is all that's required.

Now for the second paragraph. Here's the main idea and an example topic sentence.

- **Main body paragraph 2** – the loss of local education facilities.

Topic sentence 2:

In many rural areas, there is no longer a village school for the local children to attend.

Again, the main idea is stated clearly and simply.

In the exam, you will fully complete the first main body paragraph before moving onto the second. I have created both topic sentences together just for illustration.

Explanation Sentences & Examples

These ideas now need to be developed with an explanation and, ideally, an example.

We'll start by developing the idea in topic sentence 1.

Topic sentence 1:
When 18-30 year olds move to towns and cities in search of new opportunities, they leave behind an ageing population to do all the work.

Explanation and example 1:

Most employment in the countryside involves manual labour. This can be difficult for older people to manage as it is far more suited to fit and healthy young adults. A government survey carried out over the past decade, reveals that the number of family farms being sold off to developers is increasing year by year. The main reason given for this is that the parents can no longer manage to do all the hard work themselves and their sons and daughters have moved to urban areas to seek new opportunities.

Here we have two sentences giving more detail on the idea and two sentences setting out an example.

Examples can come from many sources including personal experience, news reports and articles or academic studies you've read.

Don’t worry if you can’t think of a real example. It’s fine to make one up, as this one is, as long as it’s believable.

If you really can’t think of an example, add another piece of information to support your idea instead.

Next, we need to develop topic sentence 2.

Topic sentence 2:

In many rural areas, there is no longer a village school for the local children to attend.

Explanation and example 2:

With fewer young families living on the farms and in the villages, there are not enough kids to keep the local primary schools open. This is a big loss to rural communities as it means that children still living in the countryside often have to travel a long way to school each day. In the region of Devon where I live, every village had its own school just forty years ago. Now only a handful of them still exist. Most have been converted into houses or holiday cottages.

Again, we have a couple on sentences containing extra information to support the main idea and an example which, in this instance, is true.

So, let’s bring our two main body paragraphs together. You can see them on the next page.

Finished Main Body Paragraphs

When 18-30 year olds move to towns and cities in search of new opportunities, they leave behind an ageing population to do all the work. Most employment in the countryside involves manual labour. This can be difficult for older people to manage as it is far more suited to fit and healthy young adults. A government survey carried out over the past decade, reveals that the number of family farms being sold off to developers is increasing year by year. The main reason given for this is that the parents can no longer manage to do all the hard work themselves and their sons and daughters have moved to urban areas to seek new opportunities.

Furthermore, in many rural areas, there is no longer a village school for the local children to attend. With fewer young families living on the farms and in the villages, there are not enough kids to keep the local primary schools open. This is a big loss to rural communities as it means that children still living in the countryside often have to travel a long way to school each day. In the region of Devon where I live, every village had its own school just forty years ago. Now only a handful of them still exist. Most have been converted into houses or holiday cottages.

Note that I've added the word ‘furthermore’ to the beginning of the second paragraph as a cohesive device to link the two ideas.

Summary

As you can see, you don’t have time to include many ideas. Here’s a summary of what each main body paragraph includes:

- **A topic sentence**
- **An explanation**
- **An example**

With the introduction and body paragraph complete, we just need to add a conclusion and our essay is finished.

Chapter 8
Writing the Conclusion

If your introduction and main body paragraphs are structured correctly, writing a conclusion to your Task 2 essay will be very simple.
In this chapter learn:

- **Why a good conclusion is important**
- **4 common mistakes to avoid**
- **The structure of a good conclusion**
- **How to write the perfect conclusion**

Why a Good Conclusion is Important

As we already know, high-scoring Task 2 essays have a simple 4 part structure:

1) **Introduction**
2) **Main Body Paragraph 1**
3) **Main Body Paragraph 2**
4) **Conclusion**

Although your conclusion will only be 1 or 2 sentences long, it's as important as each of the other sections of the essay and you will miss out on valuable marks if you don't include one.

A good conclusion will:

- **Neatly end the essay**
- **Link all your ideas together**
- **Sum up your argument or opinion**
- **Answers the question**

If you do this well, you'll improve your score for both task achievement and cohesion and coherence which together make up 50% of the overall marks.

Without a conclusion, you'll score below band 6 for task achievement.

4 Common Mistakes to Avoid

First, let's consider what you should not do when writing a conclusion. You should not:

- **Introduce new ideas.**
- **Introduce new evidence or examples.**
- **Write too much.**
- **Be too general**

Do not add any new information. The purpose of this final paragraph is to summarise what you've already said, nothing else.

Many candidates write conclusions that are far too long. A lengthy conclusion isn't necessary. Also, you won't have much time left in which to write it, so keep it short. Follow the simple guidelines I'm about to give you.

Another common error is to write a concluding statement about the topic in general. A big mistake. You must be specific. Your conclusion must relate directly to the question and sum up the specific ideas in the main body of your essay.

The Structure of a Good Conclusion

The ideal conclusion has 1 or 2 sentences:

- **Sentence 1 – a summary of your main ideas.**
- **Sentence 2 – a prediction or recommendation statement. (optional).**

This second sentence is optional but perfectly acceptable if you do want to add one. It is useful if you find that you're just below the word limit when you finish your essay and need one more sentence to get you over the minimum 250 words.

If your essay is already long enough, leave it out as it won't earn you extra marks. You're time will be better spent checking your grammar and spellings.

The Summary Sentence

Your summary sentence is the one that's essential, so we'll begin with this. We're going to add a conclusion to the essay we've been working on in the last two chapters.

Here's a reminder of the question:

> *Some young people are leaving the countryside to live in cities and towns, leaving only old people in the countryside.*
>
> *Do you think this is a positive or a negative development?*

The migration of the younger generation to urban areas is leaving many rural locations populated predominantly by the elderly. This essay argues that the loss of young people from the rural landscape has problematic consequences. The two most serious are, the depletion of the rural workforce and the loss of local education facilities.	Introduction
When 18-30 year olds move to towns and cities in search of new opportunities, they leave behind an ageing population to do all the work. Most employment in the countryside involves manual labour. This can be difficult for older people to manage as it is far more suited to fit and healthy young adults. A government survey carried out over the past decade, reveals that the number of family farms being sold off to developers is increasing year by year. The main reason given for this is that the parents can no longer manage to do all the hard work themselves and their sons and daughters have moved to urban areas to seek new opportunities.	Main body paragraph 1
Furthermore, in many rural areas, there is no longer a village school for the local children to attend. With fewer young families living on the farms and in the villages, there are not enough kids to keep the local primary schools open. This is a big loss to rural communities as it means that children still living in the countryside often have to travel a long way to school each day. In the region of Devon where I live, every village had its own school just forty years ago. Now only a handful of them still exist. Most have been converted into houses or holiday cottages.	Main body paragraph 2

The first few words of a summary sentence are extremely important. The good news is that you can use the same phrase for almost any Task 2 essay. I recommend that you use:

- **In conclusion**
  or
- **To conclude**

These cohesive devices do two jobs:

- **They link this final paragraph to what has been written previously.**
- **They make it clear to the examiner that you are about to summarise your answer to the question.**

There's another piece of good news. If you followed my instructions on how to write a good introduction to your essay, your introduction will be a summary of what your essay **is going to include**.

Since your conclusion is about what the essay **did include** (your opinion and the main points), all you need to do now is to paraphrase this same information.

Here's the introduction:

> **Introduction:**
> The migration of the younger generation to urban areas is leaving many rural locations populated predominantly by the elderly. This essay argues that the loss of young people from the rural landscape has problematic consequences. The two most serious are, the depletion of the rural workforce and the loss of local education facilities.

Here's the same information formed into a conclusion:

> **Summary sentence:**
> In conclusion, the significant rise in the average age of people living in rural areas has resulted in a lack of suitable people to fill the workforce and the closure of the majority of village schools, causing hardship to local communities.

Study the way I've used synonyms and a different sentence structure to form this conclusion from the introduction. This really is all you need to do.

The Prediction or Recommendation Sentence

Finally, let's consider the optional **prediction** or **recommendation** sentence. What do these two words mean?

- **A prediction is a statement about what you think <u>will</u> happen in the future.**
- **A recommendation is a statement about what you think <u>should</u> happen in the future.**

Here are examples of each type of sentence that you could use for this Task 2 essay:

- **It is predicted that there will be a steady increase in young families moving to country locations in the coming decade as parents seek a more relaxed lifestyle for themselves and their children.**
- **It is recommended that governments should improve public transport and provide affordable village housing to encourage young people back to rural areas.**

Sometimes it will be appropriate to use ‘I predict that…’ or ‘I recommend that…’.

With our conclusion written, the essay is complete. You can see the final version on the next page.

It is well over the 250 minimum word limit so, no prediction or recommendation sentence is needed.

Finished essay

The migration of the younger generation to urban areas is leaving many rural locations populated predominantly by the elderly. This essay argues that the loss of young people from the rural landscape has problematic consequences. The two most serious are, the depletion of the rural workforce and the loss of local education facilities.

When 18-30 year olds move to towns and cities in search of new opportunities, they leave behind an ageing population to do all the work. Most employment in the countryside involves manual labour. This can be difficult for older people to manage as it is far more suited to fit and healthy young adults. A government survey carried out over the past decade, reveals that the number of family farms being sold off to developers is increasing year by year. The main reason given for this is that the parents can no longer manage to do all the hard work themselves and their sons and daughters have moved to urban areas to seek new opportunities.

Furthermore, in many rural areas, there is no longer a village school for the local children to attend. With fewer young families living on the farms and in the villages, there are not enough kids to keep the local primary schools open. This is a big loss to rural communities as it means that children still living in the countryside often have to travel a long way to school each day. In the region of Devon where I live, every village had its own school just forty years ago. Now only a handful of them still exist. Most have been converted into houses or holiday cottages.

In conclusion, the significant rise in the average age of people living in rural areas has resulted in a lack of suitable people to fill the workforce and the closure of the majority of village schools, causing hardship to local communities.

(315 words)

Learning to write good Task 2 essays takes a lot of practice. Use this lesson and the two on introductions and main body paragraphs to learn the technique then, do as much practice as you can on all five question types.

We'll go through each of these next.

While practicing on past questions, take as long to plan and write your essays as you need to at first. Gradually speed up the process until you can finish your essay within the 40 minutes allowed.

As we work through the 5 different types of essays, I'll be going over much of the material we've already covered to reinforce it and to show you how to use it to answer real questions.

Chapter 9
How To Write Opinion Essays

IELTS opinion essays, also known as 'agree or disagree' essays, come up frequently in the writing exam. In this chapter, I'm going to show you how to plan and write them step-by-step.

Here's what we'll be covering:

- **3 Common mistakes**
- **Essay structure**
- **How to plan**
- **How to write an introduction**
- **How to write main body paragraphs**
- **How to write a conclusion**

The Question

The first part of the question will be a statement. You will then be asked to give your own opinion about the statement. Here is some typical wording that might be used:

- **What is your opinion?**
- **Do you agree or disagree?**
- **To what extent do you agree or disagree?**

This is the question I'll be using this question to guide you through the process of planning and writing an opinion essay. It comes from a past test paper.

> *A big salary is much more important than job satisfaction.*
>
> *Do you agree or disagree?*
>
> *Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge or experience.*
>
> *Write at least 250 words.*

3 Common Mistakes

These three errors are common in opinion essays.

