* [Health](http://ieltsadvantage.com/2015/03/06/health-vocabulary/)
* [Environment](http://ieltsadvantage.com/2015/03/06/environment-vocabulary/)
* [Education](http://ieltsadvantage.com/2015/03/06/education-vocabulary/)
* Development
* Globalisation
* Public Transport
* Criminal Justice
* Youth Crime
* Government Spending
* Technology
* Traditional Culture
* International Aid
* The Environment
* Economics

**WRITING ESSAY - TASK 1**

## 1. Marking Criteria

There are four marking criteria for Task 1:

* Task Achievement
* Coherence and Cohesion
* Lexical Resource
* Grammatical Range and Accuracy

Each of these is worth 25% of your total mark.

Don’t worry if you don’t understand what these phrases mean, I will go through each of them in more detail below and explain what they mean in simpler language. You can access the official marking criteria [here](https://takeielts.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/IELTS_task_1_Writing_band_descriptors.pdf).

### Task Achievement

**Task Achievement** refers to your ability to answer the question properly. In order to do this you have to do all the things the question asks you to do and write a clear, well developed answer.

You will get a higher score if you:

* Select the main/key features of the graph, chart, map or process.
* Write a clear overview that includes the main/key features (main trends, differences, stages etc.) of the graph, chart, map or process.
* Support them with accurate detail.
* Write at least 150 words.

### Coherence and Cohesion

**Coherence** refers to your ability to connect your main ideas together so that they make sense and are easy to understand. This is mostly done at paragraph level. Are your paragraphs in a logical order? Is there one clear main idea in every paragraph? Is it easy to understand the main idea of each paragraph?

You will get a higher score for coherence if you:

* Introduce your essay by paraphrasing the question in the first paragraph.
* Separate your ideas into paragraphs.
* Making it clear which paragraph is your overview.
* Having very clear ideas in your overview.
* Supporting the main points in your overview in separate paragraphs.
* Making it clear what each paragraph is about.

**Cohesion** refers to the connection of ideas at sentence and paragraph level. Are your sentences and ideas linked together?

You will get a higher score for cohesion if you:

* Use a range of linking words when appropriate.
* Use linking words accurately.
* Do not over-use linking words.

### Lexical Resource

**Lexical resource** refers to your ability to use vocabulary both accurately and appropriately.

You will get a higher score for vocabulary if you:

* Paraphrase the question correctly.
* Vary your vocabulary using synonyms.
* Avoid vocabulary mistakes.
* Spell words correctly.
* Use appropriate vocabulary to describe trends, comparisons, stages, changes etc.

### Grammatical Range and Accuracy

This refers to your ability to write sentences with no mistakes and also use a range of grammatical structures.

You will get a higher score if you:

* Do not make [errors](http://ieltsadvantage.com/2015/04/20/ielts-grammar-mistakes/).
* Use a range of appropriate tenses.
* Use a range of appropriate structures.
* Use both simple and [complex sentences](http://ieltsadvantage.com/2015/03/27/ielts-writing-complex-sentence/).
* Use correct punctuation.

## 2. Paraphrase Question

Now that we know how the exam is marked we can give the examiners exactly what they want and prevent common mistakes that stop people getting a high score.

Our very first sentence in Task 1 should always be a paraphrase of the question. [Paraphrasing](http://ieltsadvantage.com/2015/03/31/paraphrase-ielts/)is when we rewrite phrase or sentence so that it has different words but keeps the same meaning. We can do this in a number of different ways, but the simplest way is to use synonyms.

For example:

**Question**: ‘The chart below shows the changes in three different areas of crime in Manchester city centre from 2003-2012.’

**Paraphrased**: ‘The line graph displays alterations for burglary, car theft and robbery in the centre of Manchester between 2003 and 2012.’

The synonyms we used:

So with a few simple synonyms we have paraphrased the sentence and shown the examiner that we can use this skill effectively and that we have a wide ranging vocabulary, thus two big ticks towards a high score.

This should be your very first paragraph and we should then skip a line to show the examiner that we are starting a new paragraph- **the overview**.

## 3. Overview

The [overview](http://ieltsadvantage.com/2015/05/13/ielts-task-1-overview/) is the most important paragraph in the whole essay and it is impossible to get a high score if you don’t write a good one.

