IELTS
Academic and General Task 1:
How to write at a band 9 level

Copyright (c) by Ryan Thomas Higgins

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or used in any form without the explicit permission of its author, Ryan Thomas Higgins.

Layout by Daria Lacy

Cover by Dominique Gamelin

http://www.ieltswritingblog.com

Telegram channel: @mockTashkent

FOREWORD

This book has been written to provide the IELTS student with details on how to prepare and perform effectively on the written Task 1 portion of the IELTS Academic examination.

Task 1 is completely different from Task 2 and will test your ability to present graphical data in written English. You will find in your training for this section that new lexical resources and writing patterns will need to be adopted. Structurally speaking, Task 1 is in many ways much more complicated than Task 2. Unlike Task 2, which can be performed in four well-organized paragraphs and a set number of sentences, the number of paragraphs your Task 1 response requires will vary according to the data you are given in your question. Further, the number of sentences within these paragraphs can also vary. Thus, the training you will receive through this book will show you how to maintain a flexible structure allowing you to accommodate your response to the needs of Task 1 questions on a case-by-case basis.

Although a powerful tool, this ebook should not be the only resource you draw from in preparation for your examination. It should be remembered that no textbook can replace the value of a routine of practice administered under the guidance of a professional IELTS trainer.

The pages included in this ebook are the result of months of research, drafting, editing, writing and rewriting and reflect the professional skills I have built as an IELTS trainer since 2004. This ebook is provided at a price to allow fair access to everyone on all budgets. Please do not bootleg!

CONTENTS

Foreword

1.1 What is required in Task 1 of the IELTS writing exam?

1.2 Analyzing Task 1 questions and identifying and interpreting data types

2.1 How to reveal broad, minor and minute details in your writing

2.2 Proper Task 1 writing structure

2.3 Single data source structure in more detail

2.4 Double data source structure in more detail

3.1 Lexical resources for different data types

3.2 The importance of pace

3.3 Building your paragraphs

3.4 The importance of cohesion

4.1 How to write using double data source structure

5.1 How to respond to diagrams

6.1 Review quiz

1.1



WHAT IS REQUIRED IN TASK 1 OF THE IELTS WRITING EXAM?

The writing portion of the IELTS exam is 60 minutes in length. The Academic and General portions require the student to complete two tasks referred to as *Task 1* and *Task 2*; however, the tasks themselves differ between the two exams. The first task of the Academic exam asks the student to write a descriptive report based on information given in a picture, table, diagram or graph. Task 1 of the General exam requires students write a letter. Task 2 on both exams requires students compose an essay. Essay questions are very similar between the two exams; however, General test takers may be more personal and less formal in their response. Students are expected to allot 20 minutes to Task 1 and 40 minutes to Task 2 when engaging either exam.

The written Task 1 portion of the Academic IELTS is designed to test your ability to analyze data presented in English and to express this in writing. As these data sources can be quite random, you will need to train yourself to be flexible.

Successful Task 1 responses require the IELTS student to analyze data and digest it into its broad, minor and minute details. The student must then be able to employ sufficiently broad lexical resources to describe these details coherently and with grammatical accuracy. The product of their writing should be cohesive and logical and read with a fluency almost indiscernible from a native English user.

Examiners gauge these above skills by weighing a student's performance in four areas – Task Achievement, Coherence and Cohesion, Lexical Resources and Grammar. These four sections tend to be interdependent, thus performing poorly in one often lowers grades in others. In the following section, we will briefly discuss each of these categories and how a student can fulfill them.

Task Achievement

This breadth gauges the depth with which the student is able to reflect the information presented in their data source. Often a good test of whether the student has done this to check if an accurate reproduction of the original data source could be

made based on the student's writing. The other breadths (Coherence and Cohesion, Lexical Resources and Grammar) are very closely tied to the student's Task Achievement mark. Coherence issues, for example, leave the Task Achievement requirements unfulfilled.

Coherence and Cohesion

This section of the mark gauges the student's ability to write in a way that expresses a message fluently. Sentence structure, fitting vocabulary choices and grammar contribute to how coherent a student's message is. Cohesive phrases help tie ideas together at the sentence and paragraph level and solidify the overall fluency with which the report can be read.

Lexical Resources

This area refers to the accuracy and relevance of the vocabulary a student chooses to employ when describing their data source. Successful students exhibit the ability to use a variety of contextually accurate words and phrases without sounding unnatural or robotic. Word variation accuracy is also a defining trait of a successful student performing at this level.

Grammar

Grammar is often the area that holds students back from the upper IELTS bands. Students scoring band 7 and above are capable of composing grammatically accurate sentences at least 50% of the time. Grammar issues tend to have a cascading effect on student performance in other sections, too. For example, poor grammar can hinder an examiner's ability to understand what the student is writing, which directly impacts the student's Coherence mark. Poor coherence in turn lowers the student's overall Task Achievement peformance.

For information regarding the specific differences among bands 6-9 between these four breadths, please refer to the following chart:

Band	Task Achievement	Coherence and Cohesion	Lexical Resources	Grammar
9	-indistinguishable from a native English user	-indistinguishable from a native English user	-indistinguishable from a native English user	-indistinguishable from a native English user
8	-report accurately reflects data source(s) -can be read and understood as though it were written by a native English user	-logical thoughts link seamlessly -rare awkwardness makes it possible to distinguish from a native English user	-almost flawless word choices and usage -rare issues with minor words may be apparent	-grammatically accurate sentences almost all of the time
7	-mostly accurate reflection of data source(s) but may lack some depth in response	-displays effective use of several cohesive devices -slight awkwardness is present at times -most text can be understood by examiner without having to reread	-writer understands and can use specialized vocabulary -prefix and suffix word structures are used with fair accuracy	-grammatically accurate sentences at least 50% of the time
6	-accurate reflection of data source(s) but may contain inaccurate or irrelevant details -lacks in depth response -improper tone	-cohesive devices sound unnatural -examiner needs to reread parts to fully understand	-regular wording mistakes are seen -weakness in specialized vocabulary use is apparent	-grammatically accurate sentences less than 50% of the time

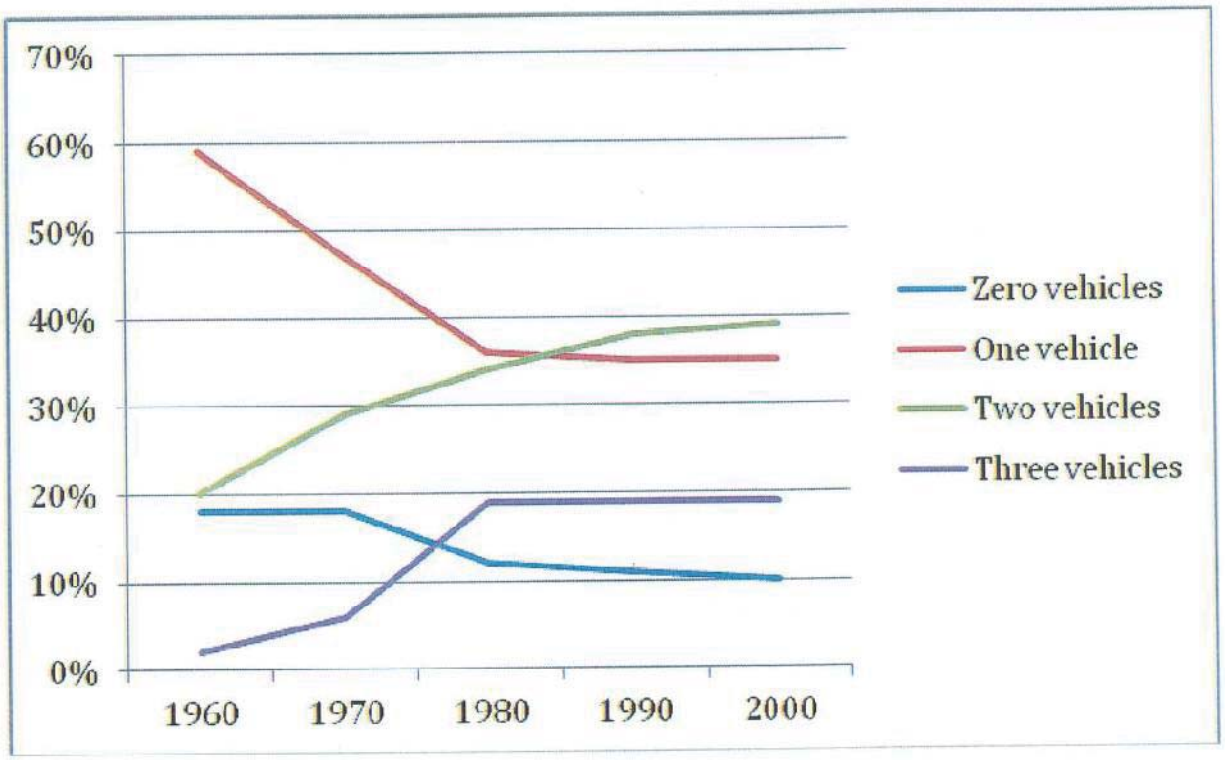
1.2

ANALYZING TASK 1 QUESTIONS AND IDENTIFYING AND INTERPRETING DATA TYPES

Task 1 questions present data in a variety of forms. The four forms you may be presented on your examination are graphs, tables, charts and diagrams. Visual data is always accompanied by a Task 1 description that will frame the data in some manner.

The first step in interpreting data sources is being capable of differentiating a 'source' and a trend'. A 'data source' refers to the entire piece of data (a graph, table, chart or diagram). A trend refers to a single, evolving item within the data source. Thus, the following graph...

British households by vehicle ownership



...would be described as a *single* data source depicting *four* trends.

Graphs, tables, charts and diagrams present data that can be broken down into ***broad***, ***minor*** and ***minute*** details:

Broad details are details that encompass all parts of the data source. They summarize the entire data source into a single sentence. In the example graph above, the broad detail would be that overall vehicle ownership appears to growing in the UK.

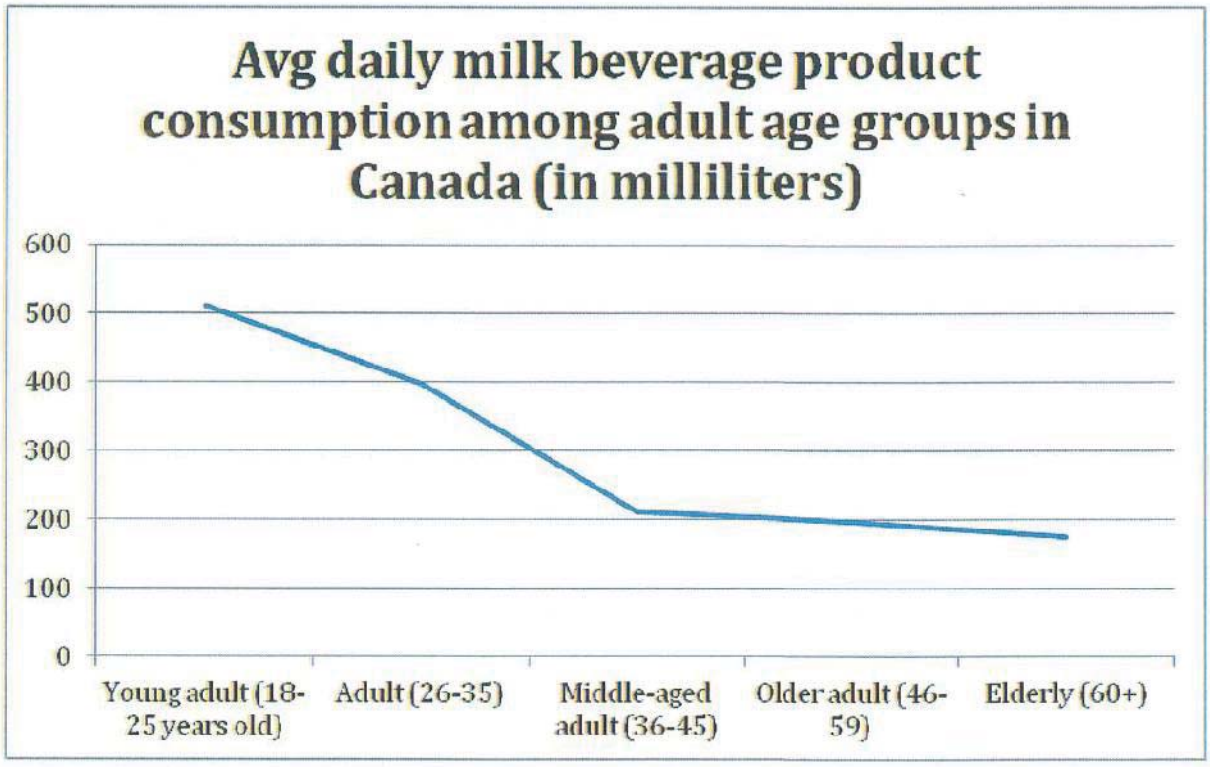
Minor details describe the smaller portions that make up the broad details. For example, a single trend within a data source is often made up of several minor details.