- **Not stating an opinion.**
- **Giving arguments for both views.**
- **Not supporting your opinion with clear reasons.**

The most common mistake that students make is not giving an opinion. The question will clearly state that you must choose one side of the argument. If you fail to do this, you will get a low score for task achievement.

It doesn't matter which side of the argument you take or even, that you agree with it. Choose the one you can develop the best argument for. Make sure that you don't change your opinion part way through the essay, and don't give reasons for the opposing view.

Essay Structure

Now let's look at a simple structure you can use to write opinion essays. It's not the only possible structure but it's the one I recommend because it's easy to learn and will enable you to quickly plan and write a high-level essay.

1) Introduction

- Paraphrase the question
- Give your opinion
- State two supporting reasons

2) Main body paragraph 1

- Topic sentence – outline 1st reason for supporting this view
- Explanation – explain this idea
- Example – give an example

3) Main body paragraph 2

- Topic sentence – outline 2nd reason for supporting this view
- Explanation – explain this idea
- Example – give an example

4) Conclusion

- Summarise opinion and key reasons

This structure will give us a well-balanced essay with 4 paragraphs. We now need some ideas to add into the structure and we'll have everything we need for our essay.

How To Plan IELTS Opinion Essays

1) Decide on your opinion

The question I've chosen to work on is quite straightforward and easy to understand so we don't need to spend time analysing it. The first task, then, is to decide on our opinion.

Here's the first part of the question again:

> ***A big salary is much more important than job satisfaction.***
>
> ***Do you agree or disagree?***

For this essay, I'm going to disagree with the statement and argue that job satisfaction is more important than a big salary.

2) Generate ideas

The second task is to generate some ideas to write about.
Since I'm going to argue that job satisfaction is more important than a large salary, I need ideas to support this view.
There are several different ways to think up ideas. We looked at the four main ones in Chapter 4:

- **Brainstorming**
- **Mind-mapping**
- **Friends technique**
- **Examples method**

With this particular question, I immediately thought of a couple of examples of situations where job satisfaction did prove to be more important than a high salary, so I'm going to use the 'example method' of generating ideas.

Once you've thought of an example or two, ideas to include in your essay should come to you easily.

You might want to try this yourself before reading on for my ideas.

Here are my examples and some ideas they generated.
Both the examples are partly true but I've adapted them to better fit the essay. It's fine to do this as the examiner won't check your facts.

Examples:

- Uncle Barry – boasted about high salary but hated his job. Nervous breakdown – lost job & can't work.

- Me – gave up teaching. Now enjoy my work and am much more relaxed and happy even though I earn much less money.

Ideas:

- High-salary jobs are generally more stressful
- Stress leads to ill health, both mental and physical
- 40 hours a week at work – a third of the day
- Money doesn't bring happiness
- Better quality of life
- Sense of fulfilment
- Less stressed – healthier and happier

I've got more ideas here than I need so I'm going to pick two to develop in the essay – one for each of the main body paragraphs.

Idea 1 – High-salary jobs are generally more stressful and can lead to ill health.

Idea 2 – Job satisfaction gives a sense of fulfilment.

We're almost ready to start writing our opinion essay but first, we have one other small task to do.

3) Vocabulary

In an IELTS essay, it's important to be able to say the same things in different ways, either by paraphrasing and/or using synonyms. During the planning stage, quickly jot down a few synonyms of key words you could use to save you having to stop and think of the right language while you're writing.

For example:

satisfaction – fulfilment, achievement, sense of accomplishment, content, sense of well-being

salary – income, wages, pay, earnings

important – significant, valued, has more meaning

job – work, employment, position

With that done, we can focus on the first paragraph of the essay – the introduction.

How To Write an Introduction

A good introduction has a simple 3 part structure:

1) **Paraphrased question**
2) **Thesis statement**
3) **Outline statement**

An introduction should:

- **Have 2-3 sentences**
- **Be 40-60 words long**
- **Take 5 minutes to write**

1) Paraphrase the question

Start your introduction by paraphrasing the question.

Question:
A big salary is much more important than job satisfaction.
Do you agree or disagree?

Paraphrased question:
It is argued that earning lots of money has more significance to people than being content in their work.

Note that I've used some of the synonyms I listed, although it's fine to repeat one or two words if you need to. Above all, your language must sound natural.

2) Thesis statement

The thesis statement is where you state your opinion. For example,

Thesis statement:
This essay totally disagrees with that statement.

That's all you need to say.

If you decided to agree with the statement, you would write:

This essay completely agrees with that statement.

3) Outline statement

Finally in the introduction, you must outline the two main points that you'll cover in the rest of the essay. These are **Ideas 1 and 2** that we chose earlier. Do this in one sentence, or you can add them onto the end of the thesis statement if appropriate. For example,

Outline statement:

I believe that people are increasingly concerned about the risk of stress-related ill-health frequently experienced by people in highly paid positions and they care more about feeling fulfilled at work.

So, let's bring the three elements of our introduction together.

Introduction

> It is argued that earning lots of money has more significance to people than being content in their work. This essay totally disagrees with that statement. I believe that people are increasingly concerned about the risk of stress-related ill-health frequently experienced by people in highly paid positions and they care more about feeling fulfilled at work.

This introduction achieves three important functions:

- **It shows the examiner that you understand the question.**
- **It acts as a guide to the examiner as to what your essay is about.**
- **It also helps to keep you focused and on track as you write.**

The two ideas in your introduction will become your two main body paragraphs.

Main body paragraph 1 – concerns about the risk of stress-related ill-health

Main body paragraph 2 – a sense of fulfilment at work

How To Write Main Body Paragraphs

The structure of a good main body paragraph has 3 parts:

- **Topic sentence**
- **Explanation**
- **Example**

If you can't think of an example, you can add further supporting ideas but we already have our two examples so that's not an issue here.

A common problem when writing main body paragraphs for an opinion essay is having too many ideas. Again, we have already chosen the two ideas we are going to develop, so we are all set to start writing.

You can see how important the planning stage is and how it make the actual writing of the essay far quicker and easier.

Main Body Paragraph 1

The **topic sentence** summarises the main idea of the paragraph. That's all it needs to do so it doesn't have to be complicated.

It plays an important role in ensuring that your ideas flow logically from one to another. It does this by acting as a signpost for what is to come next, that is, what the paragraph will be about.

If you maintain a clear development of ideas throughout your essay, you will get high marks for task achievement and cohesion and coherence.

We'll now take the idea for our first main body paragraph and create our topic sentence.

Main idea 1 – concerns about the risk of stress-related ill-health

Topic sentence:
Employees earning a large income are generally under significant mental and emotional pressure to perform well and achieve targets.

Next, we must write an **explanation sentence**. This explains to the examiner what we mean. It expands on our first idea.

Explanation sentence:
This causes many individuals to suffer high levels of stress which can result in both mental and physical health problems.

Finally, we add an **example** to support our main point. I thought of this in the planning stage so I have it ready to use.

If you can't think of a real example, it's fine to make one up, as long as it's believable. The examiner isn't going to check your facts.

Example sentence:
This happened to my uncle. He used to boast about his huge salary but the boss kept increasing his sales targets and in the end, the stress became too great and he had a nervous breakdown. Now he regrets being driven by the money.

That's the 3 parts of our first main body paragraph complete. Here's the finished paragraph.

> Employees who earn a large income are generally under significant mental and emotional pressure to perform well and achieve targets. This causes many individuals to suffer high levels of stress which can result in mental health problems. This happened to my uncle. He used to boast about his huge salary but the boss kept increasing his sales targets and in the end, the stress became too great and he had a nervous breakdown. Now he regrets being driven by the money.

We now follow the same process for our second main body paragraph.

Main Body Paragraph 2

Main idea 2 – Job satisfaction gives a sense of fulfilment.

First, we write the **topic sentence** to summarise the main idea.

Topic sentence:
Having a job that they enjoy doing, and in which they feel valued, is a major concern for most of the modern workforce.

Now for the **explanation sentence** to explain this idea.

Explanation sentence:
A significant number of people are giving up well-paid positions to do jobs which pays less but that they find more enjoyable and less stressful.

Finally, an **example** to support our main point. As before, I thought of this in the planning stage so just need to form it into a couple of sentences.

Example sentence:

I am an example of this myself. A year ago I left the teaching profession because the workload had become too great and I am now a gardener. I feel really fulfilled in this work and I am much more relaxed and happy even though I earn far less money.

That's the 3 parts of our second main body paragraph complete. Here's the finished paragraph.

> Having a job that they enjoy doing, and in which they feel valued, is a major concern for most of the modern workforce. A significant number of people are giving up well-paid positions to do jobs which pays less but that they find more enjoyable and less stressful. I am an example of this myself. A year ago I gave up the teaching profession because the workload had become too great and am now a gardener. I feel really fulfilled in this work and am much more relaxed and happy even though I earn far less money.

Now we need a conclusion and our opinion essay is done.

How To Write a Conclusion

Conclusions to opinion essay should do two things:

- **Summarise the main points**
- **State your opinion**

This can generally be done in a single sentence.

If you are below the minimum 250 words after you've written your conclusion, you can add an additional prediction or recommendation statement.

Our essay currently has 233 words so we're on target and won't need this extra sentence but you can learn more about how to write a prediction or recommendation statement in Chapter 8.

The conclusion is the easiest sentence in the essay to write but one of the most important.

A good conclusion will:

- **Neatly end the essay**
- **Link all your ideas together**
- **Sum up your argument or opinion**
- **Answer the question**

If you achieve this, you'll improve your score for both task achievement and cohesion and coherence which together make up 50% of the overall marks. Without a conclusion, you'll score below band 6 for task achievement.

You can start almost any final paragraph of an opinion essay with the words:

- **In conclusion**

  or

- **To conclude**

Now all you need to do is briefly summarise the main ideas into one sentence.

Here's a **top tip**. Go back and read the introduction to the essay because this is also a summary of the essay. It outlines what you are going to write about.
To create a great conclusion, you simply have to paraphrase the introduction. Let's give it a go.

Introduction:

It is argued that earning lots of money has more significance to people than being content in their work. This essay totally disagrees with that statement. I believe that people are increasingly concerned about the risk of stress-related ill-health frequently experienced by people in highly paid positions and they care more about feeling fulfilled at work.

Here's is the same information formed into a conclusion:

Conclusion:

In conclusion, for a high percentage of the population, earning a substantial wage is less important than job satisfaction because of the negative effects of work-related stress and the desire to feel happy and fulfilled at work.

That's it. We've completed our essay. You can see the 4 paragraphs together on the next page.

Question:

A big salary is much more important than job satisfaction.

Do you agree or disagree?

Finished Opinion Essay

It is argued that earning lots of money has more significance to people than being content in their work. This essay totally disagrees with that statement. I believe that people are increasingly concerned about the risk of stress-related ill-health frequently experienced by people in highly paid positions and they care more about feeling fulfilled at work.

Employees who earn a large income are generally under significant mental and emotional pressure to perform well and achieve targets. This causes many individuals to suffer high levels of stress which can result in mental health problems. This happened to my uncle. He used to boast about his huge salary but the boss kept increasing his sales targets and in the end, the stress became too great and he had a nervous breakdown. Now he regrets being driven by the money.

Having a job that they enjoy doing, and in which they feel valued, is a major concern for most of the modern workforce. A significant number of people are giving up well-paid positions to do jobs which pays less but that they find more enjoyable and less stressful. I am an example of this myself. A year ago I left the teaching profession because the workload had become too great, and I am now a gardener. I feel really fulfilled in this work and I am much more relaxed and happy even though I earn far less money.