The question for Academic Task 1 is always the same. It states:

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

We therefore need to provide a short summary of the main features. You do this in the overview paragraph by picking out 3-4 of the most significant things you can see and writing them in general terms. By general, I mean you do not support anything you see with data from the graph or chart, just write about what you can see at first glance.

A problem students often have is limiting themselves to just three or four things. There is so much information and it can all seem relevant.

When things are complicated in the IELTS exam, think of a way to simplify them. To make this task easier, think about this way: if someone asked you to tell them three things and three things only about the graph what would they be?Thinking this way stops you looking at all the data and focuses your mind on picking out the most important points.

With line graphs we should look out for what happens generally between the start date and the end date.

Let’s look at our example again and pick out the ‘**main features**.’



If I had to say just three general things about the graph above, they would be:

1. Burglary decreases dramatically.
2. Car theft increases steadily.
3. Robbery remains steady throughout the period.

That’s it. You don’t need to over-complicate it. Just find the three or four most obvious things and pick them out.

We are now ready to take our three main features and add them to our overview paragraph. An overview paragraph should normally be 2 sentences and state the main features in general terms. Never support the main features with data in the overview. Dates are fine, but don’t use any other numbers.

Our overview paragraph will look like this:

***The most noticeable trend is that burglary fell dramatically over the period. Car theft fluctuated until 2008, upon which it rose steadily; whereas the number of robberies remained relatively stable between 2003 and 2012.***

Again, this paragraph is very simple, clear and easy to read. Please see our [Task 1 grammar guide](http://ieltsadvantage.com/2015/03/10/ielts-writing-task-1-grammar-guide/) for more ways to describe general trends.

Now that we have finished our overview it is time to support it with more detail in the next two paragraphs.

## 4. Support Overview with Detail

We reported three main features in the overview and now we must take each of those features and describe them in more detail.

1. If we take robbery first we notice that it goes up a little first, then there is a big drop until 2008 when it goes up slightly and then remains steady.
2. Car theft goes up and down slightly (fluctuates) until 2008, when it rises steadily.
3. Robbery also fluctuates throughout the period but not by much. It rises slightly and drops, then remains steady  for a number of years, before rising and falling slightly again.

Now that we have looked at these in more detail we need to put them into sentences.

***Burglaries started at just below three and a half thousand in 2003 and apart from a small rise of around five hundred offences in 2004, fell drastically to just over one thousand incidents in 2008. 2009 saw a slight rise to just below fifteen hundred in 2009 and it remained in and around this figure until the end of the time period.***

***From 2003 to 2008 the number of car thefts shifted between just below two thousand five hundred and just over two thousand, before rising steadily to nearly three thousand in 2013. Over the entire period robbery never rose above one thousand and did not go under five hundred.***

## 5. Check Your Work

Question # 6- Should I write a conclusion for Task 1?

No. A conclusion is a summary of YOUR ideas and your opinion. Task 1 is simply reporting what you see, so there shouldn’t be any of your ideas or your opinion.

Instead of a conclusion you should write an overview.

The reason lots of people get confused about this is some teachers, books and even one British Council website call the overview a ‘conclusion’. It’s not a conclusion, it’s an overview.

Finally, it does not matter where you put the overview paragraph. I teach my students to put it after the introduction, but it is also fine to have it as your final paragraph.

Example:

There was a gradual rise in the price of oil.

There has been a sharp drop in the price of oil.

**Vocabulary for Writing task 1**

Possible adjectives

gradual

moderate

modest

sharp

dramatic

slight

steep

steady

significant

considerable

rapid

Possible nouns:

variation

decline

decrease

dip

drop

fall

peak

fluctuation

growth

increase

rise

slump

Possible verbs:

rise

jump

grow

climb

increase

rocket

fall

drop

decline

decrease

go down

plummet

plunge

Possible adverbs:

gradually

moderately

modestly

sharply

dramatically

slightly

steeply

steadily

significantly

considerably

rapidly

slowly

Summarising

IELTS writing task 1 is essentially a summarising task. Your overview paragraph should contain two or three sentences summarising the main features of the graph. In order to help you do this, here are some short phrases.