Minute details refer to specific points of reference within a data source. Typically, precise figures (for example, numbers) are referenced as minor details. Minute details are only included in your Task 1 response if they are significant.

Your first step when responding to a Task 1 question is mentally breaking the data you are presented down and classifying it into these three categories. You should not start writing your response until you have carried out this essential step.

Let's look at the following data type examples and specify what portions make up their *broad*, *minor* and *minute* details:

1 – Graphs

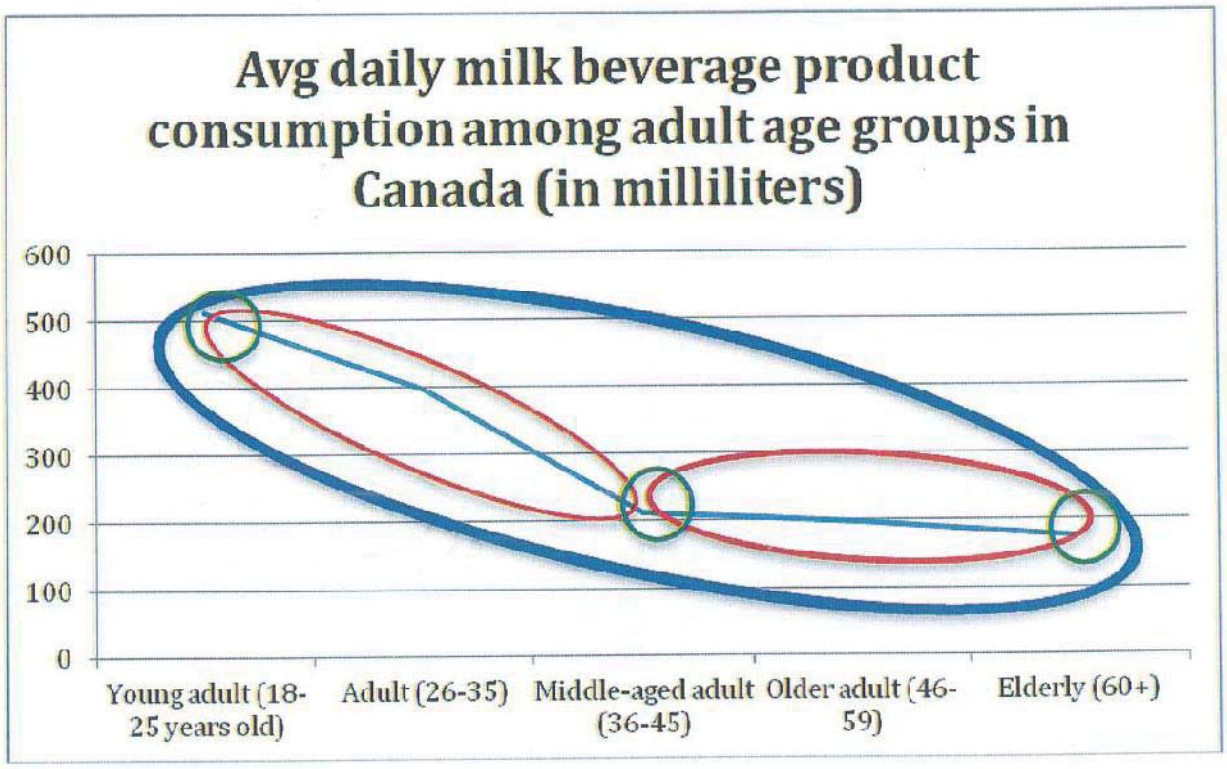


The *broad detail* in this data appears to be a downward development without interruption from start to finish.

Minor details are twofold: a sharper decline between 'Young adult' and 'Middle-aged adult' followed by a more gradual decline between 'Middle-aged adult' and 'Elderly'.

Minute details can be seen at three points in this data: the trend's beginning (just slightly more than 500 milliliters), the point where the trend changes (middle-aged, at roughly 200 milliliters) and at the trend's conclusion (slightly below 200 milliliters). These are the details that mark points of significance within the trend.

To help visualize, take a look at the following graph where broad, minor and minute details have been circled in blue, red and green respectively:



2 – Tables

British cuisine composition (as % of entire caloric intake)

Animal derived products

- Livestock (12%)
- Fish and other seafood (4%)
- Eggs (3%)
- Milk and other dairy products (4.5%)
- Other (including oil) (3%)

Plant derived products

- Above ground vegetables (5%)
- Tuber vegetables (7%)
- Fruit (3.5%)
- Grain-derived products (including all wheat derived goods) (42%)
- Heavily processed plant products (including sugar) (10%)
- Other (including all fungi and oil) (6%)

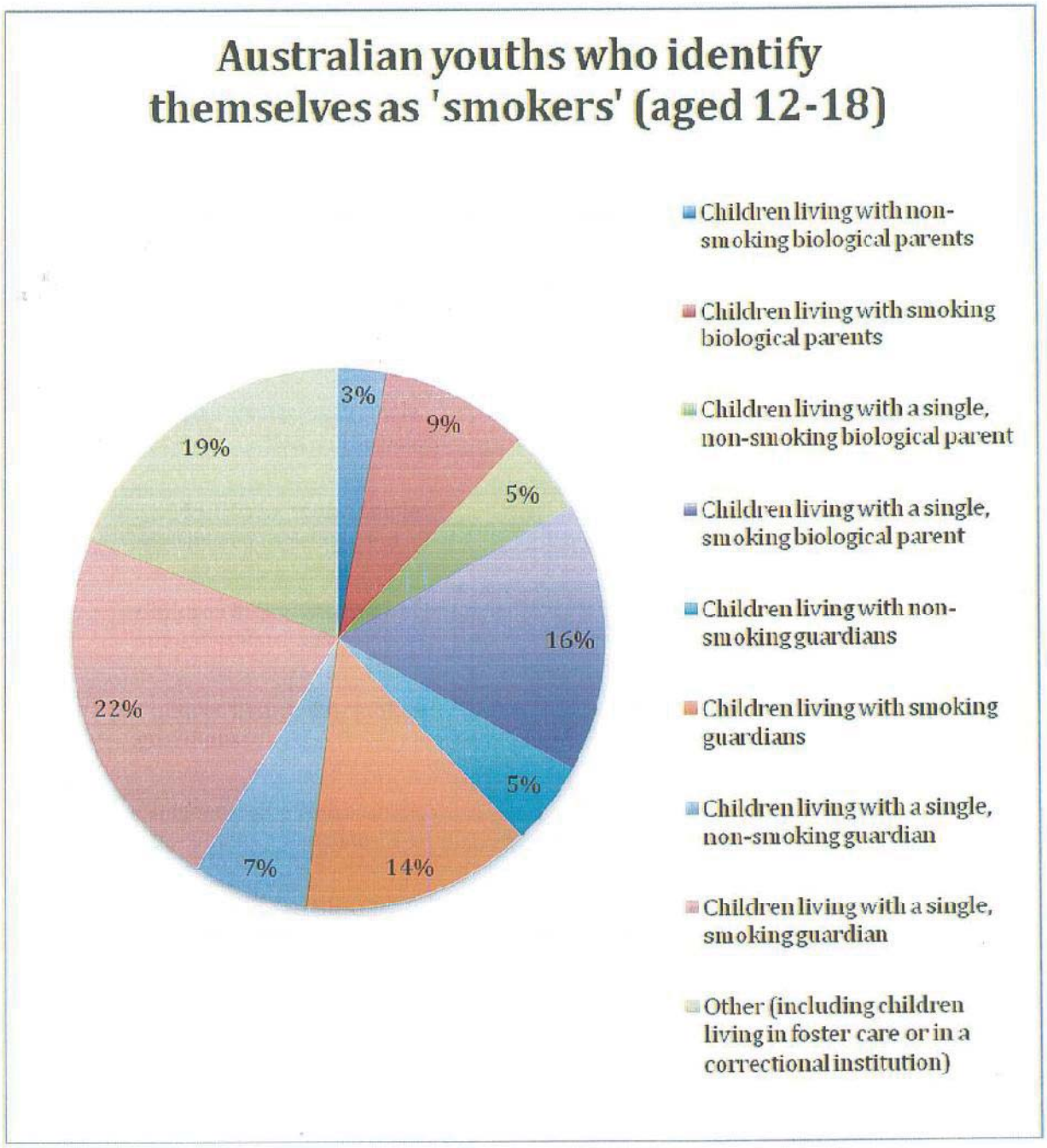
The *broad details* outlined in this table are most clearly defined by the chart's title: *British cuisine composition.*

Minor details can be seen in the way the elements are grouped together. 26.5% of the chart is derived from animals, while 73.5% is plant based. We could also consider grouping minor details by food group.

Minute details are those figures in the list that are worth noting numerically. In this list, the larger caloric sources of livestock, grain and sugar could be quoted as figures in the student's Task 1 IELTS response to better illustrate what kinds of foods are most heavily weighted in this diet. Foods not making up noticeable portions of the diet are not significant enough to mention in detail and thus probably wouldn't be included in our Task 1 response unless referenced collectively as a single, grouped figure (i.e. vegetables make up 12% of the typical British diet).

Telegram channel: @mockTashkent

3 – Charts



Looking at this chart, we can see that our *broad detail* is how this data outlines the various demographics that make up Australian smoking youths.