In conclusion, for a high percentage of the population, earning a substantial wage is less important than job satisfaction because of the negative effects of work-related stress and the desire to feel happy and fulfilled at work.

(272 words)

Go through this lesson as many times as you need to in order to fully understand it and put in lots of practice writing opinion essays from past exam questions. Practice is the only way to improve your skills.

Chapter 10
How To Write Discussion Essays

Students can find it difficult to identify discussion essays and often confuse them with either opinion essays or advantage and disadvantage essays.

This is one of the issues I'll be addressing in this chapter. I'm also going to show you how to plan and write discussion essays step-by-step.

Here's what we'll be covering:

- **Identifying discussion essays**
- **3 Common mistakes**
- **Essay structure**
- **How to plan**
- **How to write an introduction**
- **How to write main body paragraphs**
- **How to write a conclusion**

The Question

The first part of the question will be a statement containing two opposing views.
You will then be asked to discuss both sides of the argument and give your own opinion. Here is some typical wording that might be used:

- **Discuss both views and give your opinion.**
- **Discuss both these views and then give your own opinion.**
- **Discuss both sides of this argument and give your own opinion.**

Here's a question from a past test paper.

> *Some people think that zoos are cruel and should be closed down. Others, however, believe that zoos can be useful in protecting wild animals.*
>
> *Discuss both views and give your opinion.*
>
> *Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge or experience.*
>
> *Write at least 250 words.*

I'll be using this question to guide you through the process of planning and writing an IELTS discussion essay.

The key to identifying this type of question is the fact that you are required to discuss BOTH views. This is different to opinion questions where you must decide between two opposing views and make an argument to support your own opinion.

Opinion essays, also known as 'agree or disagree' essays, a generally worded in one of these ways:

- **What is your opinion?**
- **Do you agree or disagree?**
- **To what extent do you agree or disagree?**

The other essay type that students mistake for discussion essays is **advantages and disadvantages essays**.

With these, the statement will contain just one view and the question will typically be written as shown in this sample question.

> ***School children are using computers in school more than ever.***
>
> ***Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of this and give your own opinion.***

The consequence of incorrectly identifying the question type is that you will use the wrong structure for your essay. This is a major reason why people make the mistakes we'll now look at.

3 Common Mistakes

These three errors are common in discussion essays.

- **Not stating your opinion.**
- **Not giving arguments for both views.**
- **Not developing both sides of the argument equally.**

The most common mistake that students make is not giving their opinion. The question will clearly state that you must choose one side of the argument to agree with. If you fail to do this, you will get a low score for task achievement.

It doesn't matter which side of the argument you take or even, that you actually agree with it.

However, you must give equal attention to both sides. A common error is to provide a stronger argument for the view you favour. This leads to an unbalanced essay and a low score for task achievement.

Essay Structure

Now let's look at a simple structure you can use to write you essay. It's not the only possible structure but it's the one I recommend because it's easy to learn and will enable you to quickly plan and write a high-level essay.

1) Introduction

- Paraphrase the question
- State two supporting reasons
- Give your opinion

2) Main body paragraph 1

- Topic sentence – outline the view you don't agree with
- Explanation – explain why this view is held by some people
- Example – give an example

3) Main body paragraph 2

- Topic sentence – outline the view you do agree with
- Explanation – explain why this view is held by some people
- Example – give an example

4) Conclusion

- Summarise the key points and state your opinion

This structure will give us a well-balanced essay with 4 paragraphs. We now need some ideas to add into the structure and we'll have everything we need for our essay.

How To Plan IELTS Discussion Essays

1) Analyse the question

This is an essential step in the planning process and will ensure that you answer the question fully. It's quick and easy to do. You just need to identify 3 different types of words:

1. **Topic words**
2. **Other keywords**
3. **Instruction words**

We've already considered the instruction words (the actual question) so we'll focus on the first two.

Topics words are the ones that identify the general subject of the question.

> **Some people think that zoos are cruel and should be closed down. Others, however, believe that zoos can be useful in protecting wild animals.**

So, this question is about '**zoos**'.

Many people do this first step of the process and then write about the topic in general. This is a serious mistake and leads to low marks for task achievement.

What we need to do now that we know the general topic, is to understand exactly what aspect of zoos we're being asked to write about.

The **other keywords** in the question tell you the specific topic you must write about. They define the opinions stated in the statement.

Some people think that zoos are cruel and should be closed down. Others, however, believe that zoos can be useful in protecting wild animals.

By highlighting these words, it's easy to see that you are being asked to write about the opposing views that zoos are cruel and should be closed down and that zoos can be useful in protecting wild animals. Your essay must only include ideas relevant to these ideas.

2) Decide on your opinion

Instructions: **Discuss both views and give your opinion.**

As already mentioned, it doesn't matter if you genuinely agree with the view you take in your essay or not. IELTS discussion essays are about your ability to write a well-structured essay in the English language and you will not be assessed on any opinion you might hold.

So, choose one view and make sure that your opinion is clear throughout the essay.

For this model essay, I'm going to agree with the statement that zoos are cruel and should be closed down.

3) Generate ideas

The next task is to generate some ideas to write about.
There are several different ways to think up ideas. We looked at the four main ones in Chapter 4:

- **Brainstorming**
- **Mind-mapping**
- **Friends technique**
- **Examples method**

For this essay, we're going to use the 'friends technique'. This is my preferred method as it allows you to take a step back from the stress of the exam situation and think more calmly.

Here's how it works. Imagine you are chatting with a friend and they ask you the question in a casual conversation. What answers would you give them off the top of your head? Plan your essay around these ideas.

Doing this will help you to come up with simple answers in everyday language rather than straining your brain to think of amazing ideas using high level-language, which isn't necessary.
You might want to try this yourself before reading on for my ideas.

Here are my ideas:

Cruel – closed down:

- Cramped cages – animals distressed
- Unnatural environments
- Most animals not endangered
- Animals become a public spectacle for entertainment

Useful – protect wild animals:

- Research work to learn more about wild animals
- Breeding programmes for endangered species
- Some species saved from extinction
- Seeing wild animals close up inspires people to want to help protect them

I've got more ideas here than I need so I'm going to pick two to develop in the essay – one for each of the main body paragraphs.

Idea 1 – **Cramped cages & unnatural environments, animals distressed.**

Idea 2 – **Breeding programmes for endangered species, some species saved from extinction.**

We're almost ready to start writing our essay but first, we have one other small task to do.

4) Vocabulary

In an IELTS essay, it's important to be able to say the same things in different ways, either by paraphrasing and/or using synonyms. During the planning stage, quickly jot down a few synonyms of key words you could use to save you having to stop and think of the right language while you're writing.

For example:

zoos – animals in captivity, collections of wild animals, menagerie, wildlife park

cruel – to cause suffering, inhumane

protect – safeguard, preserve

animals – creatures, species

With that done, we can focus on the first paragraph of the essay – the introduction.

How To Write an Introduction

A good introduction to a discussion essay has a simple 3 part structure:

1) **Paraphrase the question**
2) **State two supporting reasons (outline statement)**
3) **Give your opinion (thesis statement)**

It should:

- **Have 2-3 sentences**
- **Be 40-60 words long**
- **Take 5 minutes to write**

1) Paraphrase the question

Start your introduction by paraphrasing the question.

> **Question:**
> Some people think that zoos are cruel and should be closed down. Others, however, believe that zoos can be useful in protecting wild animals.
>
> Discuss both views and give your opinion.

There are various phrases you can use to do this. Here are three examples. They all say the same thing using different language.

- **Some people argue that… while others say that…**
- **It is considered by some…. while there are others who think….**
- **It is often argued that... whilst others disagree and think...**

Choose one and add the details in the question statement in a paraphrased form. I recommend putting the view you don't agree with first. For example,

> **Paraphrased question:**
> **Some people argue that zoos help to preserve wild creatures, while others say that they are inhumane and should be abolished.**

Note my use of synonyms. You don't have to replace every key word but do so where possible whilst ensuring that your language sounds natural. There aren't any suitable synonyms of 'zoo' that I can think of, so I've repeated this word from the statement.

2) Thesis and outline statements

Now we need to add an **outline statement** that outlines the two main points that we'll cover in the rest of the essay (ideas 1 and 2 above) and a **thesis statement** where we state our opinion.

Outline & thesis statements:

While the development of breeding programmes contributes to the preservation of endangered species, I believe that the poor conditions that many animals held in captivity are kept in make the existence of zoos unacceptable.

So, let's bring the three elements of our introduction together.

Introduction:

> Some people argue that zoos help to preserve wild creatures, while others say that they are inhumane and should be abolished. While the development of breeding programmes contributes to the preservation of endangered species, I believe that the poor conditions that many animals held in captivity are kept in makes the existence of zoos unacceptable.

This introduction achieves three important functions:

- **It shows the examiner that you understand the question.**
- **It acts as a guide to the examiner as to what your essay is about.**
- **It also helps to keep you focused and on track as you write.**

The two ideas in your introduction will become your two main body paragraphs.

Main body paragraph 1 – Breeding programmes for endangered species, some species saved from extinction.

Main body paragraph 2 – Cramped cages & unnatural environments, animals distressed.

How To Write Main Body Paragraphs

Main body paragraphs in Task 2 essays should contain 3 things:

- **Topic sentence – outline the view you don't agree with**
- **Explanation – explain why this view is held by some people**
- **Example – give an example**

It is easier to begin by discussing the opinion you don't agree with and then present the reasons for the opposing view that you support. So, we'll start with idea 1.

Main Body Paragraph 1

The **topic sentence** summarises the main idea of the paragraph. That's all it needs to do so it doesn't have to be complicated.

It plays an important role in ensuring that your ideas flow logically from one to another. It does this by acting as a signpost for what is to come next, that is, what the paragraph will be about.

If you maintain a clear development of ideas throughout your essay, you will get high marks for task achievement and cohesion and coherence.

We'll now take the idea for our first main body paragraph and create our topic sentence.

Main body paragraph 1 – Breeding programmes for endangered species, some species saved from extinction.

Topic sentence:

On the one hand, there are many projects in existence in zoological parks around the world where species facing extinction have been successfully bred in captivity and their numbers increased substantially.

Next, we must write an **explanation sentence** that expands on the idea. This explains to the examiner what we mean or why this is the case.

Explanation sentence:

This is important for ensuring the survival of animals under threat from poaching and the destruction of their natural environments.

Finally, we add an **example** to support our main point. If you can't think of a real example, it's fine to make one up, as long as it's believable. The examiner isn't going to check your facts.

Example sentence:

A good example of this is the golden lion tamarin from Brazil which nearly died out because of logging and mining activities which are destroying its habitat. Today, a third of wild golden lion tamarins were raised in captivity.

That's the 3 parts of our first main body paragraph complete. Here's the finished paragraph.

On the one hand, there are many projects in existence in zoological parks around the world where species facing extinction have been successfully bred in captivity and their numbers increased substantially. This is important for ensuring the survival of animals under threat from poaching and the destruction of their natural environments. A good example of this is the golden lion tamarin from Brazil which nearly died out because of logging and mining activities which are destroying its habitat. Today, a third of wild golden lion tamarins were raised in captivity.

We now follow the same process for our second main body paragraph.

Main Body Paragraph 2

Main idea 2 – Cramped cages & unnatural environments, animals distressed.