To summarise, the most marked change is….

Overall it is clear….

Overall the majority/minority….

In sum, the most noticeable trend is….

Don’t say ‘to conclude’. This is only for discursive essays.

Tenses

**Appropriate tenses**

Using the appropriate tenses in IELTS writing task 1 is essential if you want to get a high band score.

The key is to look at the title of the chart and the information contained on both axes to establish what time frame is used. This will help you establish what tense you should use.

Example:

If the time is one point in the past, for example January 1990, then we should use the past tense.

If it has projections for the future, for example 2045, we use future tenses.

It there is no time, we use present simple.

Below are a range of tenses that could be used in task 1. Remember, the tense you use will depend on the information displayed in the graph. This is not a complete list of tenses and an awareness of all the English tenses will help you achieve the IELTS score you need.

Present Perfect:

We use this tense generally to talk about an action that happened at an unspecified time before now. The exact time period is not important.

In writing task 1, we use this tense to talk about changes in data that have happened over a period of time.

Example

The price of oil has fallen by $5 a barrel every week since July.

Present Perfect Continuous

We use this tense to show that something started in the past and has continued up until now.

Example

Oil prices have been decreasing since July.

Future Perfect

We use this tense to state that something will be finished by a particular time in the future.

We often use it with ‘by’ or ‘in’.

Example

The price of oil will have reached $300 a barrel by 2020.

Past Simple

Use this tense to talk about an action that started and finished at a specific time in the past.

Example

The price of oil fell from $150 in Jan 2014 to $50 in Jan 2015.

Approximations, Percentages and Fractions

In many of the IELTS writing task 1 questions you will have to deal with percentages. This is a good opportunity to express these percentages in a different way and boost your score. A way of varying this language is to express them as fractions or proportions.

Remember that you should vary your language as much as possible in order to score high in the ‘lexical resource’ part of the test.

It is also fine to use approximations, for example, 49% can be expressed as nearly a half.

Below are a range of expressions that can be used to express percentages.

Fractions

73%- nearly three quarters

51%- just over a half

49%- just under a half

32%- nearly a third

3%- a tiny fraction

50%- exactly a half

26%- roughly one quarter

49%- around a half

24%- almost a quarter

77%- approximately three quarters

Proportions

70%- a large proportion

71%- a significant majority

15% a small minority

3%- an insignificant minority

**Task 2 – Writing**

The five most common IELTS Writing Task 2 questions are:

1. [Opinion](http://ieltsadvantage.com/2015/03/02/ielts-writing-task-2-agree-disagree-lesson/) (Agree or Disagree)
2. [Advantages and Disadvantages](http://ieltsadvantage.com/2015/05/24/ielts-advantages-and-disadvantages-lesson/)
3. [Problem and Solution](http://ieltsadvantage.com/2015/05/08/ielts-problem-and-solution/)
4. [Discussion](http://ieltsadvantage.com/2015/03/18/writing-task-2-discussion-essay-lesson/) (Discuss both view)
5. Two-part Question

## Opinion Questions (Agree or Disagree)

**Typical Question Words**–

What is your opinion?

Do you agree or disagree?

To what extent do you agree or disagree?

Direct question.

**Example Question**–

Some people believe that unpaid community service should be a compulsory part of high school programmes (for example working for a charity, improving the neighborhood or teaching sports to younger children).

To what extent do you agree or disagree?

### Structure

[**Introduction**](http://ieltsadvantage.com/2015/03/05/how-to-write-introduction-ielts-writing-task-2/)

Sentence 1- [Paraphrase](http://ieltsadvantage.com/2015/03/31/paraphrase-ielts/)Question

Sentence 2- Thesis Statement (It is agreed…/It is disagreed…/This essay agrees/disagrees…)

Sentence 3- Outline Sentence (This essay will discuss….)

**Main Body Paragraph 1**

Sentence 1- Topic Sentence

Sentence 2- Explain Topic Sentence

Sentence 3- Example

**Main Body Paragraph 2**

Sentence 1- Topic Sentence

Sentence 2- Explain Topic Sentence

Sentence 3- Example

[**Conclusion**](http://ieltsadvantage.com/2015/06/14/ielts-writing-conclusions/)

Sentence 1- Summary and opinion

## Advantages and Disadvantages Questions

**Typical Question Words**

Discuss the advantages and disadvantages.