The *minor details* shown here illustrate how an Australian youth's likelihood to begin smoking is *positively correlated* to whether or not their parents or guardians smoke and whether or not they live with single parents or guardians. Thus, there

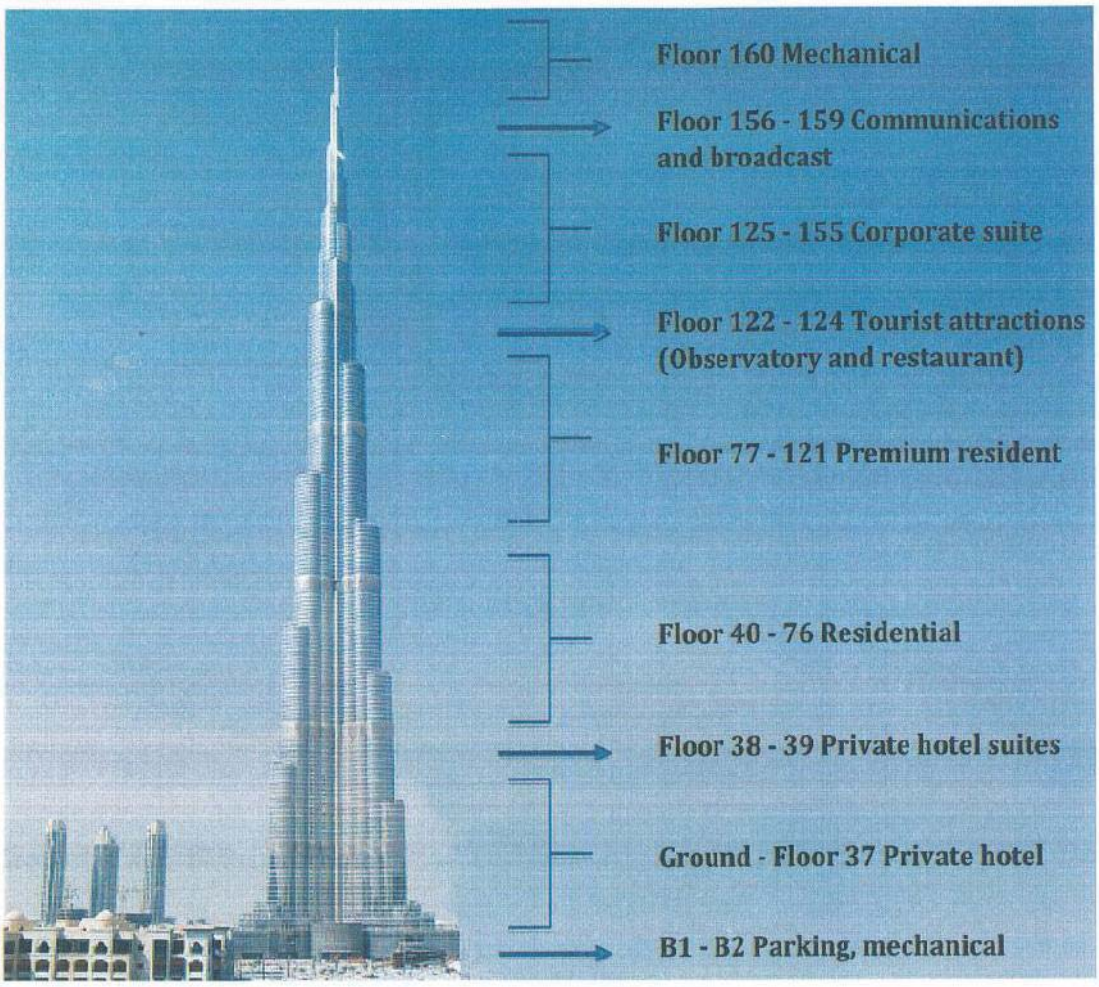
appears to be three *minor details*: (1) children who live with non-smoking parents or guardians, (2) children who live with smoking parents or guardians and (3) children who live in an alternative arrangement (denoted by 'Other').

The *minute details* are those figures that make up the *largest* and *smallest* demographics in this chart. So if describing this chart was our Task 1 question, we might think to make reference to the figure for *children living with non-smoking biological parents, children living with a single, smoking guardian* and *children living under alternative circumstances*, as these figures are either the largest or smallest in the data and therefore most significant.

Other figures of lesser weight within the graph could be noted of collectively. This does not mean that we won't mention the other data, it simply means we won't mention the other data in precise terms.

Telegram channel: @mockTashkent

4 – Diagrams



This diagram is of the Burj Dubai, currently the tallest human-made structure in the world. *Broadly* speaking, this data makes it clear that the Burj Dubai is partitioned into nine different sections.

The *minor details* would include the name of each section. Certain sections, such as the very top and very bottom levels, which are both mechanical, could be grouped.

The *minute details* would include extended discussion on certain portions within the building. Of the nine sections presented here, only the more prominent sections and their functions would be discussed in detail. We probably would not make extra mention of the mechanical areas or parking, as these parts of the building are rather small and irrelevant.

It should be noted that many diagrams depict a process, and thus should be described either in stages or chronologically. This will be explained in detail in section 5.1.

2.1

HOW TO REVEAL BROAD, MINOR AND MINUTE DETAILS IN YOUR WRITING

In your Task 1 response, you are going to reveal the *broad, minor* and *minute* details of the data source to your reader. This should be done in an attractive and easy to read format. Thus, although the natural inclination may be to structure your paragraph so that it presents all broad details followed by all minor details...

Broad details

Minor details

Minute details

...this structure does not cater kindly to the reader and will make your writing feel robotic or overly systematic.

To avoid this, visualize a structure similar to a goblet: *broader* details first followed by a logical mix of minor and minute details. Minute details are shared at key points throughout the piece to amplify areas of significance in the data source:

Broad details

Minor

and

minute

details

Use *minute* details to emphasize the more important points among your *minor*

details. Writing in this way will help you compose your Task 1 response in a much more fluent manner.

Now that we know how to identify and reveal *broad, minor* and *minute* details, let's discuss how to properly structure our Task 1 response.

2.2



ROPER TASK 1 WRITING STRUCTURE

The structure of your Task 1 response is subject to four restrictions:

1. The expectations of your examiner
2. Your IELTS Task 1 question scope
3. The Task 1 word length
4. The Task 1 time length

To properly structure your writing, you must employ a composition style that allows you to adhere to these four restrictions.

1 – The expectations of your examiner
As discussed in section 1.1, you are expected to fulfill the breadths of task Achievement, Coherence and Cohesion, Lexical Resources and Grammar.

2 – Your IELTS Task 1 question scope
Second, your IELTS Task 1 question is going to present you with either one data source (for example, one diagram) or two data sources (for example, one graph and one chart) and likely a description regarding this data. Your writing must remain within the *scope* of this question. What this means is that your response should not deviate from the data you are to describe. Only state items present in your data source. Theorizing on the cause of the data should be avoided.

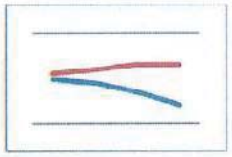
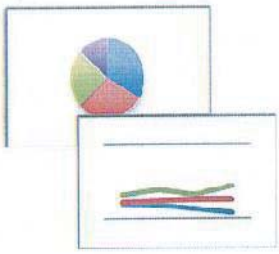
3 – The Task 1 word length
In addition to the examiner's expectations and the question scope, you must also adhere to a minimum word length of 150 words and you should aim to hit this length as precisely as you can. Writing responses of 200 or more words is *highly discouraged,* as this will increase the chances of grammatical and structural errors and will as well waste valuable time.

4 – The Task 1 time length
Finally, the examination provides only 60 minutes to perform both written Task 1

and 2. Thus, you should set yourself a limit of 18 minutes with which to perform Task 1, reserving two minutes to check our response before moving on to Task 2. To best prepare for the exam, train to perform Task 1 within 18 minutes.

Now let's review a writing structure that allows us to demonstrate our skills while adhering to these four restrictions.

Although the structure of the written Task 1 section of the IELTS examination cannot be regimented quite as strictly as that of Task 2, there are certain writing patterns you can follow in your composition to help ensure the response retains a sense of unity. It should be remembered that Task 1 question types vary and this means that your written response structure will also need to be flexible. For example, your Task 1 question might give you a single graph, table, chart or diagram or it might present a combination of data types (such as a diagram and a graph). Let's analyze the following table outlining structures for both situations:

	Single data source structure	Double data source structure
		
Overview Section	Paragraph 1 - Overview 1. Data type description 2. Broad details	Paragraph 1 – Overview 1. Data type(s) description and broad details 2. Relationship between sources
Analytical Section	Paragraph 2 - Analysing 3. Minor detail (minute detail) 4. Minor detail (minute detail) 5. Minor detail (minute detail) (repeat as needed…) 6. Conclusion	Paragraph 2 – Analysing source 1 3. Minor detail (minute detail) 4. Minor detail (minute detail) 5. Minor detail (minute detail) (repeat as needed…) 6. Conclusion Paragraph 3 –Analysing source 2 7. Minor detail (minute detail) 8. Minor detail (minute detail) 9. Minor detail (minute detail) (repeat as needed…)

The bulleted numbers in these lists represent sentences. As most of the sentences in your Task 1 response will have around 15 words, you can expect your entire piece to include roughly 10 sentences and allow you to hit your mark of 150 words overall. As stated previously, writing responses longer than 170 words is not encouraged. Your examiner is expecting you to present only the pertinent material in your data source and to leave out the unnecessary items.

2.3

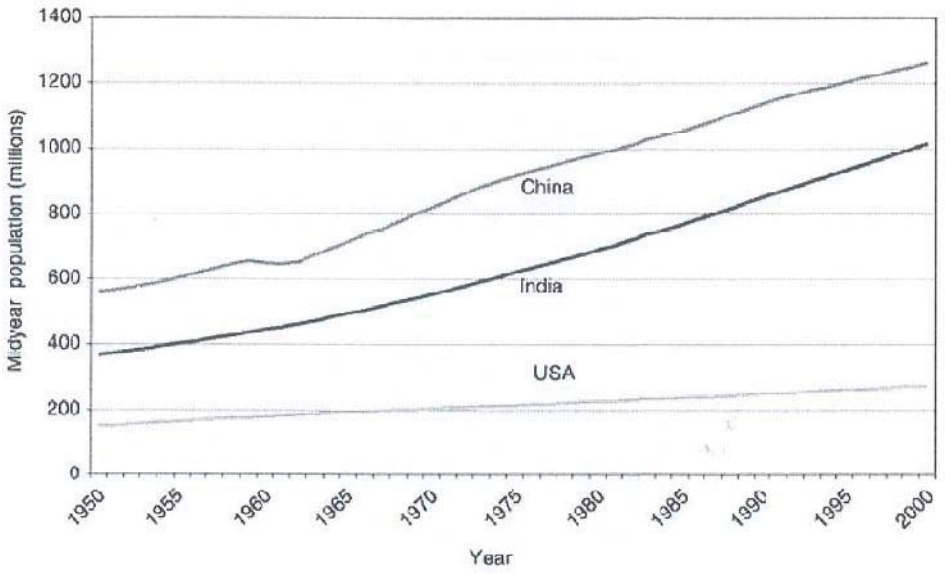


INGLE DATA SOURCE STRUCTURE IN MORE DETAIL

The data presented in your question will vary and thus so will the number of sentences you will need to employ. Let's look at the *Single data source structure* again in detail. *Minor detail sentences* can be *added* or *subtracted* as needed to best describe the areas of significance in your Task 1 question data:

- ***Overview paragraph***
    - An introduction sentence describing what kind of data is being presented.
    - A broad sentence outlining the overall trend, trends, function or process depicted in the data.
- ***Analyzing paragraph***
    - A sentence depicting the first minor detail as a trend, phase or function in the data. You may choose to couple this with a minute detail.
    - An additional *minor detail* (with optional minute detail) sentence
    - An additional *minor detail* (with optional minute detail) sentence
    - An additional *minor detail* (with optional minute detail) sentence
    - A sentence that provides the reader with a feeling of conclusion. This can be the final minor or minute detail presented in the Task 1 question data, the final phase presented (if the data is in the form of a process) or the last portion of whatever spatial diagram you are describing.

Now look at this sample data source and read the example response. Try to identify the different sentence types that are in play.



This line graph outlines population growth patterns in China, India and the United States. All trends exhibit positive growth, albeit at different rates.

China's population growth starts at just below 600 million in 1950. The following decade would see a swell to roughly 650 million people. After a slight lull in the early 1960s, Chinese population growth accelerates, and increases of almost 200 million people per decade are apparent. China hits a population of 800 million in 1970, one billion in 1980, 1.16 billion in 1990 and 1.25 billion in 2000. India's growth is very similar. Starting with a population just shy of 400 million, India swells to 430 million in 1960 and then continues a very stable climb with slight acceleration over the following forty years. Its growth concludes at 1.1 billion in the year 2000. Although American population growth is much more modest, this trend's progression moves with greater predictability. The population of 160 million in 1950 expands in a gradual and unremarkable manner to 270 million by the year 2000. The upward trend seen in all three countries is expected to continue into the foreseeable future.