First, we write the **topic sentence** to summarise the main idea. I started main body paragraph 1 with the phrase 'On the one hand...', so main body paragraph 2 will naturally begin, 'On the other hand... .

These are great cohesive devices to use when making a direct contrast between two opposing views and they link the ideas together well. They can be used in most discussion essays and will help to earn you a good score for cohesion and coherence.

Topic sentence:

On the other hand, a significant percentage of zoos house their animals in cramped cages with very little space to move around or behave naturally.

Now for the **explanation sentence** where we expand on this idea.

Explanation sentence:

This can lead to them becoming distressed and depressed as well as suffering physically through lack of exercise.

Finally, an **example** to support this point.

Example sentence:

A friend of mine recently visited a wildlife park while on holiday abroad and was very upset to see the lions pacing up and down in a narrow, bare pen and eagles in enclosures so small that they were unable to fly.

That's the 3 parts of our second main body paragraph complete. Here's the finished paragraph.

> On the other hand, a significant percentage of zoos house their animals in cramped cages with very little space to move around or behave naturally. This can lead to them becoming distressed and depressed as well as suffering physically through lack of exercise. A friend of mine recently visited a wildlife park while on holiday abroad and was very upset to see the lions pacing up and down in a narrow, bare pen and eagles in enclosures so small that they were unable to fly.

Now we need a conclusion and our IELTS discussion essay is done.

How To Write a Conclusion

The conclusions should do two things:

- **Summarise the main points**
- **State your opinion**

This can generally be done in a single sentence.

If you're below the minimum 250 words after you've written your conclusion, you can add a prediction or recommendation statement.

Our essay currently has 231 words so we're on target and won't need this extra sentence but you can learn more about how to write a prediction or recommendation statement in Chapter 8.

The conclusion is the easiest sentence in the essay to write but one of the most important.

A good conclusion will:

- **Neatly end the essay**
- **Link all your ideas together**
- **Sum up your argument or opinion**
- **Answer the question**

If you achieve this, you'll improve your score for both task achievement and cohesion and coherence which together make up 50% of the overall marks. Without a conclusion, you'll score below band 6 for task achievement.

You can start almost any final paragraph of an IELTS discussion essay with the words:

- **In conclusion**

  or
- **To conclude**

Now all you need to do is briefly summarise the main ideas into one sentence.

Here's a **top tip**. Go back and read the introduction to the essay because this is also a summary of the essay. It outlines what you are going to write about.

To create a great conclusion, you simply have to paraphrase the introduction. Let's give it a go.

Introduction:

Some people argue that zoos help to preserve wild creatures, while others say that they are inhumane and should be abolished. While the development of breeding programmes contributes to the preservation of endangered species, I believe that the poor conditions that many animals held in captivity are kept in makes the existence of zoos unacceptable.

Here is the same information formed into a conclusion:

Conclusion:

In conclusion, although zoos do help to safeguard dwindling populations of particular species, the suffering experienced by many captive creatures due to unsuitable living conditions amounts to cruelty and they should not be allowed to exist.

That's it. We've completed our essay. You can see the 4 paragraphs together on the next page.

Question:

Some people think that zoos are cruel and should be closed down. Others, however, believe that zoos can be useful in protecting wild animals.

Discuss both views and give your opinion.

Finished Discussion Essay

Some people argue that zoos help to preserve wild creatures, while others say that they are inhumane and should be abolished. While the development of breeding programmes contributes to the preservation of endangered species, I believe that the poor conditions that many animals held in captivity are kept in make the existence of zoos unacceptable.

On the one hand, there are many projects in existence in zoological parks around the world where species facing extinction have been successfully bred in captivity and their numbers increased substantially. This is important for ensuring the survival of animals under threat from poaching and the destruction of their natural environments. A good example of this is the golden lion tamarin from Brazil which nearly died out because of logging and mining activities which are destroying its habitat. Today, a third of wild golden lion tamarins were raised in captivity.

On the other hand, a significant percentage of zoos house their animals in cramped cages with very little space to move around or behave naturally. This can lead to them becoming distressed and depressed as well as suffering physically through lack of exercise. A friend of mine recently visited a wildlife park while on holiday abroad and was very upset to see the lions pacing up and down in a narrow, bare pen and eagles in enclosures so small that they were unable to fly.

In conclusion, although zoos do help to safeguard dwindling populations of particular species, the suffering experienced by many captive creatures due to unsuitable living conditions amounts to cruelty and they should not be allowed to exist.

(267 words)

Go through this lesson as many times as you need to in order to fully understand it and put in lots of practice writing discussion essays from past exam questions. Practice is the only way to improve your skills.

Chapter 11
How To Write Problem Solution Essays

IELTS problem solution essays are the most challenging essay type for many people. The way they are worded can vary hugely which can make it difficult to understand how you should answer the question.

Generally, you'll be asked to write about both the problem, or cause, and the solution to a specific issue. Sometimes, however, you will only be required to write about possible solutions.

The 3 essay types:

- **Problem and solution**
- **Cause and solution**
- **Just the solution**

Hence, it's essential that you analyse the question carefully, which I'll show you how to do in this chapter. I'm also going to demonstrate step-by-step how to plan and write problem solution essays.
Here's what we'll be covering:

- **Identifying IELTS problem solution essays**
- **6 Common mistakes**
- **Essay structure**
- **How to plan**
- **How to write an introduction**
- **How to write main body paragraphs**
- **How to write a conclusion**

The Question

Here are two typical problem solution essay questions. They consist of a statement followed by the question or instruction.

> ***1.*** *One problem faced by almost every large city is traffic congestion.*
>
> *What do you think the causes are? What solutions can you suggest?*
>
> ***2.*** *Since the beginning of the 20th century, the number of endangered species has increased significantly and we have witnessed more mass extinctions in this period than in any other period of time.*
>
> *State some reasons for this and provide possible solutions.*

These are some examples of different ways in which questions can be phrased. The first half of the questions relate to the problem or cause, the second half to the solution.

- **What issues does this cause and how can they be addressed?**
- **What are some resulting social problems and how can we deal with them?**
- **What problems arise from this and how can they be tackled?**
- **Why is this? How might it be remedied?**
- **What are the reasons for this, and how can the situation be improved?**
- **Why is this happening, and what measures can be taken to tackle this problem?**

And here are a few questions where you only have to write about the solution.

- **How can this situation be improved?**
- **What solutions can you suggest to deal with this problem?**
- **How can this problem be solved?**
- **What measures could be taken to prevent this?**

It's important that you are able to recognise the common synonyms, words and phrases used in problem solution questions. Here are the key words and their synonyms used in the questions above.

- **Problem** – issues, resulting, situation
- **Cause** – reasons, why
- **Solution** – deal with, be addressed, be tackled, be remedied, be improved, measures taken, be solved, prevent

Before we move on to some common mistakes, I want to quickly explain the difference between a problem and a cause.
Read the following examples.

Problem – I missed the last bus home after visiting my friend for the evening.

Cause – I misread the timetable and thought the bus left at 22.45 when it actually left at 22.35.

We'll be looking at question analysis in more detail in a minute.

6 Common Mistakes

These six errors are common in IELTS problem solution essays.

- **Confusing problem and causes questions.**
- **Having too many ideas.**
- **Not developing your ideas.**
- **Not developing both sides of the argument equally.**
- **Not linking the problems and solutions.**
- **Not being specific enough.**

It is common for a student essay to consist of a list of problems and solutions without any of them being expanded on or linked to each other. Sometimes, a student will focus on just the problem or only the solution which leads to an unbalanced essay. Both these issues will result in a low score for task achievement.

You must choose just one or two problems and pick solutions directly linked to them. Explain them and give examples.

Another serious error is to write generally about the topic. You need to be very specific with your ideas. Analysing the question properly is essential to avoiding this mistake. I'll show you how to do this.

Essay Structure

Now let's look at a simple structure you can use to write problem solution essays. It's not the only possible structure but it's the one I recommend because it's easy to learn and will enable you to quickly plan and write a high-level essay.

1) Introduction

- Paraphrase the question
- State 1 key problem/cause and related solution

2) Main body paragraph 1 – Problem or Cause

- Topic sentence – state the problem or cause
- Explanation – give detail explaining the problem or cause
- Example – give an example

3) Main body paragraph 2 – Solution

- Topic sentence – state the solution
- Explanation – give detail explaining the solution
- Example – give an example

4) Conclusion

- Summarise the key points

This structure will give us a well-balanced essay with 4 paragraphs.

One Problem/Cause & Solution or Two?

Most questions will state problems, causes and solutions in the plural, that is, more than one. However, it is acceptable to write about just one.

This will give you an essay of just over the minimum 250 words. To write about two problems/causes and solutions will require you to write between 350 and 400 words which are a lot to plan and write in the 40 minutes allowed.

It is better to fully develop one problem/cause and solutions than ending up with one idea missing an explanation or an example because you run out of time.

The step-by-step essay structure I'm going to show you includes one problem and solution but you can write about two if you feel able to or more comfortable doing so.

How To Plan IELTS Problem Solution Essays

Here's the question we're going to be answering in our model essay followed by the 3 steps of the planning process.

> *One problem faced by almost every large city is traffic congestion.*
>
> *What do you think the causes are? What solutions can you suggest?*
>
> *Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge or experience.*
>
> *Write at least 250 words.*

- **Analyse the question**
- **Generate ideas**
- **Identify vocabulary**

1) Analyse the question

This is an essential step in the planning process and will ensure that you answer the question fully. It's quick and easy to do. You just need to identify 3 different types of words:

1. **Topic words**
2. **Other keywords**
3. **Instruction words**

Topics words are the ones that identify the general subject of the question and will be found in the statement part of the question.

> **One problem faced by almost every large city is traffic congestion.**

So, this question is about '**traffic congestion'**.

Many people will do this first step of the process and then write about the topic in general. This is a serious mistake and leads to low marks for task achievement.

What we need to do now that we know the general topic, is to understand exactly what aspect of traffic congestion we're being asked to write about.

The **other keywords** in the question tell you the specific topic you must write about.

> **One problem faced by almost every large city is traffic congestion.**

By highlighting these words, it's easy to see that you are being asked to write about the problem of traffic congestion in large cities. Your essay must only include ideas relevant to these ideas.

The **instruction words** are the question itself. These tell you the type of problem solution essay you must write. This is a 'causes and solution' question.

> **What do you think the causes are? What solutions can you suggest?**

2) Generate ideas

The next task is to generate some ideas to write about.
There are several different ways to think up ideas. We looked at the four main ones in Chapter 4:

- **Brainstorming**
- **Mind-mapping**
- **Friends technique**
- **Examples method**

For this question, we're going to use the 'friends technique'. This is the method I prefer as it allows you to take a step back from the stress of the exam situation and think more calmly.

Here's how it works. Imagine that you are chatting with a friend over a cup of coffee and they ask you this question. What are the first thoughts to come into your head? Plan your essay around these ideas.

Doing this will help you to come up with simple answers in everyday language rather than straining your brain to think of amazing ideas using high-level language, which isn't necessary.

You might want to try this yourself before reading on for my ideas. Here are my ideas:

Cause:

- Too many cars on the roads – increasing numbers of people own cars, more convenient than buses & trains
- Inadequate public transport – crowded, old & dirty
- Poor road layout
- Rush hour traffic – most people travel to & from work at the same times each day

Solution:

- Car sharing, park-and-ride scheme, congestion charge
- Improve public transport – more frequent and better quality
- Improve infrastructure – bus lanes, cycle lanes will make it safer for people to cycle
- Flexible working hours

For each cause you think of, immediately write down a possible solution. This you will ensure that the problems and solutions you think of are linked.