Discuss the advantages and disadvantages and give your own opinion.

**Example Question**

Computers are being used more and more in education.

Discuss the advantages and disadvantages and give your own opinion.

### Structure

**Introduction**

Sentence 1- Paraphrase Question

Sentence 2- Outline Sentence

**Main Body Paragraph 1**

Sentence 1- State One Advantage

Sentence 2- Expand/Explain Advantage

Sentence 3- Example

Sentence 4- Result

**Main Body Paragraph 2**

Sentence 1- State One Disadvantage

Sentence 2- Expand/Explain Disadvantage

Sentence 3- Example

Sentence 4- Result

**Conclusion**

Sentence 1- Summary

Sentence 2- Opinion

### Sample Answer

It is argued that technology is playing an every increasing role in schools and universities. This essay will firstly, discuss student freedom as one of the main advantages of this and secondly, outline decreasing levels of face to face contact as one of the main disadvantages.

One of the principle advantages of an increase in the use electronic devices in education is the autonomy it provides students. Students have the freedom to focus on whatever topic or subject they want and study it in depth through the internet. A prime example of this is the amount of online university courses available to students, covering a myriad of subjects, that up until recently were unavailable to most learners. This has resulted in more people studying third level degrees than ever before, at a pace and schedule that suits them.

The main disadvantage associated with increasing use of technology in education is the decrease in face to face interaction between students. Students spend more time looking at computer screens by themselves than interacting with each other. For instance, the recent explosion in smart phone use has been at the expense of genuine human interaction. This results in soft skills, such as verbal communication and empathy, being effected.

In conclusion, the benefits technology brings to education, such as student autonomy, must be weighed against the drawbacks, such as negative effects on human interaction. Overall, the educational benefits outweigh the disadvantages because human beings will always want human contact and most people will not solely use IT for education.

## Discuss Both Views Question (Discussion Essay)

**Typical Question Words**

Discuss both points of view and give your opinion.

**Example Question**

Computers are being used more and more in education. Some people say that this is a positive trend, while others argue that it is leading to negative consequences.

Discuss both sides of this argument and then give your own opinion.

### Structure

**Introduction**

Sentence 1- Paraphrase Question and/or state both view points.

Sentence 2- Thesis Statement

Sentence 3- Outline Sentence

**Main Body Paragraph 1**

Sentence 1- State first viewpoint

Sentence 2- Discuss first viewpoint

Sentence 3- Reason why you agree or disagree with viewpoint

Sentence 4- Example to support your view

**Main Body Paragraph 2**

Sentence 1- State second viewpoint

Sentence 2- Discuss second viewpoint

Sentence 3- Reason why you agree or disagree with viewpoint

Sentence 4- Example to support your view

**Conclusion**

Sentence 1- Summary

Sentence 2- State which one is better or more important

### Sample Answer

There is an ever increasing use of technology, such as tablets and laptops, in the classroom. It is often argued that this is a positive development, whilst others disagree and think it will lead to adverse ramifications. This essay agrees that an increase in technology is beneficial to students and teachers. This essay will discuss both points of view.

It is clear that the internet has provided students with access to more information than ever before. Moreover, learners have the ability to research and learn about any subject at the touch of a button. It is therefore agreed that technology is a very worthwhile tool for education. Wikipedia is a prime example, where students can simply type in any keyword and gain access to in-depth knowledge quickly and easily.

However, many disagree and feel that technology deprives people of real human interaction. Human interaction teaches people valuable skills such as discourse, debate and empathy. Despite this, human interaction is still possible through the internet and this essay disagrees technology should be dismissed for this reason. For instance, Skype and Facebook make it possible for people to interact in ways that were never before possible.

While the benefits of technology, particularly the internet, allow students to tap in to limitless sources of information, some still feel that people should be wary of this new phenomena and not allow it to curb face to face interaction. However, as long as we are careful to keep in mind the importance of human interaction in education, the educational benefits are clearly positive.

## Problem and Solution Questions

**Typical Question Words**

Problem and solution.

Cause and solution.

**Example Question**

Students are becoming more and more reliant on computers.