2.4



OUBLE DATA SOURCE STRUCTURE IN MORE DETAIL

The double data source structure is also flexible and can be lengthened to accommodate more *minor details* if needed.

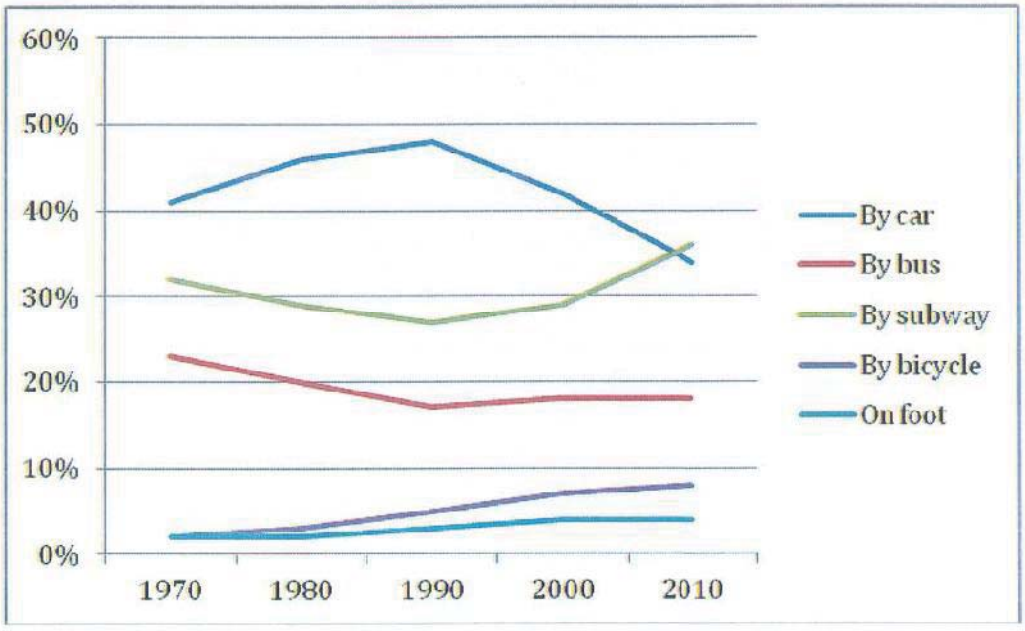
- Overview paragraph
    - An introduction sentence describing what kind of data is being presented (in both sources) and a broad description of the overall trend, trends, function or process depicted in the data of both sources.
    - A somewhat general sentence clearly defining the relationship these two pieces of data have with each other.
- First analyzing paragraph (regarding the first data source presented)
    - A sentence depicting a minor detail, phase or function in the first data source. You may choose to couple this with a minute detail.
    - An additional *minor detail* (with optional minute detail) sentence
    - An additional *minor detail* (with optional minute detail) sentence
    - An additional *minor detail* (with optional minute detail) sentence
    - A sentence that provides the reader with a feeling of conclusion. This can be the final minor detail presented in the Task 1 question data, the final phase presented (if the data is in the form of a process) or the last portion of whatever spatial diagram you are describing.
- Second analyzing paragraph (regarding the second data source presented)
    - A sentence depicting a minor detail, phase or function in the second data source. You may choose to couple this with a minute detail.

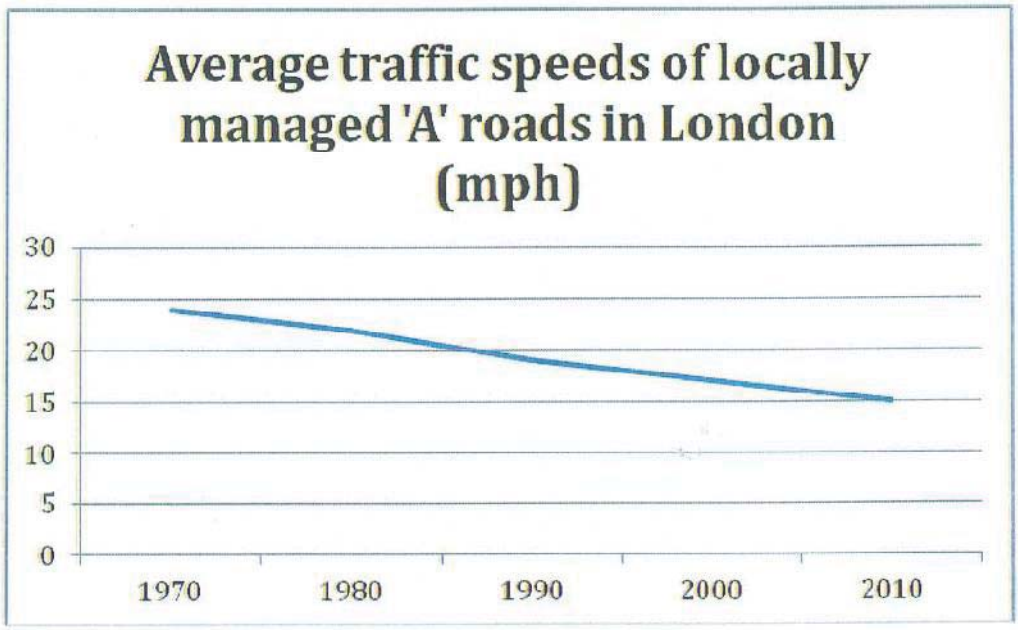
- An additional *minor detail* (with optional minute detail) sentence
- An additional *minor detail* (with optional minute detail) sentence
- An additional *minor detail* (with optional minute detail) sentence
- A sentence that provides the reader with a feeling of conclusion. This can be the final minor detail presented in the Task 1 question data, the final phase presented (if the data is in the form of a process) or the last portion of whatever spatial diagram you are describing.

Although the above structures may vary in sentence number depending on the data given, the overall written piece should end up between 150 and 170 words. As you can see, having these structures in mind before you head into the exam gives you a direction for your writing. It also provides you as a test-taker confidence, and this is something that always leads to better writing.

To illustrate, look at these two data sources and the accompanying Task 1 response. Try to note where each of the above sentences appear.

How Londoners Commute to Work





The above charts show how Londoners have historically commuted to work and the average London traffic speeds between the years 1970 and 2010. These data sources clearly communicate that Londoners are gradually finding alternative ways to commute to work as traffic congestion worsens.

The first chart illustrates that 41% of Londoners commuted to work by car in 1970. This value climbs to 47% by 1990 but then falls gradually to 34% in 2010. Subway usage is negatively correlated. The 32% of total London commuters that travelled by subway in 1970 dips to 26% by 1990 only to grow to 36% by 2010. Bus usage falls from a high of 23% in 1970 to 19% in 2010. Travelling to work by bicycle or on foot saw modest grow from 2% in 1970 to 8% and 5% in 2010 respectively.

The second chart indicates that traffic speeds in London have steadily slowed over the period in question. In 1970, average London traffic speeds were 24 miles per hour. This figure slows to 19 miles per hour in 1990 and 15 miles per hour in 2010.

3.1

LEXICAL RESOURCES FOR DIFFERENT DATA TYPES

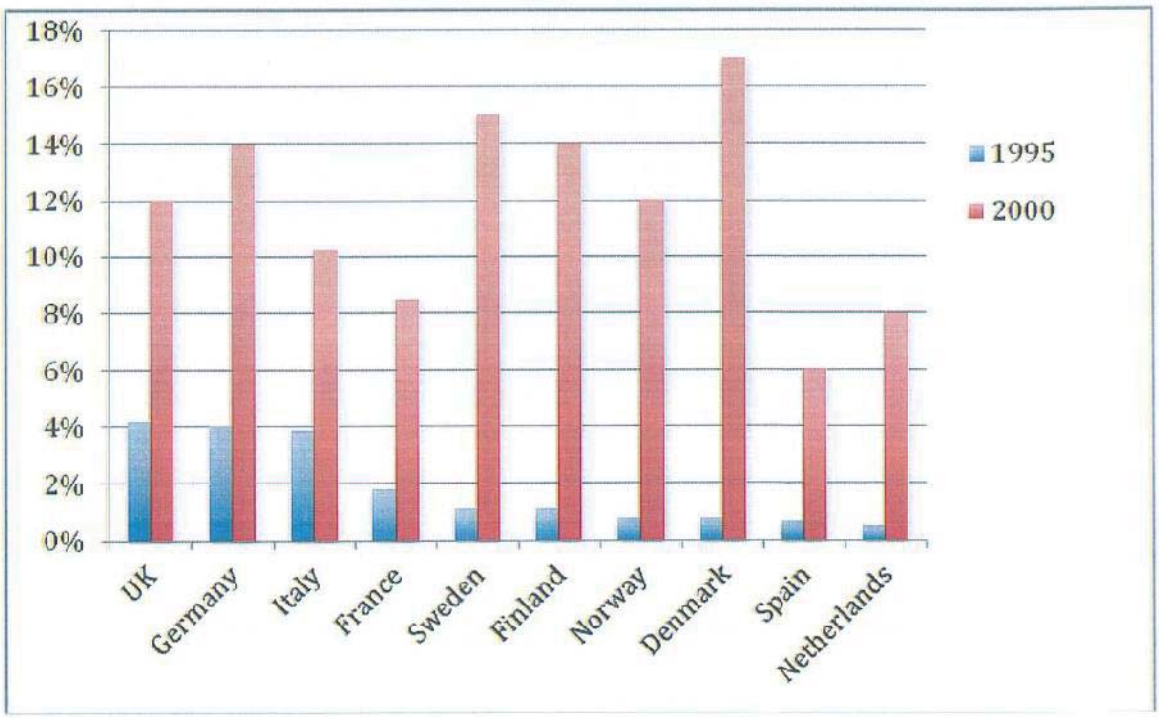
The lexical resources you draw upon will vary from one data type to another. In this section, we will explore how to describe data presented in a number of different formats.

Graphs

As you have already learned, graphs show data in trends. Graphs will always contain at least one of the following patterns: an increase, a decrease, an unchanging trend and/or a volatile trend.

Let's look at the following graph. Can you identify the broad details? The minor details? The minute details?

Notebook computer owners (as % of each country's total population)



Broad detail: *All countries show a significant increase in notebook computer owners between 1995 and 2000.*

Minor details: *The countries with the largest economies (the UK, Germany, Italy and France) appear to have had more notebook computer owners in 1995 than the other countries. The notebook computer owners of these countries also appear to have grown at a slower pace than the exponential growth seen in the Scandinavian countries.*

Minute details: *The country experiencing the most modest growth is the UK, which grew by about 8%. The country experiencing the most significant growth is Denmark, which began at roughly 1% and ballooned to a figure of 17%.*

Let's look at some different ways we can describe trends when illustrated in a graph as well as some transition phrases we can use to go from describing one trend to another:

Data referred to as	the figure the trend the data the number(s) the value the amount
Increase	peaked at... *(this phrase marks the highest point)* topped at... *(this phrase marks the highest point)* shot to... rocketed to... jumped to... swelled to... ballooned to... gradually climbed to... modestly climbed to... inched to... crawled to...

Decrease	dropped to... fell to... slid to... deflated to... shrunk to... bottomed at... *(this phrase marks the lowest point)* hit a trough at... *(this phrase marks the lowest point)*
Unchanging state	maintained a value of... went without change for... went unaltered... remained stable held steady at... reached a plateau of...
Volatile state	experienced volatility for... unstable figures between _____ and _____ the figures became turbulent jumped back and forth erratically
State transition	...before it... following this, the trend... a period of _____ ensues... after reaching _____ the trend is... _____ marks the moment when...