You don't need to spend long on this as you only need one or two ideas.

I've got more far more ideas here than I need as I spent more time thinking about it that I would in the real exam. I'm going to pick just one cause to develop in the essay and one or two solutions.

My advice on making your selection is to choose ideas you can quickly think of an example to illustrate.

Here are my choices:

Cause – Too many cars on the roads. Why? – increasing numbers of people own cars, more convenient than buses & trains

Solution – Park-and-ride schemes

We're almost ready to start writing our IELTS problem solution essay but first, we have one more task to do.

3) Vocabulary

During the planning stage, quickly jot down some vocabulary that comes to mind as you decide which cause and solution you are going to write about, especially synonyms of key words. This will save you having to stop and think of the right language while you're writing. For example:

- **traffic jam**
- **heavy traffic**
- **queue**
- **vehicles**
- **commute**
- **rush hour**
- **private transport**
- **infrastructure**

With that done, we can focus on the first paragraph of the essay – the introduction.

How To Write an Introduction

Good introductions to problem solution essays have a simple 2 part structure:

- **Paraphrase the question**
- **State 1 key problem/cause and related solution/s (outline sentence)**

It should:

- **Have 2-3 sentences**
- **Be 40-60 words long**
- **Take 5 minutes to write**

1) Paraphrase the question

Start your introduction by paraphrasing the question.

> **Question:**
> One problem faced by almost every large city is traffic congestion.
>
> What do you think the causes are? What solutions can you suggest?

Paraphrased question:

One of the most serious issues facing the majority of large urban areas is traffic jams.

Note my use of synonyms to replace key words in the question statement. You don't have to replace every key word but do so where possible whilst ensuring that your language sounds natural.

2) Outline statement

Now we need to add an **outline statement** where we outline the two main points that we'll cover in the rest of the essay, that is, the cause and the solution I chose earlier. Here they are again.

Outline statement:

The main reason for this is that there are too many private cars on the roads these days and a viable solution is to introduce more park-and-ride schemes.

So, let's bring the two elements of our introduction together.

Introduction:

> *One of the most serious issues facing the majority of large urban areas is traffic jams. The main reason for this is that there are too many private cars on the roads these days and a viable solution is to introduce more park-and-ride schemes.*

This introduction achieves three important functions:

- **It shows the examiner that you understand the question.**
- **It acts as a guide to the examiner as to what your essay is about.**
- **It also helps to keep you focused and on track as you write.**

The two ideas in your introduction will become your two main body paragraphs.

Main body paragraph 1 – Too many cars on the roads

Main body paragraph 2 – Park-and-ride schemes

How To Write Main Body Paragraphs

Main body paragraphs should contain 3 things:

- **Topic sentence – outline the cause / solution**
- **Explanation – give detail explaining the problem or cause**
- **Example – give an example**

Main Body Paragraph 1

The **topic sentence** summarises the main idea of the paragraph. That's all it needs to do so it doesn't have to be complicated.

It plays an important role in ensuring that your ideas flow logically from one to another. It does this by acting as a signpost for what is to come next, that is, what the paragraph will be about.

If you maintain a clear development of ideas throughout your essay, you will get high marks for task achievement and cohesion and coherence.

We'll now take the idea for our first main body paragraph and create our topic sentence.

Obviously, we're going to write about the cause of the problem first.

Main body paragraph 1 – Too many cars on the roads

Topic sentence:

The number of people owning cars increases year on year, with most families now having more than one car.

Next, we must write an **explanation sentence** that develops the idea.

Explanation sentence:

Most people like the convenience of travelling at the time they want to rather than being restricted to public transport timetables, so they prefer to drive themselves around rather than taking the bus or train. This is despite the fact that they frequently have to sit in long traffic queues as they near the city centre.

Finally, we add an **example** to support our main point. If you can't think of a real example, it's fine to make one up, as long as it's believable. The examiner isn't going to check your facts. Alternative, you could add another piece of information to support your idea.

Example sentence:

Whenever I have to attend a meeting in the city, I always drive because it means that I can leave home when I want to rather than getting stressed about getting to the station in time to catch the train.

That's the 3 parts of our first main body paragraph complete. Here's the finished paragraph.

The number of people owning cars increases year on year, with most families now having more than one car. Most people like the convenience of travelling at the time they want to rather than being restricted to public transport timetables, so they prefer to drive themselves around rather than taking the bus or train. This is despite the fact that they frequently have to sit in long traffic queues as they near the city centre. Whenever I have to attend a meeting in the city, I always drive because it means that I can leave home when I want to rather than getting stressed about getting to the station in time to catch the train.

We now follow the same process for our second main body paragraph.

Main Body Paragraph 2

Main idea 2 – Park-and-ride schemes

First, we write the **topic sentence** to summarise the main idea.

Topic sentence:
A solution that is proving successful in many areas is park-and-ride schemes.

Now for the **explanation sentence** where we expand on this idea.

Explanation sentence:
This is where you park your car for free in a large car park on the outskirts of the city and take a bus for the final part of your journey. The fee you have to pay for the bus trip is usually very small and this public transport system is generally very regular, running every ten minutes or so.

Finally, an **example** to support this point.

Example sentence:

A survey carried out in the city of Exeter showed that the rush hour congestion decreased by 10% when the council set up a park-and-ride scheme to the north of the city. There was an additional drop of another 10% in traffic volume when a second scheme began operating to the south.

That's the 3 parts of our second main body paragraph complete. Here's the finished paragraph.

> A solution that is proving successful in many areas is park-and-ride schemes. This is where you park your car for free in a large car park on the outskirts of the city and take a bus for the final part of your journey. The fee you have to pay for the bus trip is usually very small and this public transport system is generally very regular, running every ten minutes or so. A survey carried out in the city of Exeter showed that the rush hour congestion decreased by 10% when the council set up a park-and-ride scheme to the north of the city. There was an additional drop of another 10% in traffic volume when a second scheme began operating to the south.

Now we need a conclusion and our essay is done.

How To Write a Conclusion

The conclusion is a summary of the main points in your essay and can generally be done in a single sentence. It should never introduce new ideas.

If you're below the minimum 250 words after you've written your conclusion, you can add a prediction or recommendation statement.

Our essay is already over the minimum word limit so we don't need this extra sentence but you can learn more about how to write a prediction or recommendation statement in Chapter 8.

The conclusion is the easiest sentence in the essay to write but one of the most important.

A good conclusion will:

- **Neatly end the essay**
- **Link all your ideas together**
- **Sum up your argument or opinion**
- **Answer the question**

If you achieve this, you'll improve your score for both task achievement and cohesion and coherence which together make up 50% of the overall marks. Without a conclusion, you'll score below band 6 for task achievement.

You can start almost any final paragraph of an IELTS problem solution essay with the words:

- **In conclusion**

  or

- **To conclude**

Now all you need to do is briefly summarise the main ideas into one sentence.

Here's a **top tip**. Go back and read the introduction to the essay because this is also a summary of the essay. It outlines what you are going to write about.

To create a good conclusion, you simply have to paraphrase the introduction.

Introduction:

> One of the most serious issues facing the majority of large urban areas is traffic jams. The main reason for this is that there are too many private cars on the roads these days and a viable solution is to introduce more park-and-ride schemes.

Here is the same information formed into a conclusion. I've also added a personal statement at the end to link back to one of my example sentences. You don't have to do this but in this case, I think that it rounds the essay off better.

Conclusion:

> To conclude, the major urban problem of traffic congestion caused by the excessive number of private cars on city roads can be partly alleviated by the introduction of park-and-ride systems on city fringes. I would certainly use one if it was introduced in my area.

That's it. We've completed our essay. You can see the 4 paragraphs together on the next page.

Question:

One problem faced by almost every large city is traffic congestion.

What do you think the causes are? What solutions can you suggest?

Finished Problem Solution Essay

One of the most serious issues facing the majority of large urban areas is traffic jams. The main reason for this is that there are too many private cars on the roads these days and a viable solution is to introduce more park-and-ride schemes.

The number of people owning cars increases year on year, with most families now having more than one car. Most people like the convenience of travelling at the time they want to rather than being restricted to public transport timetables, so they prefer to drive themselves around rather than taking the bus or train. This is despite the fact that they frequently have to sit in long traffic queues as they near the city centre. Whenever I have to attend a meeting in the city, I always drive because it means that I can leave home when I want to rather than getting stressed about getting to the station in time to catch the train.

A solution that is proving successful in many areas is park-and-ride schemes. This is where you park your car for free in a large car park on the outskirts of the city and take a bus for the final part of your journey. The fee you have to pay for the bus trip is usually very small and this public transport system is generally very regular, running every ten minutes or so. A survey carried out in the city of Exeter showed that the rush hour congestion decreased by 10% when the council set up a park-and-ride scheme to the north of the city. There was an additional drop of another 10% in traffic volume when a second scheme began operating to the south.

To conclude, the major urban problem of traffic congestion caused by the excessive number of private cars on city roads can be partly alleviated by the introduction of park-and-ride systems on city fringes. I would certainly use one if it was introduced in my area.

(328 words)

Go through this lesson as many times as you need to in order to fully understand it and put in lots of practice writing problem solution essays from past exam questions. Practice is the only way to improve your skills.

Chapter 12
How To Write Advantages and Disadvantages Essays

Questions for IELTS advantages and disadvantages essays can be worded in several different ways. Here is some typical wording that might be used:

- **What are the advantages and disadvantages of….?**
- **Do you think the advantages outweigh the disadvantages?**
- **Discuss the advantages and disadvantages and give your opinion.**

It is also common for synonyms of 'advantages' and 'disadvantages' to be used, such as 'benefits' and 'drawbacks', as can be seen in this sample question.

> *A lot of places in the world rely on tourism as a main source of income. Unfortunately, tourism can also be a source of problems if it is not well-managed.*
>
> *What are the advantages and disadvantages of tourism in the modern world? Do you think that the benefits of tourism outweigh its drawbacks?*

I'll be using this question to guide you through the process of planning and writing an advantage and disadvantages essay.

Here's what the lesson covers:

- **Understanding advantages & disadvantages essay questions**
- **Essay structures**
- **How to plan**
- **How to write an introduction**
- **How to write main body paragraphs**
- **How to write a conclusion**

The Question

Advantages and disadvantages essay questions fall into two main categories:

- **Questions that ask for your opinion.**
- **Questions that do not require you to state your opinion.**

The first part of the question will always be a statement. You will then be asked to write about **both** the advantages **and** disadvantages of the idea stated. You **may** also be required to state your opinion.

Here are two more sample questions for illustration. For the first one, you must give your opinion but in the second, you should not.

> ***1.*** *Small businesses are disappearing and being replaced by large multinational companies.*
>
> *Do the advantages of this outweigh the disadvantages?*
>
> ***2.*** *Most career choices demand vocational skills or specialist knowledge. However, despite this, most schools still teach academic subjects such as history or social studies.*
>
> *Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of this?*

Essay Structures

Now let's look at two simple structures you can use to write advantages and disadvantages essays. They not the only possible structures but are ones I recommend because they are easy to learn and will enable you to quickly plan and write a high-level essay.

I'll explain later why I'm giving you two slightly different structures.