What are some of the problems associated with reliance on computers, and what are some of the possible solutions?

### Structure

**Introduction**

Sentence 1- Paraphrase Question

Sentence 2- Outline Sentence

**Main Body Paragraph 1**

Sentence 1- State Problem

Sentence 2- Explain problem

Sentence 3- Result

Sentence 4- Example

**Main Body Paragraph 2**

Sentence 1- State Solution

Sentence 2- Explain Solution

Sentence 3- Example

**Conclusion**

Sentence 1- Summary

Sentence 2- Recommendation or Prediction

### Sample Answer

Learners are becoming ever more dependent on technology, such as the internet and mobile devices. This essay will discuss one of the main problems associated with dependence on computers and suggest a viable solution.

The principal problem with over reliance on technology, such as tablets and computers, is plagiarism. Students often use search engines to answer a question and simply copy the text from a website, rather than thinking about the question. This practice is not only prohibited in schools and universities, but also stunts a student’s intellectual development. For example, many teachers complain that students copy web pages straight from Wikipedia word for word rather than giving a reasoned answer to their questions.

A solution to this worrying problem is asking students to email their answers to teachers and teachers using anti-plagiarism software to detect copying. Moreover, students would be made aware of this practice and this would inspire them to answer questions using their own words, rather than someone else’s. For instance, many universities already use this kind software to scan course work for plagiarism and it could be extended to include all homework, by learners in both secondary and tertiary education.

In summary, one of the main problems with over-use of technology in education is plagiarism and this can be solved through the use of plagiarism detection software. It is predicted that more and more students’ will email their work to their teacher and this work will be scrutinised for plagiarism.

**For more detail on how to answer problem and solution questions please visit our**[problem and solution lesson](http://ieltsadvantage.com/2015/05/08/ielts-problem-and-solution/)**.**

## Two-Part Questions

**Typical Question Words**

There will normally be a statement and they will then ask you to answer to separate questions.

**Example Question**

As most people spend a major part of their adult life at work, job satisfaction is an important element of individual wellbeing.

What factors contribute to job satisfaction?

How realistic is the expectation of job satisfaction for all workers?

### Structure

**Introduction**

Sentence 1- Paraphrase Question

Sentence 2- Outline Sentence (mention both questions)

**Main Body Paragraph 1**

Sentence 1- Answer first question directly

Sentence 2- Explain why

Sentence 3- Further explain

Sentence 4- Example

**Main Body Paragraph 2**

Sentence 1- Answer second question directly

Sentence 2- Explain why

Sentence 3- Further explain

Sentence 4- Example

**Conclusion**

Sentence 1- Summary

### Sample Answer

As the majority of adults spend most of their time at work, being content with your career is a crucial part of a person’s health and happiness. This essay will first discuss which elements lead to job satisfaction and it will then address the question of how likely it is that everyone can be happy with their job.

The two most important things that lead to someone being satisfied at work are being treated with respect by managers and being compensated fairly. If those more senior than you respect you as a person and the job you are doing then you feel like you are valued. A fair salary and benefits are also important considerations because if you feel you are being underpaid you will either resent your bosses or look for another job. There two factors came top of a recent job satisfaction survey conducted by Monster.com, that found that 72% of people were pleased with their current role if their superiors regularly told them they were appreciated.

With regards to the question of happiness for all workers, I think this is and always will be highly unlikely. The vast majority of people fail to reach their goals and end up working in a post they don’t really care about in return for a salary. This money is just enough to pay their living expenses which often means they are trapped in a cycle of disenchantment. For example, The Times recently reported that 89% of office workers would leave their jobs if they did not need the money.

In conclusion, being satisfied with your trade or profession is an important part of one’s wellbeing and respect from one’s colleagues and fair pay can improve your level of happiness, however job satisfaction of all workers is an unrealistic prospect.

**How to write Task 2**

##  1. Question Analysis

You must first understand the question to know exactly what the examiner is looking for. One of the biggest mistakes students make is not answering the question properly. If you do not answer the question fully, you can’t score higher than a Band 5.

In order to do this you must first identify the question type, then identify the keywords in the question and finally identify the instructions words in order to find out what the examiner wants you to do with the question. We will look at these **skills** in more detail below.