Examples demonstrating some of the above phrases in action.	• *The figure began at 1% before it swelled to 17%.* • *After the following month, the value inched its way to 18 before undergoing a period of volatility.* • *From here, the trend appears to have experienced a brief period of stability before sliding to 11 and then hitting a trough at 5.*

Tables

Tables can show information in one of two ways. The first presents trends and thus when writing you will need to draw from the same lexical pool as graphs. The second presents static data seen in such data types as schedules, menus or lists. We can describe such data as 'static' because it does not present information that evolves or changes over time.

Let's analyze the *broad details, minor details* and *minute details* of the following table:

Public bus schedule for a bus route in Vancouver

Monday-Friday	Saturday	Sunday
8:00	*8:00*	*no service*
8:30	*9:00*	
9:00	*10:00*	
9:30	*11:00*	
10:00	*4:30*	
10:30	*5:30*	
11:00	*6:30*	
4:30	*7:30*	
5:00		
5:30		
6:00		
6:30		
7:00		
7:30		

Broad details: *Bus circulation is heavier during the week than on weekends.*

Minor details: *Bus service is heaviest during weekday mornings and evenings. Bus service is available at reduced circulation on Saturdays. There is no service offered on Sundays.*

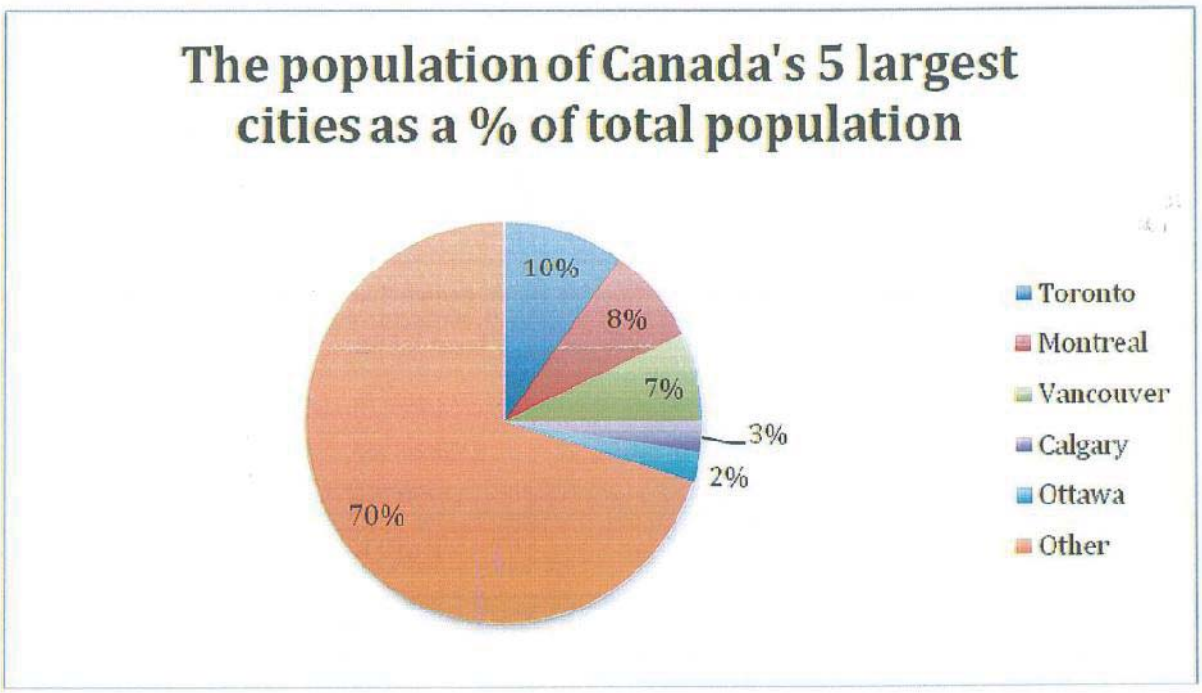
Minute details: *From Monday to Friday, buses run on the half hour from 8 am until 11 am then again from 4:30 pm until 7:30 pm. On Saturday, buses run once per hour from 8 am until 11 am and 4:30 pm until 7:30 pm.*

Now let's review a few ways to describe the data we are presented in tables:

Describing repeating data/data at intervals	*cyclical* *regular* *every...* *_____ follows a cycle* *repeating every...*
Describing time	*commences at ...* *departs at ...* *from _____ to _____* *concludes at...*
Describing an exception	*except between _____ and _____* *save _____*
Examples demonstrating some of the above phrases in action.	• The schedule for Saturday commences at 9 am and concludes at 3 pm. • A train departs every 30 minutes, except at rush hour when it operates at intervals of 15 minutes. • There is a plane to London every day of the week, save Tuesday.

Charts

Charts typically present information in a 'snapshot' fashion. In other words, the data presented may show the value of a number of figures at *a single point in time. Let's analyze the broad details, minor details and minute details of the following chart:*



Broad details: *Although a large number of Canadians live in Canada's 5 largest cities, the vast majority of Canadians live elsewhere.*

Minor details: *Most Canadians live in cities smaller than Ottawa. A significant proportion of Canadians live in Canada's five largest cities.*

Minute details: *25% of Canadians live in Toronto, Montreal or Vancouver. The country's capital, Ottawa, makes up only 2% of Canada's overall population and is the smallest of the 5 cities presented here. 70% of Canadians live outside Canada's largest cities.*

Let's come up with some language we can use to describe charts:

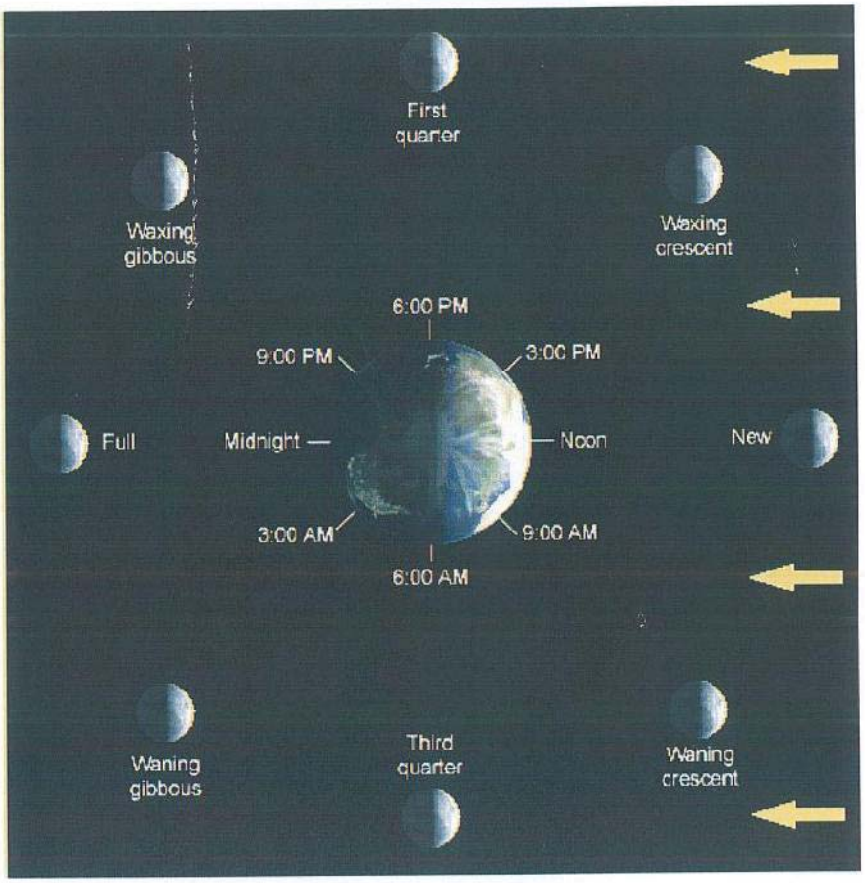
Describing majority	*the lion's share of...* *the vast majority...* *by far the most...* _____ *has a slight majority*
Describing minority/ insignificancy	*a small stake* *holds a rather miniscule share* *makes up an insignificant part* *is rather negligible* *next to none*
Describing share	*roughly a quarter of* *half of the pie is allotted to...* *the chart is partitioned into eight sections* *contains four items of equal size*
Examples demonstrating some of the above phrases in action.	• The chart is partitioned into six sections, three of which make up more than a 60% share. • The countries of Lebanon, Syria and Kuwait, make up a rather miniscule part of the Arab world geographically. • Africa takes the lion's share of the pie, producing over 50% of the world's diamonds in 2009.

Diagrams

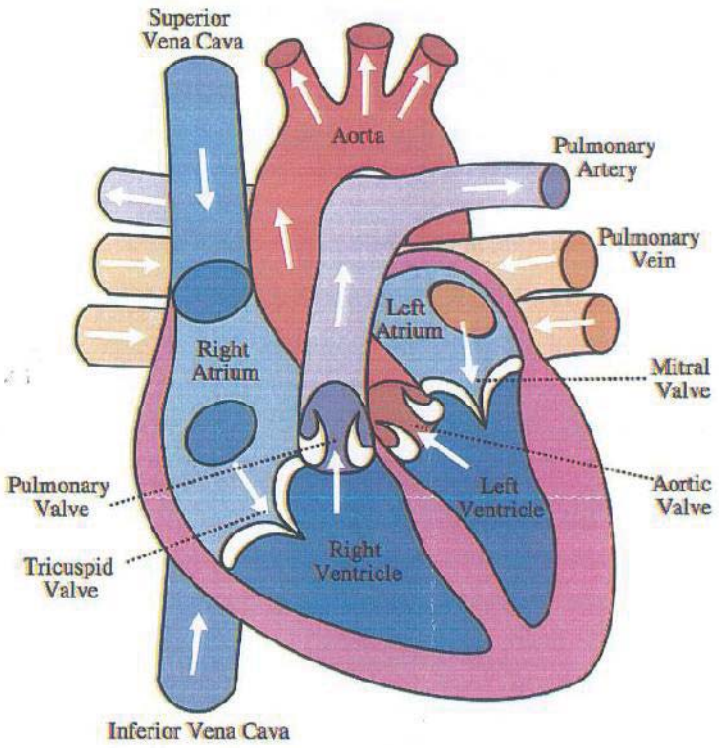
Diagrams will depict either a process or an image that requires a spatially-sensitive lexical resource to be described effectively. Like graphs, tables and charts, diagrams can also be broken up into *broad details, minor details* and *minute details.*

The diagrams you will see on your IELTS examination will fall into one of the two following categories:

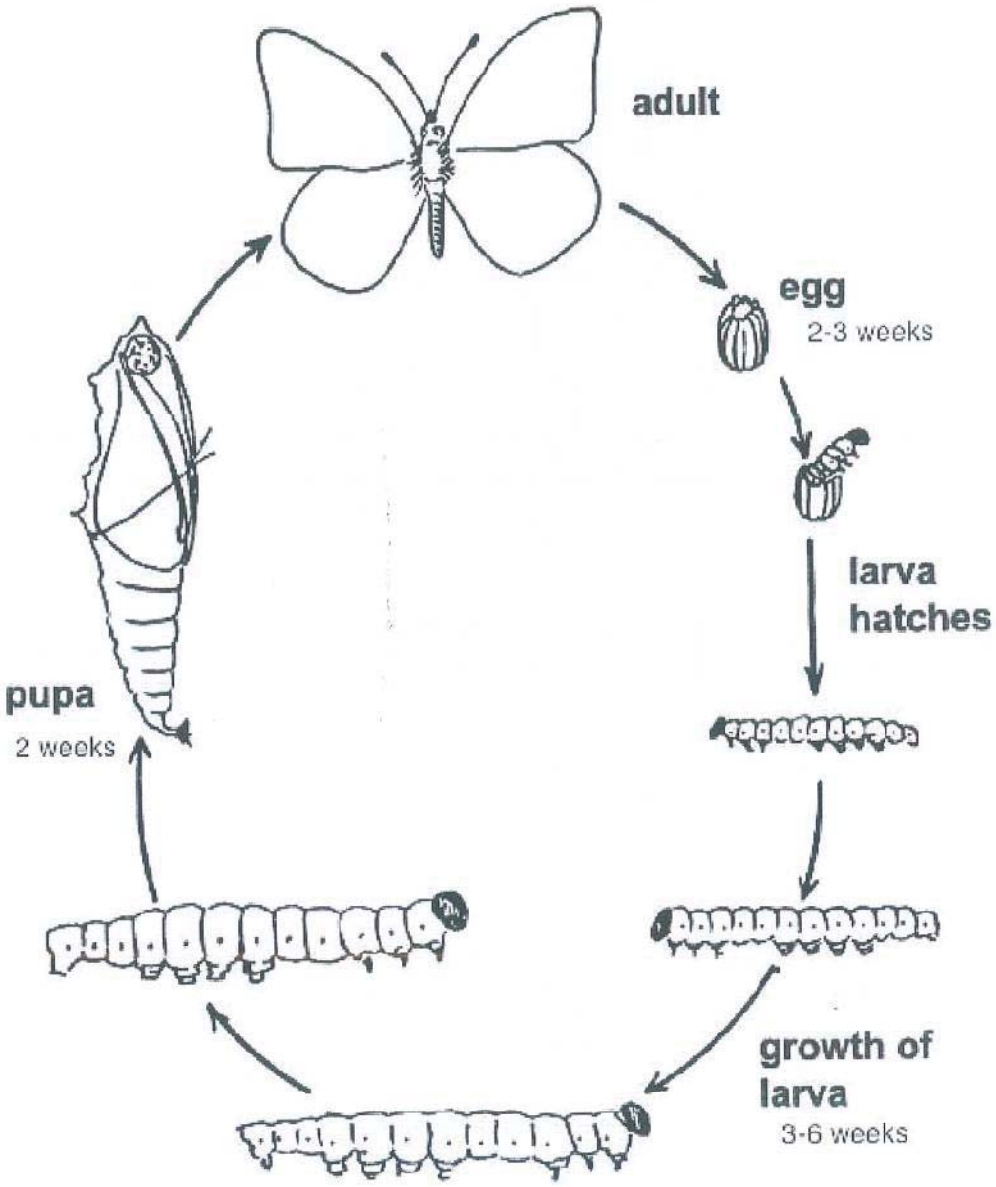
1. Processes that exhibit phases or steps that need to be outlined. These types of descriptions are typically ***time-sensitive.***



2. Spatial images. These images are typically ***not time-sensitive:***



Let's identify the *broad, minor* and *minute* details of the following diagram:



Broad details: *This diagram outlines the life cycle of a butterfly, from egg to mature adult.*

Minor details: *There are five phases in this life cycle: egg, newly-hatched larva, larva growth phase, pupating phase and finally the adult phase.*

Minute: *Eggs appear to develop for two to three weeks before hatching. The larva then enters its growth phase, which can last between three and six weeks. Before becoming a mature adult butterfly, the larva must pupate and turns into a pupa for a period of two weeks. The growth cycle restarts when the adult butterfly produces eggs of its own.*

Here is some language we can use to describe ***time-sensitive*** diagrams:

Phases	first second the initial step following this initial phase from here, ... before this can occur, ... after this occurs, ... _____ is the next phase of the process. finally, ... Concluding the process is the _____ step. _____ wraps up the process

In cases where you must use language to describe ***non time-sensitive*** data, the following is suggested:

Direction/location	to the right of adjacent the... directly below sitting flush on the ... / laying flat on the ... below hovering above about _____ (measurement) from _____ (object) at opposite ends of

Shape	cylindrical sharp edges at an obtuse/acute/right angle spherical hollow top-heavy stabilized by a _____
Texture	which appears to have a rough texture smooth lacquered flexible pliable solid fragile brittle gritty unfinished splintered metallic rubbery

Motion	alternating moving straight along moving perpendicular to moving away from back and forth pulsating static coursing towards mechanical rebounding rotating orbiting pivoting undulating
Examples demonstrating some of the above phrases in action.	• A pendulum swings back and forth below the clock's face to maintain time. • The hockey helmet in the diagram appears to have its interior lined with soft, pliable foam. • The steering wheel looks to be made of a metallic material and can be rotated to maneuver the direction of the vehicle.

3.2

THE IMPORTANCE OF PACE

'Pace' describes the speed at which you share information in your writing, and it is a key skill to demonstrate on your exam. Take the following graph as an example:



The trend depicted in this graph can be described at either a *rapid* pace:

> This chart commences with a period of volatility lasting from 5 June 2010 to 17 July 2010 before a steady climb to $21,000 in sales is seen on 28 August 2010.

...or an extremely *gradual* pace:

> Travel Echo's summer begins slow. Its first week sees sales of only $5000; however this climbs in the second week to more than $10,000. Similar figures alternate back and forth over the following weeks: June 19th sees a fall to well below $5000, June 26th shows another gain to $10,000, July 3rd experiences yet another fall to about $3000 and July 10 concludes almost as high as June 26th at about $9000. The dates following the 17th of July 2010 appear to be the beginning of a steady climb in the company's revenue. July 31st garners the company $10,000 in sales earnings. August 7th sees this number increase to $13,000. August 14th marks $15,000 in sales earnings. $18,000 is August 21st's figure and the graph finishes August 28th at $21,000.

Both responses describe the graph's data accurately; however, they vary only in the speed by which they share information, or 'pace'. In Task 1 of the IELTS examination, you ***must*** budget your time correctly and this means controlling how long and how many sentences you commit to describing certain trends. The *gradual* writing that you see above is *much* too detailed to be plausibly written on your examination. It is important that you do not waste time describing trivial details, but it is equally important that you do not gloss over data pertinent to your written response. Thus, when presented with one piece of data, allow yourself to describe data more gradually, and when presented with multiple pieces of data, describe major data developments while providing broad descriptions for areas of little concern. This will help you make the most of the 18 minutes you have to write your Task 1 response. Further, following this strategy will allow you to shorten your analyzing section paragraphs in the event you are given multiple pieces of data and lengthen them when given only one piece of data.

3.3

BUILDING YOUR PARAGRAPHS

In Chapter 1, we studied how to properly select a structure for our Task 1 response and in Chapter 2 we bolstered our lexical resources to ensure an accurate description of our data source can be made. Now we are ready to use these skills to write complete paragraphs outlining the information presented in the data source. Let's run through an exercise with this simplified Task 1 question:

Study the following graph, which depicts monthly attendance rates for the Shanghai Library in 2010. Write a report for a university lecturer summarizing the information below.

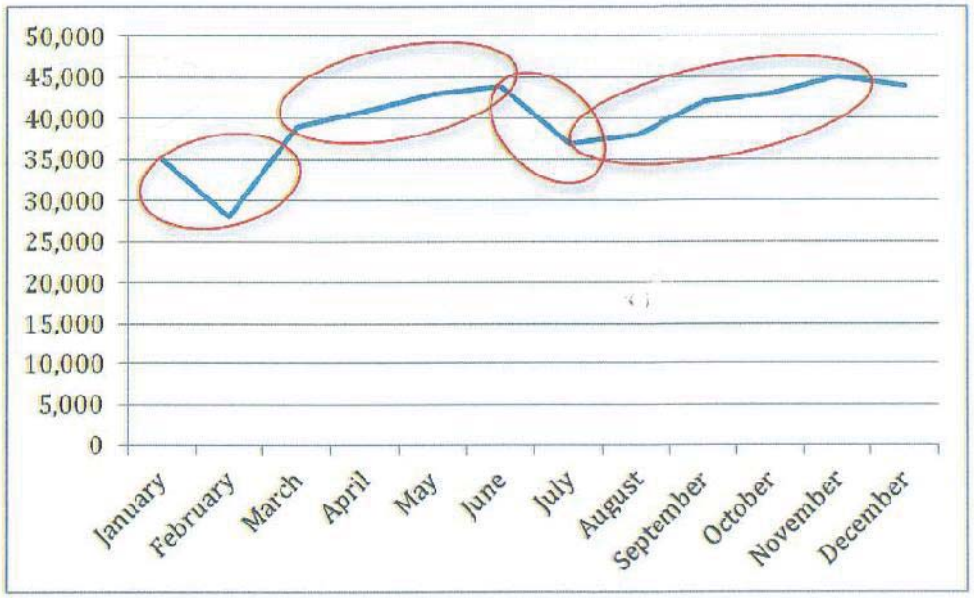


Let's discuss it...

When initially looking at the chart, you should be able to immediately identify *broad details, minor details* and *minute details.*

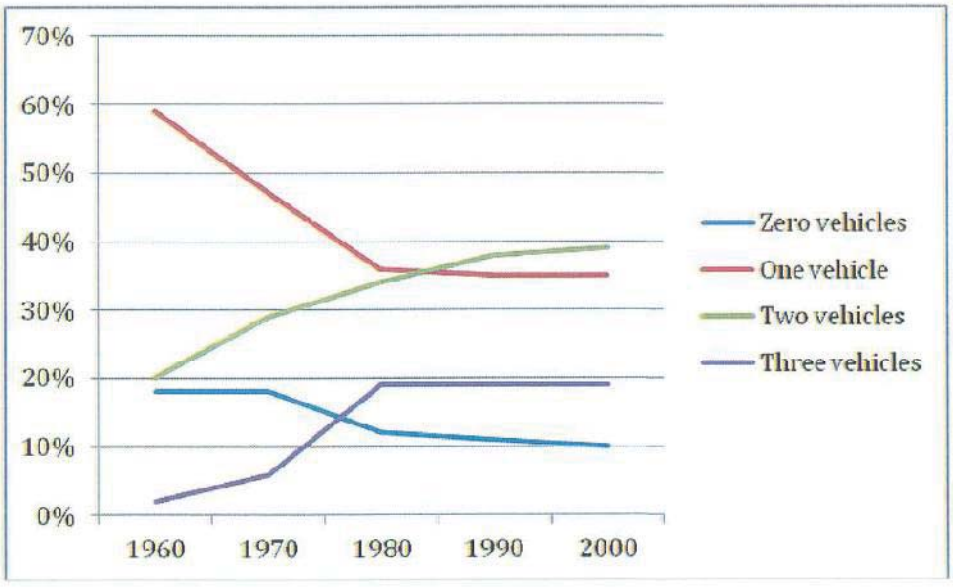
Broadly speaking, we can clearly see that the data presents two minor peaks and two minor troughs; however the overall direction is ***up***.

The *minor details* in this chart are also quite easy to identify. The first is a dip, followed by a climb, then a fall and a climb. The following image outlines the location of these minor details:



The *minute details* are those points in the graph where *change* occurs, whether that be a *change in trend* or the *beginning* or *ending* of the data presented. *Minute* details typically act as points of reference for your description of the data and will be the points where you include *tangible information* (usually as numerical figures).

Therefore, in this chart, it appears attendance is highest in June and November and lowest in February (with a noticeable drop during the summer months, too). The year ends stronger than it began:



After identifying our graph's broad details, minor details and minute details, the writing becomes easy! The first thing that needs to be done is to write an overview paragraph: (1) data type description sentence and (2) a broad sentence. As you learned in Chapter 1, these two opening sentences should clearly state what kind of data we are being presented as well as the broad detail the data depicts. Thus, in this case we would probably write something such as:

> The graph presents the monthly attendance rates experienced by the Shanghai Library in 2010. The overall trend of the data depicts a somewhat steady increase; however, minor downward deviations occur at two points in the year.