Essay Structure 1

1) Introduction • Paraphrase the question • Outline the views stated in the statement • State your opinion (if required) **2) Main body paragraph 1 – Advantage** • Topic sentence – state 1 advantage • Explanation – give detail explaining the advantage • Example – give an example	**3) Main body paragraph 2 – Disadvantage** • Topic sentence – state 1 disadvantage • Explanation – give detail explaining the disadvantage • Example – give an example **4) Conclusion** • Summarise the key points • State your opinion (if required)

Essay Structure 2

1) Introduction • Paraphrase the question • Outline main ideas • State your opinion (if required) **2) Main body paragraph 1 – Advantage** • Topic sentence – give an example • Explanation – explain the benefits/advantages • Consequence – state the result	**3) Main body paragraph 2 – Disadvantage** • Topic sentence – give an example • Explanation – explain the problems/disadvantages • Consequence – state the result **4) Conclusion** • Summarise the key points • State your opinion (if required)

These structures will give you a well-balanced essay with 4 paragraphs.

One Advantage and Disadvantage or Two?

The question will state 'advantages' and 'disadvantages' in the plural, that is, more than one. However, it is acceptable to write about just one.

This should give you an essay of just over the minimum 250 words. To write about two advantages and disadvantages will require you to write nearer 400 words which are a lot to plan and write in the 40 minutes allowed.

It is better to fully develop one advantage and one disadvantage than ending up with your second idea missing an explanation or an example because you run out of time, but you can write about two if you feel able to or more comfortable doing so.

Having said that, using essay structure 2, where you start with the examples, will enable you to easily add more than one advantage and disadvantage without having to write many more words.

It will be more suitable for some question than others so bear this in mind when you're writing practice essays and try out both structures.

I'm going to use essay structure 2 to show you step-by-step how to write an IELTS advantage and disadvantages essay. I'll also give you a model answer using essay structure 1 so that you can compare the two.

How To Plan
IELTS Advantages and Disadvantages Essays

The planning process only takes around 5 minutes but it is essential as it will save you time overall and will result in a far better essay and thus, higher marks.

There are the 3 things you need to do:

- **Analyse the question**
- **Generate ideas**
- **Identify vocabulary**

1) Analyse the question

Analysing the question will ensure that you answer it fully. It's quick and easy to do. You just need to identify 3 different types of words:

- **Topic words**
- **Other keywords**
- **Instruction words**

Topics words are the ones that identify the general subject of the question and will be found in the statement part of the question.

Here is the question we're going to be working on. I've highlighted the topic words in blue.

> **A lot of places in the world rely on tourism as a main source of income. Unfortunately, tourism can also be a source of problems if it is not well-managed.**
>
> **What are the advantages and disadvantages of tourism in the modern world? Do you think that the benefits of tourism outweigh its drawbacks?**

So, this question is about '**tourism'**.

Many people do this first step of the process and then write about the topic in general. This is a serious mistake and leads to low marks for task achievement.

What we need to do now that we know the general topic, is to understand exactly what aspect of tourism we're being asked to write about.

The **other keywords** in the question tell you the specific topic your essay must be about.

> **A lot of places in the world rely on tourism as a main source of income. Unfortunately, tourism can also be a source of problems if it is not well-managed.**
>
> **What are the advantages and disadvantages of tourism in the modern world? Do you think that the benefits of tourism outweigh its drawbacks?**

By highlighting these words, it's easy to see that you are being asked to write about the conflicting issues of tourism being 'a main source of income' in many places, yet also being 'a source of problems'.
Your essay must only include ideas relevant to this aspect of tourism.

The **instruction words** are the question itself. They tell you exactly what to include in your essay.

> **A lot of places in the world rely on tourism as a main source of income. Unfortunately, tourism can also be a source of problems if it is not well-managed.**
>
> **What are the advantages and disadvantages of tourism in the modern world? Do you think that the benefits of tourism outweigh its drawbacks?**

Here, we are required to write about:

- **The advantages of tourism in relation to income generation.**
- **The disadvantage of tourism in relation to problems it can cause.**
- **Our opinion as to whether the advantages outweigh the disadvantages.**

Note the use of the synonyms '**benefits**' and '**drawback**' in the second sentence of the question.

> **What are the advantages and disadvantages of tourism in the modern world? Do you think that the benefits of tourism outweigh its drawbacks?**

2) Generate ideas

The next task is to generate some ideas to write about.

There are several different ways to think up ideas. We looked at the four main ones in Chapter 4:

- **Brainstorming**
- **Mind-mapping**
- **Friends technique**
- **Examples method**

I'm going to demonstrate two of them for you here – the 'friends technique', which is suitable for most IELTS essays, and the 'example method', which perfectly fits essay structure 2.

The '**friends technique**' is the method I generally prefer as it allows you to take a step back from the stress of the exam situation and think more calmly.

Here's how it works. Imagine that you are chatting with a friend over a cup of coffee and they ask you this question. What are the first thoughts to come into your head? Plan your essay around these ideas.

Doing this will help you to come up with simple answers in everyday language rather than straining your brain to think of amazing ideas using high-level language, which isn't necessary.

Here are my ideas using the friends technique:

Advantages of tourism – source of income:

- Provides jobs for local people
- Opportunities for local entrepreneurs
- Tourist spending boosts both national & local economy
- Brings improvement in local infrastructure & facilities which benefit whole community
- Helps maintain traditions & culture

Disadvantages of tourism – the problems:

- Money goes to wealthy business owners not local people
- Increased crime
- Illegal activities, e.g. drugs
- More pubs & clubs – changes the local culture Increase in property values
- Destruction of the natural environment to build hotels, airports & other facilities
- Displacement of indigenous people

There are far too many ideas here to include in an essay of just over 250 words. Think up a few then pick one advantage and one disadvantage that you think you can develop well.

With the '**example method**', on the other hand, you start by thinking of specific examples related to the question. They can come from your own experience or be something you've read or heard about. These examples will generate ideas that will become the main points of your essay.

It works particularly well for the model question I've selected for this lesson which is why I've included the second essay structure.

Here are my ideas using the examples technique:

Thailand:

- Poor fishing villages now prosperous tourist resorts
- Provides jobs for locals
- Tourist income spent on improving transport systems, electricity supply, telecommunications & medical facilities
- Creation of national parks, where wildlife is protected

Venice:

- Homes replaced with tourist accommodation & shops
- Crowded streets – too narrow for volume of people
- Lost sense of community – too many tourists
- Pollution from huge cruise ships
- Damaging high tides caused by hundreds of tourist boats

Now that we have some ideas, we're almost ready to start writing our essay, but first, we have one more task to do.

3) Vocabulary

During the planning stage, quickly jot down some vocabulary that comes to mind as you decide what you're going to write about, especially synonyms of key words. This will save you having to stop and think of the right language while you're writing.

Writing an IELTS Advantages and Disadvantages Essay

We're ready to begin writing our essay. For the first model answer, I'm going to take you step-by-step through essay structure 2. I'll then give you a model answer for essay structure 1.

Here's a reminder of the question and the essay structure.

> ***A lot of places in the world rely on tourism as a main source of income. Unfortunately, tourism can also be a source of problems if it is not well-managed.***
>
> ***What are the advantages and disadvantages of tourism in the modern world? Do you think that the benefits of tourism outweigh its drawbacks?***

Essay Structure 2

1) Introduction • Paraphrase the question • Outline main ideas • State your opinion (if required) **2) Main body paragraph 1 – Advantage** • Topic sentence – give an example • Explanation – explain the benefits/advantages • Consequence – state the result	**3) Main body paragraph 2 – Disadvantage** • Topic sentence – give an example • Explanation – explain the problems/disadvantages • Consequence – state the result **4) Conclusion** • Summarise the key points • State your opinion (if required)

We'll now start work on the introduction.

How To Write an Introduction

The introduction to an IELTS advantages and disadvantages essay should have a simple 2 or 3 part structure:

- **Paraphrase the question**
- **Outline the main ideas**
- **State your opinion (if required)**

Our tourism question asks for our opinion, so our introduction will have 3 parts.

1) Paraphrase the question

Start your introduction by paraphrasing the question statement.

Question:

A lot of places in the world rely on tourism as a main source of income. Unfortunately, tourism can also be a source of problems if it is not well-managed.

Paraphrased question:

Although holidaymakers contribute hugely to the economies of many popular destinations, the influx of tourists can also cause serious issues.

Note my use of synonyms for some of the key words. It's fine to repeat one or two words if you can't think of suitable synonyms. Above all, your language must sound natural.

2) Outline statement

Now we need to add a statement where we outline the main points that we'll be covering in the rest of the essay, that is, an advantage of tourism and a disadvantage of tourism.

Here are the two main ideas I've chosen to write about:

- **Advantage – Poor areas are now prosperous tourist resorts**
- **Disadvantage – Displacement of local people**

Outline statement:
This essay will demonstrate how tourism can transform the economy of poor areas but will also show that this can lead to such problems as the displacement of local people.

3) Opinion statement

The question also asks for our opinion and it's essential that we include it in the introduction.

Opinion statement:
Whilst acknowledging that there are drawbacks, the essay will argue that the advantages of the tourist industry outweigh the disadvantages.

So, let's bring the three elements of our introduction together.

Introduction

Although holidaymakers contribute hugely to the economies of many popular destinations, the influx of tourists can also cause serious issues. This essay will demonstrate how tourism can transform the economy of poor areas but will also show that this can lead to such problems as the displacement of local people. Whilst acknowledging that there are drawbacks, the essay will argue that the advantages of the tourist industry outweigh the disadvantages.

This introduction achieves three important functions:

- **It shows the examiner that you understand the question.**
- **It acts as a guide to the examiner as to what your essay is about.**
- **It also helps to keep you focused and on track as you write.**

The two ideas in your introduction will become your two main body paragraphs.

Main body paragraph 1 – Poor areas are now prosperous tourist resorts

Main body paragraph 2 – Displacement of local people

How To Write Main Body Paragraphs

Main body paragraphs in IELTS advantages and disadvantages essays written using structure 2, should contain 3 things:

- **Topic sentence** – give an example
- **Explanation** – explain the benefits/advantages
- **Consequence** – state the result

Main Body Paragraph 1

The **topic sentence** summarises the main idea of the paragraph. It plays an important role in ensuring that your ideas flow logically from one to another. It does this by acting as a signpost for what is to come next, that is, what the paragraph will be about.

If you maintain a clear development of ideas throughout your essay, you will get high marks for task achievement and cohesion and coherence.

In this instance, the topic sentence will introduce our first example, for which I've chosen Thailand.

- **Main idea –** Poor areas are now prosperous tourist resorts
- **Example** – Thailand

<u>Topic sentence</u>:
One country that has experienced a significant economic boost from tourism is Thailand.

Next, we must write an **explanation sentence** that states the main point of our example.

<u>Explanation sentence</u>:
Over the past 50 years, many of its small fishing villages, where people often struggled to make a living, have been developed into thriving holiday destinations.

Finally, we explain the **consequence or result** of the situation. This is where we give an example of one specific advantage. It is better to pick one and develop it than to just add a long list.

<u>Consequence</u>:
With all the hotels, restaurants, shops and other tourist facilities that have been developed, there are now enough jobs for everyone and the general standard of living has greatly increased. Many local people have spotted new business opportunities and become entrepreneurs which has further diversified the economy.

That's the 3 parts of our first main body paragraph complete.

Here's the finished paragraph.