##     2. Planning

The students who get the highest marks plan before they write and they often plan for up to 10 minutes. Planning helps you organise your ideas and structure before you write, saving you time and helping you write a clear essay.

##     3. Introduction

The introduction should tell the examiner what the rest of the essay is about and also answer the question directly. This tells the examiner that you know what you are doing straight away and helps you write your main body paragraphs.

##    4. Main Body Paragraphs

This is where you give the examiner more detail. You do this by stating your main points and supporting these with explanations and relevant examples.

##    5. Conclusion

Here you provide a summary of what you have already said in the rest of the essay.

That’s it you’re done!

* **5 Common Task 1 Mistakes That Stop You Getting Over a Band 6**

## Not Writing a Clear Overview

This is the most important part of your whole essay.

The overview is a short paragraph that tells the reader 2 or 3 of the most significant things about the chart, graph, table etc. It should contain no data and instead describe the main features in general terms.

If you look at the [IELTS Marking Criteria](https://takeielts.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/IELTS_task_1_Writing_band_descriptors.pdf) for Task 1 it states that in order to get a Band 7 candidates must ‘present a clear overview of main trends, differences or stages.’ In other words, if you don’t write a clear overview you can’t get a Band 7 or above.

Click the following link for more information on how to [write an effective overview](http://ieltsadvantage.com/2015/05/13/ielts-task-1-overview/).

## Writing About Everything

Every Academic Task 1 question states ‘**Summarise the information by selecting and reporting the main features..**.’. ‘Summarise’ means that you only mention the main points, or as the question states ‘the main features.’

Lots of students try to write about every piece of information they see. This normally leads to a very disorganised essay and often means that you run out of time, or even worse, run over time and fail to complete Task 2.

Always keep in mind that the task is as much about what you do **not**write as you **do** write. This is often a case of prioritising. I tell my students when writing the overview that they can only tell the examiner 3 things and three things only about the graph and this prioritisation helps them write a more effective overview.

## **Over-complicating the Question**

The examiners know that you have never seen the graph or chart before and that you only have 20 minutes to write about it, so they are not expecting miracles. To help you, the graphs are much simpler that you think. Look at the graph below and try to spot the three general trends. Try not to get caught up in the detail, just focus on what is happening generally from the start date to the end.

## Not Organizing Ideas Logically

The most logical way to organise a Task 1 essay is:

Paragraph 1- Introduction

Paragraph 2- Overview of main features

Paragraph 3- Details of main features 1

Paragraph 4- Details of main features 2

You could hand a Band 9 answer to a stranger and they would be able to read it once and then be able to roughly draw the graph or chart. Paragraphing and grouping ideas together logically helps the reader understand everything more easily. See our lesson on [Task 1 charts](http://ieltsadvantage.com/2015/03/09/ielts-writing-task-1-charts-lesson/) for more details about the structure above.

## Describing Data Incorrectly

Describing general trends and changes in data requires very specific grammar structures and vocabulary.

The most common mistake is probably trying to use grammar or vocabulary you are not sure about. Remember that the grammar and meaning need to be correct, or you risk losing marks.

You should also avoid describing data too precisely. For example, if you look at the figure for ‘Car Theft’ in 2003, it would be better to say ‘approximately/around 2300’ or ‘just under 2500’ than ‘2300’ because we don’t know what the figures are exactly from just looking at the graph.

**Introduction paragraph**

1. **Talking too generally about the topic.**

Most of these essays start off with ‘Nowadays……’ or ‘In modern life….’ followed by general information about the topic. In my opinion, this is the worst start you can possibly make. Remember that you are supposed to answer the question not write generally about the topic.

1. **Not including a thesis statement**

This is the most important sentence in the essay. Not including one will lose you marks in several different ways. I will tell you more about this below.

1. **Not outlining what you are going to do**

If you don’t include a sentence outlining what your essay will say, the examiner doesn’t really know what you are going to write about in the rest of your essay. This will also lose you marks. I’ll show you how to write an outline sentence below.

1. **Trying to write a ‘hook’ or be entertaining**

Remember this is an IELTS exam, not a university essay. There are no extra points for being interesting, in fact being boring will probably help you. This will help you avoid ‘flowery’ language.