Now that the graph's broad details have been expressed, you are ready to start your analytical paragraph. Here, we are going to talk about the source's minor details. While writing this section, include *minute* details at the points where trends change.

> Following the year's start of 35,000 library visitors in January, a clear drop in attendance rates can be seen, with the data showing its most major trough in February at about 28,000. But attendance rebounds in March to approximately 39,000, and climbs steadily by about 5000 people over the next three months to its first peak of 44,000 in June. Then attendance drops again to the year's second trough of 37,000 in July before starting a four-month climb to 45,000 in November. This month marks the second and highest peak depicted in the chart. December finishes just slightly weaker than the previous month at 44,000. The year-end figure marks a 9,000-person increase on January.

In this paragraph, the brief description of minor details is *punctuated* with minute details. *Figures are only shared for the points of minute detail.* Numerical data pertaining to the months of January, April, May, August, September and October are referenced indirectly. Even so, an accurate reconstruction of the original data source could be redrawn using this description.

3.4

THE IMPORTANCE OF COHESION

Cohesion refers to the ability of a piece of writing to link its various ideas together and operate as a collective unit. The response we wrote last chapter exhibits numerous instances of cohesion. It does this by employing cohesive phrases that make brief references to the data presented in the sentences that come before them.

Let's look at the paragraphs we have written and identify the areas that help the piece to act cohesively:

The graph presents the monthly attendance rates experienced by the Shanghai Library in 2010. The overall trend of the data depicts a somewhat steady increase, however minor downward deviations occur at two points in the year.

Following the year's start of 35,000 library visitors in January, a clear drop in attendance rates can be seen, with the data showing its most major trough in February at about 28,000. But attendance rebounds in March to approximately 39,000, and climbs steadily by about 5000 people over the next three months to its first peak of 44,000 in June. Then attendance drops again to the year's second trough of 37,000 in July before starting a four-month climb to 45,000 in November. This month marks the second and highest peak depicted in the chart. December finishes just slightly weaker than the previous month at 44,000. The year-end figure marks a 9,000-person increase on January.

The highlighted phrases outline sections of the piece that link together and create cohesion. As you can see, the links tie our first paragraph to our second and help to fortify the reader's sense that the paragraphs are working together as a team. By linking your ideas in this manner, you are showing your IELTS examiner that this piece is not some random mish-mash of sentences but a logically progressive unit that has strategically been prepared.

4.1



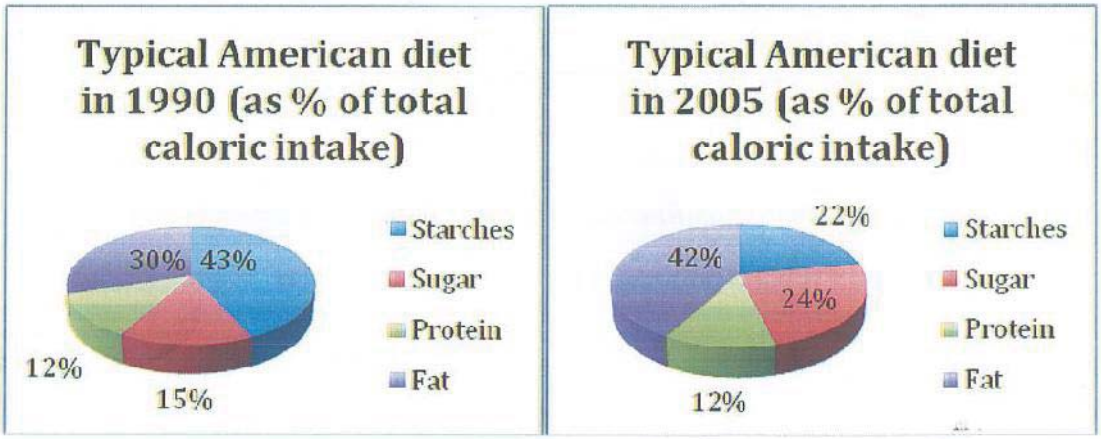
OW TO WRITE USING DOUBLE DATA SOURCE STRUCTURE

In the event you are presented with more than one data source on your exam, you must be able to adjust the structure of your writing. You must also have mastered the basic ability to effectively compare data in written English.

As you learned in Chapter 1, your Task 1 *analytical section* can be written in multiple paragraphs, while maintaining an identical word goal of 150-170 (thus helping you adhere to your length and time restrictions). For these paragraphs, you simply need to apply your skills of *pace* (see section 2.2) so that you can still present the essential facts illustrated in the data without jeopardizing critical minutes on your examination.

The real challenge of having multiple data to write about comes in the *overview* section of your writing. When presented with multiple data sources, you will need to declare their relationship, and this involves critical thinking. The first step is deciding on the nature of the relationship between the two data sources. In some cases, the two pieces of data will create a single trend between them. In other cases, the two pieces of data will present several trends and you will need to define whether those trends correlate positively, negatively or a combination of the two. In each instance, you will draw from different lexical resources to express the relationship accurately.

Let's identify the relationships between the following data pairs. First, here are two charts:



The data presented in the above charts depicts both an increase (in terms of fat intake) and a decrease (in terms of starch intake) in the typical American diet. Because these pie charts present the same set of details at two different times, there is only one trend to describe. This trend is the dietary development of typical Americans between 1990 and 2005.

A suggested response could be:

The two charts show the difference in American eating habits over a 15 year period between 1990 and 2005. The trend that is created between these charts reveal a negative correlation between the spike in fat and sugar consumption and the drop in starch consumption.

When looking at the 1990 chart, it is apparent that starches account for the lion's share of the pie, at 43% of the typical American diet. Intakes of fat, sugar and protein at this time mades up the remaining 30%, 15% and 12% respectively.

However, the second pie chart illustrates a drastic change to these figures. In only 15 years, fat and sugar intake rises significantly to make up 42% and 24% of the average American's caloric intake, while starch consumption shrank to 22%, almost half of its original 1995 value. Protein is the one section of the American diet that remains constant between 1990 and 2005.

By pacing the rate at which you share information, you are able to fully reflect the info in the two charts without writing an overly long response.

Try it yourself!

Using your understanding of Task 1 writing, convert the information in this table and graph into written English.

2009 Subway and Bus Ridership (as % of total city population)

London

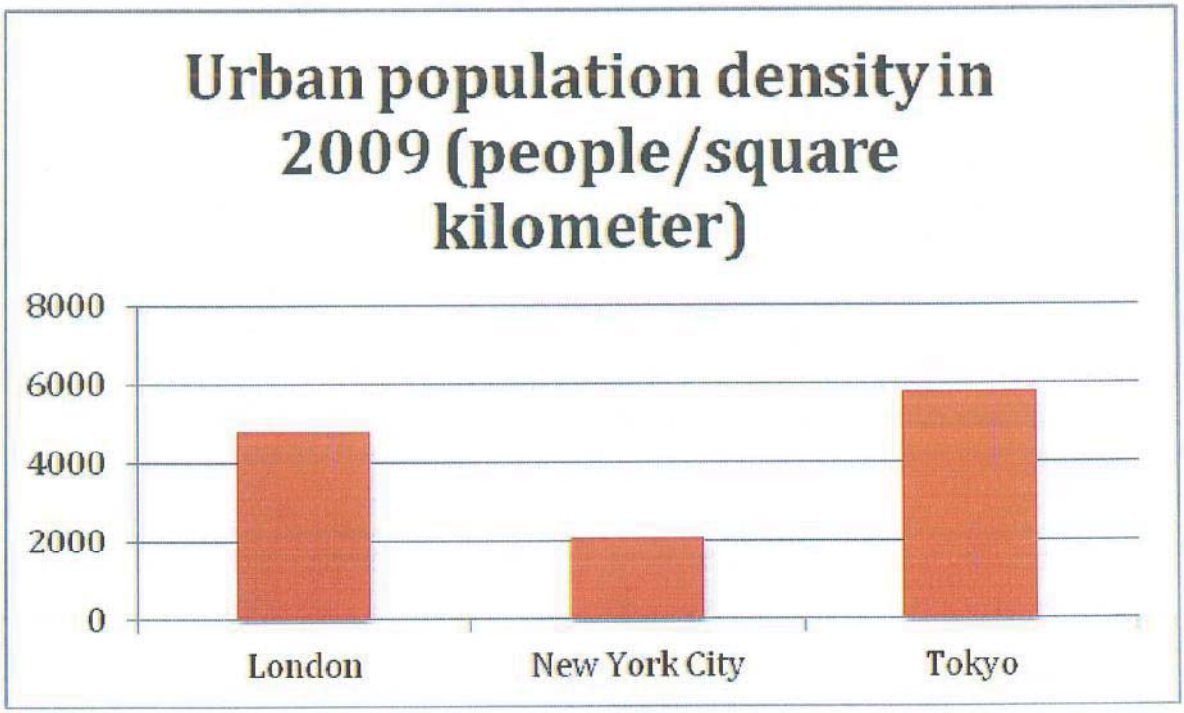
- *Subway (19%)*
- *Bus (39.3%)*

New York City

- *Subway (28.6%)*
- *Bus (12%)*

Tokyo

- *Subway (33.3%)*
- *Bus (4.4%)*



Try it yourself! (Answers)

What is seen in the first data source is a table outlining 2009 subway and bus ridership in London, New York City and Tokyo. Subway ridership is highest in Tokyo and lowest in London. Bus ridership is highest in London and lowest in Tokyo.

The second data source depicts urban population density for the same three cities. Tokyo is considered densest, while New York City is considered least dense.

What should be noticed when comparing the two pieces of data is that there *isn't* a clear relationship between population density and the type of public transit most commonly used. Although the Tokyo and London figures suggest that a higher population density may be linked to subway transit popularity, the New York City figures debunk this. According to the data, New York City has a population density less than half that of London, yet its subway service is used more than its bus service. So a logical conclusion we could reach from this data is that *the form of public transportation used by people in metropolitan cities is* ***very loosely*** *linked to population density.*

A suggested response could be:

The table and graph show 2009 figures for bus ridership and urban population density in London, New York City and Tokyo. The data shows a very loose relationship between the ridership levels of certain forms of public transit and population density.

According to the table, subway use is lowest in London and highest in Tokyo, where a third of the local population commutes by metro. Bus service presents an opposite trend, with only about 4% of the population in Tokyo using it versus 40% in London. New York City figures for both transit systems fall between Tokyo and London in all categories.

The graph, on the other hand, outlines population density for the above three cities. Tokyo is considered to have the densest population of the three, at just shy of 6000 people per square kilometer. London boasts slightly less than 5000 and New York City is just a shade higher than 2000 people per square kilometer.