> *One country that has experienced a significant economic boost from tourism is Thailand. Over the past 50 years, many of its small fishing villages, where people often struggled to make a living, have been developed into thriving holiday destinations. With all the hotels, restaurants, shops and other tourist facilities that have been developed, there are now enough jobs for everyone and the general standard of living has greatly increased. Many local people have spotted new business opportunities and become entrepreneurs, which has further diversified the economy.*

We'll now follow the same process for our second main body paragraph.

Main Body Paragraph 2

Main idea – Displacement of local people
Example – Venice

First, we write the **topic sentence** to summarise the main idea.

Topic sentence:
In Venice, on the other hand, the huge popularity of the beautiful canals and stunning architecture with visitors from around the world has had a negative impact on local residents.

Now for the **explanation sentence** that states the main point of our example.

Explanation sentence:
The growing need for tourist accommodation, places to eat and shops has forced many people from their homes to make way for this new development.

Finally, a specific example to explain the **consequence**.

Consequence:
Not only have these people suffered by having to move away from their family and friends but the situation has also resulted in a lost sense of community in the worst affected areas.

That's the 3 parts of our second main body paragraph complete. Here's the finished paragraph.

In Venice, on the other hand, the huge popularity of the beautiful canals and stunning architecture with visitors from around the world has had a negative impact on local residents. The growing need for tourist accommodation, places to eat and shops has forced many people from their homes to make way for this new development. Not only have these people suffered by having to move away from their family and friends but the situation has also resulted in a lost sense of community in the worst affected areas.

Now we need a conclusion and our essay is done.

How To Write a Conclusion

The conclusion is a summary of the main points in your essay and can generally be done in a single sentence. It should never introduce new ideas.

If you're below the minimum 250 words after you've written your conclusion, you can add a prediction or recommendation statement.

Our essay is already near the minimum word limit, so we don't need this extra sentence but you can learn more about how to write a prediction or recommendation statement in Chapter 8.

The conclusion is the easiest sentence in the essay to write but one of the most important.

A good conclusion will:

- **Neatly end the essay**
- **Link all your ideas together**
- **Sum up your argument or opinion**
- **Answer the question**

If you achieve this, you'll improve your score for both task achievement and cohesion and coherence which together make up 50% of the overall marks. Without a conclusion, you'll score below band 6 for task achievement.

You can start almost any final paragraph of an IELTS advantages and disadvantages essay with the words:

- **In conclusion**

  or

- **To conclude**

Now all you need to do is briefly summarise the main ideas into one sentence.

Here's a **top tip**. Go back and read the introduction to the essay because this is also a summary of the essay. It outlines what you are going to write about.

To create a great conclusion, you simply have to paraphrase the introduction.

Introduction:

> Although holidaymakers contribute hugely to the economies of many popular destinations, the influx of tourists can also cause serious issues. This essay will demonstrate how tourism can transform the economy of poor areas but will also show that this can lead to such problems as the displacement of local people. Whilst acknowledging that there are drawbacks, the essay will argue that the advantages of the tourist industry outweigh the disadvantages.

Here's the same information formed into a conclusion.

Conclusion:

> In conclusion, although mass tourism can sometimes result in local residents having to be relocated, it greatly improves the lives of most people as well as contributing significantly to the national economy. Hence, the positive effects of developing a tourist industry definitely outweigh the drawbacks.

That’s it. We’ve completed our essay. You can see the 4 paragraphs together on the next page.

Finished Advantages and Disadvantages Essay

Question:

A lot of places in the world rely on tourism as a main source of income. Unfortunately, tourism can also be a source of problems if it is not well-managed.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of tourism in the modern world? Do you think that the benefits of tourism outweigh its drawbacks?

Although holidaymakers contribute hugely to the economies of many popular destinations, the influx of tourists can also cause serious issues. This essay will demonstrate how tourism can transform the economy of poor areas but will also show that this can lead to such problems as the displacement of local people. Whilst acknowledging that there are drawbacks, the essay will argue that the advantages of the tourist industry outweigh the disadvantages.

One country that has experienced a significant economic boost from tourism is Thailand. Over the past 50 years, many of its small fishing villages, where people often struggled to make a living, have been developed into thriving holiday destinations. With all the hotels, restaurants, shops and other tourist facilities that have been developed, there are now enough jobs for everyone and the general standard of living has greatly increased. Many local people have spotted new business opportunities and become entrepreneurs, which has further diversified the economy.

Venice, on the other hand, the huge popularity of the beautiful canals and stunning architecture with visitors from around the world has had a negative impact on local residents. The growing need for tourist accommodation, places to eat and shops has forced many people from their homes to make way for this new development. Not only have these people suffered by having to move away from their family and friends but the situation has also resulted in a lost sense of community in the worst affected areas.

In conclusion, although mass tourism can sometimes result in local residents having to be relocated, it greatly improves the lives of most people as well as contributing significantly to the national economy. Hence, the positive effects of developing a tourist industry definitely outweigh the drawbacks.

(283 words)

Go through this lesson as many times as you need to in order to fully understand it and put in lots of practice writing advantages and disadvantages essays from past exam questions. Practice is the only way to improve your skills.

Example Advantages and Disadvantages Essay for Structure 1

Now here's a model answer for essay structure 1. First, a reminder of the structure and the ideas I generated using the friends technique.

Essay Structure 1

1) Introduction • Paraphrase the question • Outline the views stated in the statement • State your opinion (if required) **2) Main body paragraph 1 – Advantage** • Topic sentence – state 1 advantage • Explanation – give detail explaining the advantage • Example – give an example	**3) Main body paragraph 2 – Disadvantage** • Topic sentence – state 1 disadvantage • Explanation – give detail explaining the disadvantage • Example – give an example **4) Conclusion** • Summarise the key points • State your opinion (if required)

Ideas generation - Friends technique

I've underline the ideas I've chosen to write about in this second essay:

Advantages of tourism – source of income:

- Provides jobs for local people
- Opportunities for local entrepreneurs
- Tourist spending boosts both national & local economy
- Brings improvement in local infrastructure & facilities which benefit whole community
- Helps maintain traditions & culture

Disadvantages of tourism – the problems:

- Money goes to wealthy business owners not local people
- Increased crime
- Illegal activities, e.g. drugs
- More pubs & clubs – changes the local culture
- Increase in property values
- Destruction of the natural environment to build hotels, airports & other facilities
- Displacement of indigenous people

On the next page, you'll see a model essay for structure 1. Can identify the different parts of the essay and how I have developed them?

Model Essay for Structure 1

Although holidaymakers contribute hugely to the economies of many popular destinations, the influx of tourists can also cause serious issues. This essay will demonstrate how tourism can transform the economy of poor areas but will show that it can also lead to a marked increase in crime. Although this problem is a significant one, the essay argues that the advantages of tourism do outweigh the disadvantages.

One of the main advantages is the number of jobs the tourist industry creates for local people. The many hotels, restaurants, shops and other facilities provide employment for the residents. A good example of a country that is taking full advantage of a booming tourist industry is Thailand. Regions that were once dominated by poor fishing villages are now full of thriving holiday resorts. With everyone now having a job, the general standard of living has greatly increased. The economic boost to these local communities has also had a massive impact on the national economy which is growing year on year, largely due to tourism.

However, an increase in holidaymakers can lead to some worrying issues. One of the most serious of these is an escalation in the local crime rate. This is a particular problem in popular party destinations such as Ibiza where illegal drug taking and the excessive consumption of alcohol, which leads to unruly behaviour, are an important part of the holiday experience for many visitors. The affected areas, which were once quiet coastal towns and villages with very little crime, now require a large police presence to tackle these problems.

In conclusion, although mass tourism can result in a rise in criminal activity, it greatly improves the lives of most local inhabitants as well as contributing significantly to the national economy. Hence, the positive effects of the tourist industry definitely outweigh the drawbacks.

(303 words)

Chapter 13
How To Write Double Question Essays

IELTS double question essays are also known as 'direct question' or 'two questions' essays. They are distinguished by two characteristics:

- **They have one statement with two different questions after it.**
- **The questions may or may not be linked.**

Here are 3 examples:

1) *Fossil fuels are essential for producing electricity, powering industry and fueling transportation. However, one day we will reach a point when all the world's fossil fuels have been depleted.*

How can we conserve these resources?

What are some alternatives to fossil fuels?

2) *Some parents buy their children whatever they ask for, and allow their children to do whatever they want.*

Is this a good way to raise children?

What consequences could this style of parenting have for children as they get older?

3) *The arts, including art, music and theatre are considered to be important in society.*

Do you think the arts still have a place amongst our modern lifestyles?

Should the arts be included in the school curriculum?

It's easy to mistake double question essays for one of the other four types of Task 2 essays, especially opinion or discussion essays. Each should be answered in a slightly different way.

Analysing the question properly is essential to avoiding this error. I'll also show you how to do this and give you a simple 4 part structure for planning your essay.

Essay Structure

Let's look at this essay structure straight away. You can use it to write any double question essay. It's easy to learn and will enable you to quickly plan and write a high-level essay.

1) Introduction

- Paraphrase the question
- Outline sentence – state your answer to both questions

2) Main body paragraph 1 – Answer question 1

- Topic sentence – state your answer
- Explanation – develop the idea
- Example – give an example

3) Main body paragraph 2 – Answer question 2

- Topic sentence – state your answer
- Explanation – develop the idea
- Example – give an example

4) Conclusion Summarise both questions and answers

This structure will give us a well-balanced essay with 4 paragraphs. We now need some ideas to add to the structure and we'll have everything we need for our essay.

How To Plan Double Question Essays

Here's the question we're going to be answering in our model essay followed by the 3 steps of the planning process.

> *Fossil fuels are essential for producing electricity, powering industry and fueling transportation. However, one day we will reach a point when all the world's fossil fuels have been depleted.*
>
> *How can we conserve these resources?*
>
> *What are some alternatives to fossil fuels?*

- **Analyse the question**
- **Generate ideas**
- **Identify vocabulary**

1) Analyse the question

This is an essential step in the planning process and will ensure that you answer the question fully. It's quick and easy to do. You just need to identify 3 different types of words:

- **Topic words**
- **Other keywords**
- **Instruction words**

Topics words are the ones that identify the general subject of the question and will be found in the statement part of the question.

> **Fossil fuels are essential for producing electricity, powering industry and fueling transportation. However, one day we will reach a point when all the world's fossil fuels have been depleted.**

So, this question is about '**fossil fuels**'.

Many people will do this first step of the process and then write about the topic in general. This is a serious mistake and leads to low marks for task achievement.

Now that we know what the general topic is, we need to understand exactly what aspect of fossil fuels we're being asked to write about.

The **other keywords** in the question tell you the specific things you must write about. For double question essays, these will often be in the instructions, that is, the actual questions.

> **Fossil fuels are essential for producing electricity, powering industry and fueling transportation. However, one day we will reach a point when all the world's fossil fuels have been depleted.**
>
> **How can we conserve these resources?**
>
> **What are some alternatives to fossil fuels?**

By highlighting these words, it's easy to identify the topics. Your essay must only include ideas relevant to these ideas.

The **instruction words** are the questions themselves. These tell you exactly what type of information is required and each will become the topic for one of the two main body paragraphs.

How can we conserve these resources?

What are some alternatives to fossil fuels?

The first body paragraph will answer the first question (How?) and the second body paragraph will answer the second question (What?).

2) Generate ideas

The next task is to generate some ideas to write about.

We're going to use the 'friends technique'. This is the method I prefer as it allows you to take a step back from the stress of the exam situation and think more calmly.