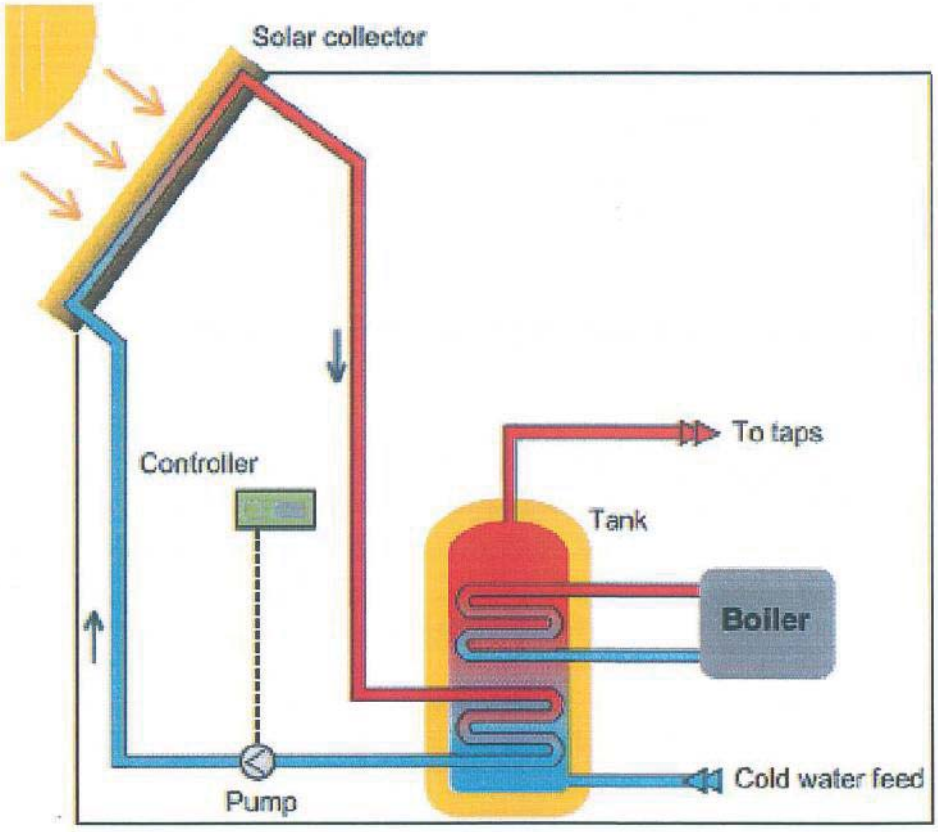
5.1

HOW TO RESPOND TO DIAGRAMS

As you have learned in Chapter 2, diagrams come in two flavours: *time-sensitive/ cyclical diagrams* and *non time-sensitive diagrams.* They challenge your ability to describe a process or an object spatially and often you will also need to make an educated guess regarding what the object is capable of doing and how it works. Given one diagram, your writing will follow a two-paragraph *Single data source structure.* Of course, the lexical resources you draw from will be entirely different from those you will use in the case of a graph, table or chart.

Let's take the following Task 1 question involving a cyclical diagram as an example:

The pipe running from the solar collector to the tank is filled with an anti-freeze fluid that is heated via the sun.



Write a summary for a university lecturer outlining the entire process by which water is heated for domestic use under such a system.

Looking at this diagram, it can be seen right away that this process operates in a cycle. The cycle involves the circulation of anti-freeze fluid for the purpose of heating water in a water tank. As the water tank is somewhat central to the entire systematic process, this is probably a good place to start our description.

Now that you've established a starting point, commence your writing. Here is a quick reminder of the *Single data source structure* we are going to follow:

- Overview paragraph
    - Data type description sentence
    - Broad sentence
- Analyzing paragraph
    - Minor detail (with optional minute detail) sentence
    - Minor detail (with optional minute detail) sentence
    - Minor detail (with optional minute detail) sentence
    - Concluding sentence

First, let's come up with a broad opening sentence describing the process as a whole:

This diagram outlines the manner in which water can be heated for domestic use via the sun.

Great! Now that we've given the big picture, we can start by describing the step-by-step process involved in heating water with solar power. As we said above, the water tank appears to be at the heart of this process, so let's start our description with the cold water that initially gets pumped into the house:

The household's water tank is fed cold water (presumed to be coming from the city) at its base and dispenses hot water from its top.

Looking at the diagram, we can see that the water is not only heated by the sun, but also by a traditional boiler system. Let's briefly describe both systems:

> The tank water is heated in two ways. The first is via a traditional boiler heater, which likely circulates a heated anti-freeze solution through a pipe that coils within the upper part of the tank. The second connects another coil of pipe in the bottom of the tank to a pump and circulates the same anti-freeze solution to the roof of the house. From here, the solution is heated in a solar collector by the sun before circulating back to the tank.

Great. Now we should make note of the controller, which is connected directly to the pump and likely controls the speed of anti-freeze movement:

> Water temperature is set using a controller, which dictates the rate at which anti-freeze solution is pumped to the roof for heating.

Great work! Now, let's read our composition in its entirety. As you read, you should be making mental note of the phrases of cohesion we've employed in our writing:

> This diagram outlines the manner in which water can be heated for domestic use via the sun.
>
> The household's water tank is fed cold water (presumed to be coming from the city) at its base and dispenses hot water from its top. The tank water is heated in two ways. The first is via a traditional boiler heater, which likely circulates a heated anti-freeze solution through a pipe that coils within the upper part of the tank. The second connects another coil of pipe in the bottom of the tank to a pump and circulates the same anti-freeze solution to the roof of the house. From here, the solution is heated in a solar collector by the sun before circulating back to the tank. Water temperature is set using a controller, which dictates the rate at which anti-freeze solution is pumped to the roof for heating. In the event of inclement weather, tank water can be heated via a traditional boiler.

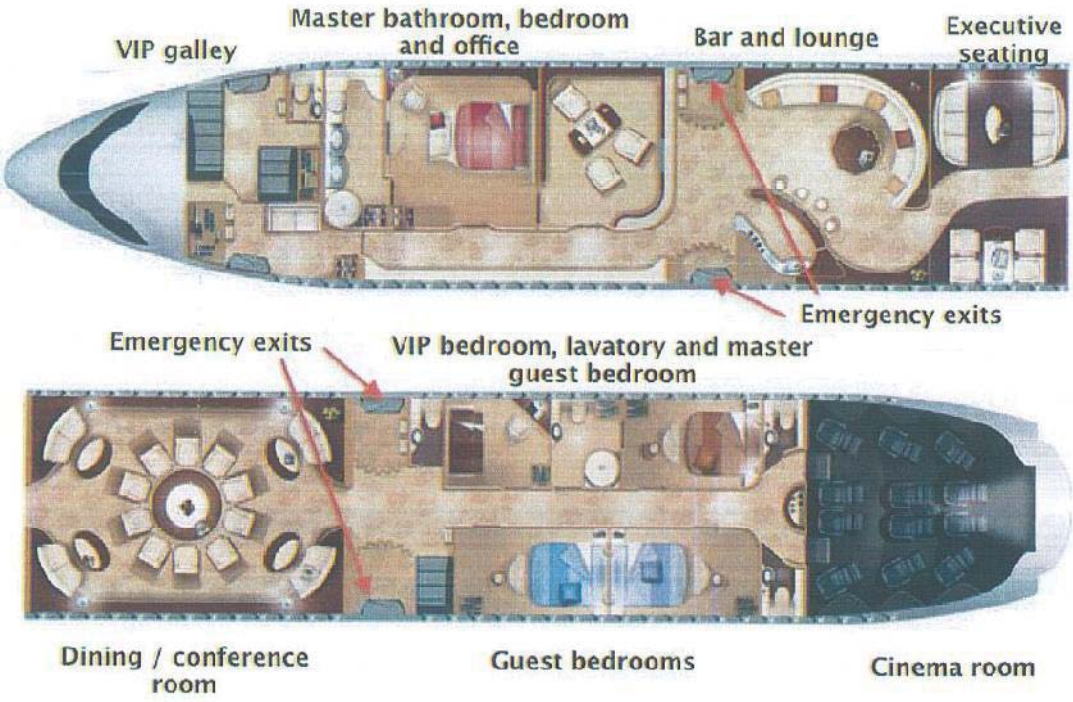
What we have learned from this exercise is that describing a diagram is structurally very similar to describing other data types such as charts and graphs. In fact, the only areas that are really quite different are the lexical resources we pull from.

Try it yourself!

Now try a *non time-sensitive* Task 1 diagram question.

This diagram outlines the floor plan of the A350, a super luxury jumbo jet.

Write an accurate description of the diagram for a university professor.



This image outlines the interior floor plan of the A350 jumbo jet from nose to tail. As a luxurious item, its floor plan appears to include all of the basics of a modern house and a select number of extravagant extras.

Immediately behind the cockpit is the VIP Galley, followed by the master bathroom, bedroom and office. The first pair of emergency exit doors can be seen after these amenities on opposite sides of the plane. The bar and lounge, executive seating area and dining room appear to be connected by a hallway that snakes through all three. The second pair of emergency exits follows this, also on opposite sides of the aircraft. A central corridor, lined by two guest rooms on one side and a VIP and master guest room on the other, connects the dining area to the back of the plane, where a cinema room large enough to seat 12 can be found.

6.1



EVIEW QUIZ

Try this brief quiz to ensure you have retained what was taught in this book.

If you were presented with two data sources, what Task 1 writing structure should you employ?

_____

Name a similarity between graphs and tables.

_____

Name something that is constant between single data source structure and double data source structure.

_____

Fill in the missing information in this Single data source structural outline:

Paragraph 1 - Overview

- _____
- Broad sentence

Paragraph 2 - Analyzing

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- Concluding sentence

What does the idea of 'pace' refer to?

_____

Name the two categories that diagrams typically fall into.

_____

6.1



EVIEW QUIZ (ANSWERS)

Try this brief quiz to ensure you have retained what was taught in this book.

If you were presented with two data sources, what Task 1 writing structure should you employ?

Double data source structure

Name a similarity between graphs and tables.

Both graphs and tables can present trending information

Name something that is constant between single data source structure and double data source structure.

Both structures yield a response of 150-170 words.

Fill in the missing information in this Single data source structural outline:

Paragraph 1 - Overview

- ***Data type description***
- Broad sentence

Paragraph 2 - Analyzing

- ***Minor detail (minute detail) description***
- ***Minor detail (minute detail) description***
- ***Minor detail (minute detail) description***
- ***Minor detail (minute detail) description***
- Concluding sentence

What does the idea of 'pace' refer to?

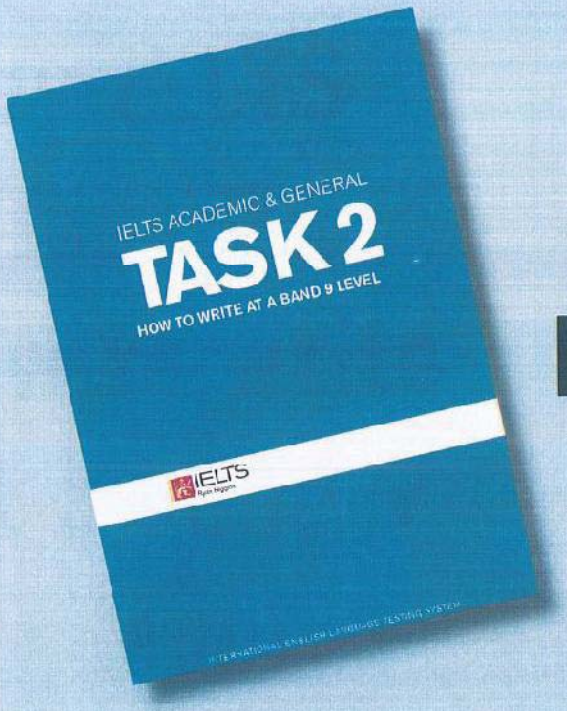
It refers to how rapidly or gradually information is shared.

Name the two categories that diagrams typically fall into.

Time-sensitive or cyclical diagrams and non-time sensitive diagrams

YOU ARE HALF WAY THERE!

You've maximized your score on Task 1, now do the same for Task 2!



Buy IELTS Task 2: How to write at a band 9 level

Get your copy in less than 2 minutes at

ieltswritingblog.com

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Born and raised in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, Ryan began his teaching career tutoring English to newly arrived Canadian immigrants. After finishing university, he relocated to Dubai in the summer of 2005 and started teaching IELTS essay writing at a number of international universities. His work with many students in preparation for their IELTS exams led him to realize that there were very few quality IELTS writing resources available free of charge online. With some encouragement from his students, he compiled all essential IELTS writing information into a series of tutorial videos and made these videos available for Internet viewing. Since then, Ryan's videos have been viewed over 4 million times and his IELTS writing strategies have been used with success the world over.

In 2007, Ryan relocated to Shanghai, China. He currently lives with his wife in Doha, Qatar.