Here's how it works. Imagine that you are in a casual conversation with a friend over a cup of coffee and they ask you this question. What are the first thoughts to come into your head? Plan your essay around these ideas.

Doing this will help you to come up with simple answers in everyday language rather than straining your brain to think of amazing ideas using high-level language, which isn't necessary.

You might want to try this yourself before reading on for my ideas.

Here are my ideas as I thought of them:

How can we conserve these resources?

- Become more energy conscious & more energy efficient
- Use more renewable energy sources – solar panels
- All new homes should be built with solar panels on
- Use car less – walk, cycle, public transport, only travel when really necessary
- Energy-efficient light bulbs

What are some alternatives to fossil fuels?

- Solar power
- Wind power
- Wave energy
- Tidal energy
- Biomass energy
- Geothermal energy

Don't spend long on this as you only need one or two ideas. There is so much to write about this topic that we have to be very careful we don't try to include too many different ideas and just end up with a list for each question rather than a well-developed essay.

Choose one main idea for each part of the question. My advice on making your selection is to choose ideas you can quickly think of an example to illustrate.

Here are my choices:

How can we conserve these resources?

- Use car less – walk, cycle, public transport

What are some alternatives to fossil fuels?

- Natural forces – solar & wind power, wave & tidal energy

We're almost ready to start writing our double question essay but first, we have one other small task to do.

3) Vocabulary

During the planning stage, quickly jot down some vocabulary that comes to mind as you decide which ideas you are going to write about, especially synonyms of key words. This will save you having to stop and think of the right language while you're writing.
For the ideas I've chosen, useful words will include:

- **sustainable**
- **renewable energy**
- **energy-efficient**

With that done, we can focus on the first paragraph of the essay – the introduction.

How To Write an Introduction

The best introduction to a double question essay has a simple 2 part structure:

1) **Paraphrase the question**
2) **Outline sentence – state your answer to both questions**

It should:

- **Have 2-3 sentences**
- **Be 40-60 words long**
- **Take 5 minutes to write**

1) Paraphrase the question

Start your introduction by paraphrasing the statement part of the question.

Question statement:
Fossil fuels are essential for producing electricity, powering industry and fueling transportation. However, one day we will reach a point when all the world's fossil fuels have been depleted.

Paraphrased question:
The world is currently reliant on oil, coal and natural gas for the majority of its energy requirements but there will come a time when these run out.

We are simply saying the same thing in a different way and using different vocabulary.

2) Outline statement

Now we need to add an **outline statement** where we outline the two main points that we'll cover in the rest of the essay, that is, the answers to the two questions.

We need to be very specific about what we are going to write about. Here's a reminder of the ideas I've chosen to answer the two questions:

How can we conserve these resources?

- Use car less – walk, cycle, public transport

What are some alternatives to fossil fuels?

- Natural forces –solar & wind power, wave & tidal energy

Outline statement:
This essay will discuss how we can help to prevent our non-renewable resources from becoming depleted by using our cars less frequently and it will name some natural forces that can be harnessed to generate power.

Note my use of synonyms to replace key words in the question. You don't have to replace every key word but do so where possible whilst ensuring that your language sounds natural.

So, let's bring the two elements of our introduction together.

Introduction

> *The world is currently reliant on oil, coal and natural gas for the majority of its energy requirements but there will come a time when these run out. This essay will discuss how we can help to prevent our non-renewable resources from becoming depleted by using our cars less frequently and it will name some natural forces that can be harnessed to generate power.*

This introduction achieves three important functions:

- **It shows the examiner that you understand the question.**
- **It acts as a guide to the examiner as to what your essay is about.**
- **It also helps to keep you focused and on track as you write.**

The two ideas in your introduction will become your two main body paragraphs.

Main body paragraph 1 – Use car less – walk, cycle, public transport

Main body paragraph 2 – Renewable energy / natural forces – solar & wind power, wave & tidal energy

How To Write Main Body Paragraphs

Main body paragraphs in double question essays should contain 3 things:

- **Topic sentence – state your answer**
- **Explanation – develop the idea**
- **Example – give an example**

Main Body Paragraph 1 – Answer question 1

The **topic sentence** summarises the main idea of the paragraph. That's all it needs to do so it doesn't have to be complicated.

It plays an important role in ensuring that your ideas flow logically from one to another. It does this by acting as a signpost for what is to come next, that is, what the paragraph will be about.

If you maintain a clear development of ideas throughout your essay, you will get high marks for task achievement and cohesion and coherence.

We'll now take the idea for our first main body paragraph and create our topic sentence.

Main body paragraph 1 – Use car less – walk, cycle, public transport, only travel when really necessary

Topic sentence:
Conserving energy is a responsibility of every individual and an important way in which we can all do our bit is to use more energy-efficient means of transport.

Next, we must write an **explanation sentence** that develops the idea.

Explanation sentence:
The easiest way to do this is to leave the car at home and walk or cycle to our destination if it isn't too far away, or take public transport for longer journeys. Another way to reduce our fuel consumption is to car share.

Finally, we add an **example** to support our main point. If you can't think of a real example, it's fine to make one up, as long as it's believable.

The examiner isn't going to check your facts. Alternative, you could add another piece of information to support your idea but an example is better.

Example sentence:
Whenever my friends and I get together for coffee, we agree to meet up at a café that we can each get to without having to drive our cars there. We usually go on foot or ride our bikes. If everyone made small decisions like this, it would make a real difference.

That's the 3 parts of our first main body paragraph complete. Here's the finished paragraph.

Conserving energy is a responsibility of every individual and an important way in which we can all do our bit is to use more energy-efficient means of transport. The easiest way to do this is to leave the car at home and walk or cycle to our destination if it isn't too far away, or take public transport for longer journeys. Another way to reduce our fuel consumption is to car share. Whenever my friends and I get together for coffee, we agree to meet up at a café that we can each get to without having to drive our cars there. We usually go on foot or ride our bikes. If everyone made small decisions like this, it would make a real difference.

We now follow the same process for our second main body paragraph.

Main Body Paragraph 2 – Answer question 2

Again, we'll take the idea I've chosen for this paragraph and create our topic sentence.

Main body paragraph 2 – Renewable energy / natural forces – solar & wind power, wave & tidal energy

Topic sentence:

The most sustainable alternatives to fossil fuels are the generation of power from natural forces such as the sun, wind and oceans.

Now for the **explanation** where we expand on this idea.

Explanation sentence:

Solar and wind power are already widely used across the world but it is wave power and tidal energy that have the greatest untapped potential to provide for our energy needs in the future.

Finally, an **example** to support our main point.

Example sentence:

A report recently commissioned in the United Kingdom estimates that tidal energy could meet as much as 20% of the UK's current electricity demands once the technology being developed is operational. Wave energy converters are expected to prove equally successful in the long-term.

That's the 3 parts of our second main body paragraph complete. Here's the finished paragraph.

> *The most sustainable alternatives to fossil fuels are the generation of power from natural forces such as the sun, the wind and the oceans. Sun and solar power are already widely used across the world but it is wave power and tidal energy that have the greatest untapped potential to provide our energy needs in the future. A report recently produced in the United Kingdom estimated that tidal energy could meet as much as 20% of the UK's current electricity demands once the technology being developed is operational. Wave energy converters are expected to prove equally successful in the long-term.*

Now we need a conclusion and our IELTS double question essay is done.

How To Write a Conclusion

The conclusion is a summary of the main points in your essay and can often be done in a single sentence. It should never introduce new ideas.

If you're below the minimum 250 words after you've written your conclusion, you can add a prediction or recommendation statement. Our essay is already over the minimum word limit so we don't need this extra sentence but you can learn more about how to write a prediction or recommendation statement in Chapter 8.

The conclusion is the easiest sentence in the essay to write but one of the most important.

A good conclusion to a double question essay will:

- **Neatly end the essay**
- **Link all your ideas together**
- **Sum up your argument or opinion**
- **Answer the question**

If you achieve this, you'll improve your score for both task achievement and cohesion and coherence which together make up 50% of the overall marks. Without a conclusion, you'll score below band 6 for task achievement.

You can start almost any final paragraph of any double question essay with the words:

- **In conclusion**
  or
- **To conclude**

Now all you need to do is briefly summarise the main ideas into one or two sentences .

Here's a **top tip**. Go back and read the introduction to the essay because this is also a summary of the essay. It outlines what you are going to write about.

To create a great conclusion, you simply have to paraphrase the introduction.

Introduction:

> The world is currently reliant on oil, coal and natural gas for the majority of its energy requirements but there will come a time when these run out. This essay will discuss how we can help to prevent our non-renewable resources from becoming depleted by using our cars less frequently and it will name some natural forces that can be harnessed to generate power.

Here is the same information formed into a conclusion:

Conclusion:

> In conclusion, our earth's reserves of fossil fuels will not last forever and we need to be continually developing new technologies to enable us to produce energy from renewable sources such as the sun, wind and water. In the meantime, we can help to slow the rate of depletion by leaving the car at home and using more energy-efficient forms of transport whenever possible.

That's it. We've completed our essay. You can see the 4 paragraphs together on the next page.

Question:

Fossil fuels are essential for producing electricity, powering industry and fueling transportation. However, one day we will reach a point when all the world's fossil fuels have been depleted.

How can we conserve these resources?

What are some alternatives to fossil fuels?

Finished Double Question Essay

The world is currently reliant on oil, coal and natural gas for the majority of its energy requirements but there will come a time when these run out. This essay will discuss how we can help to prevent our non-renewable resources from becoming depleted by using our cars less frequently and it will name some natural forces that can be harnessed to generate power.

Conserving energy is a responsibility of every individual and an important way in which we can all do our bit is to use more energy-efficient means of transport. The easiest way to do this is to leave the car at home and walk or cycle to our destination if it isn't too far away, or take public transport for longer journeys. Another way to reduce our fuel consumption is to car share. Whenever my friends and I get together for coffee, we agree to meet up at a café that we can each get to without having to drive our cars there. We usually go on foot or ride our bikes. If everyone made small decisions like this, it would make a real difference.

The most sustainable alternatives to fossil fuels are the generation of power from natural forces such as the sun, wind and oceans. Solar and wind power are already widely used across the world but it is wave power and tidal energy that have the greatest untapped potential to provide for our energy needs in the future. A report recently commissioned in the United Kingdom estimates that tidal energy could meet as much as 20% of the UK's current electricity demands once the technology being developed is operational. Wave energy converters are expected to prove equally successful in the long-term.

In conclusion, our earth's reserves of fossil fuels will not last forever and we need to be continually developing new technologies to enable us to produce energy from renewable sources such as the sun, wind and water. In the meantime, we can help to slow the rate of depletion by leaving the car at home and using more energy-efficient forms of transport whenever possible.

(351 words)

Go through this lesson as many times as you need to in order to fully understand it and put in lots of practice writing double question essays from past exam questions. Practice is the only way to improve your skills.

You now have all the information you need to plan and write high-scoring Task 2 essays. Read through it as many times as you need to in order to fully understand it but above all, practice using it.

I hope you've found this book on Writing Task 2 helpful. Thank you for taking the time to read it.
As you practice answering questions from past questions, start slowly at first and gradually speed up until you can plan and write a complete essay in around 40 minutes.

You'll find information, lessons, videos, books and courses on all aspects of the IELTS exam on my website www.ieltsjacky.com.
I wish you every success in your exam.

All the best,

Jacky