1. **Using an informal style**

Know your audience. You are expected to write in an academic style.

## **Good and Bad Examples**

**Question: There is a good deal of evidence that increasing car use is contributing to global warming and having other undesirable effects on people’s health and well-being.**

**To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?**

### **Good Introduction**

Rising global temperatures and human health and fitness issues are often viewed as being caused by the expanding use of automobiles. This essay agrees that increasing use of motor vehicles is contributing to rising global temperatures and certain health issues. Firstly, this essay will discuss the production of greenhouse gases by vehicles and secondly, it will discuss other toxic chemicals released by internal combustion engines.

### **Bad Introduction**

Nowadays, cars are a very popular way of getting around. Day by day many more people drive cars around but others feel that they cause global warming. Global warming is one of the most serious issues in modern life. They also affect people’s health and well-being which is also a serious issue.

As you can see the bad example talks about the topic very generally, copies words and phrases from the question and doesn’t include a thesis statement or outline statement.

If your introductions look something like this, don’t worry. Most of my students write introductions a lot like this when they first start in my class and the structure below always helps them fix any problems and write very effective introductions.

## **Structure of a Good Introduction**

If you use this structure you will not only score higher marks but you will also save time in the exam. If you practice enough, introductions will become easy and you will do them in just a few minutes. This will leave you lots of time to focus on the main body paragraphs where you can pick up lots of mark.

An IELTS writing task 2 opinion essay should have three sentences and these three sentences should be:

1. [Paraphrase](http://ieltsadvantage.com/2015/03/31/paraphrase-ielts/)question
2. Thesis statement
3. Outline statement

That’s it. Simple! Let’s look at each sentence in more detail.

### **Paraphrase Question**

Paraphrasing means stating the question again, but with different words so that it has the same meaning. We do this by using synonyms and flipping the order of the sentences around.

**Question: There is a good deal of evidence that increasing car use is contributing to global warming and having other undesirable effects on people’s health and well-being.**

**Paraphrase**: Rising global temperatures and human health and fitness issues are often viewed as being caused by the expanding use of automobiles.

The synonyms I’ve used are:

Increasing- expanding

Car use- use of automobiles

Global warming- rising global temperatures

People’s health and well-being- human health and fitness

As you can see, I then switched the order of the sentence around.

I have therefore demonstrated to the examiner that I can paraphrase and have a wide range of vocabulary. These are two of the things that the examiner is specifically looking for and you will gain marks for including them.

You should practice this with past paper questions.

### **Thesis Statement**

This is the most important sentence in your essay. This is your main idea and I often describe it to students as how you feel about the whole issue in one sentence. It tells the examiner that you have understood the question and will lead to a clear and coherent essay.

Let’s look at the thesis sentence from the previous example:

**Thesis statement**: This essay agrees that increasing use of motor vehicles is contributing to rising global temperatures and certain health issues.

It is always just one sentence long so you will have to practice summing up your opinion in one sentence. It should also address the micro-keywords and not the topic in general.

You should start your thesis statement with:

This essay agrees that….. or this essay disagrees that….. (Opinion essays)

The main cause(s) of this issue is….. (Causes and solutions)

The principal advantage(s) is (xxxxx) and the main disadvantage is (xxxxxx). (Advantage and disadvantages).

For a discussion (of two points of view) essay you should state both points of view clearly.

Let’s look at another example:

**Some aspects of celebrity culture have a bad influence on young people.**

**To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?**

To keep things simple, we have two options-

1. Agree that some aspects of celebrity culture have a bad influence on young people.
2. Disagree that some aspects of celebrity culture have a bad influence on young people.

My essay will argue that celebrity culture **does**have a bad influence and my thesis statement will there be:

This essay agrees that the some famous people’s lifestyles have a detrimental effect on the youth of today.

I have stated my opinion in one sentence and used synonyms to make sure I don’t just repeat the question.

Thesis statements are very important but only in question that ask you for your opinion. Some IELTS questions do not ask you for your opinion and in these cases you can leave it out.

### **Outline Statement**

Now that you have paraphrased the question and told the examiner what you think in your thesis sentence, you are now going to tell the examiner what you will discuss in the main body paragraphs. In other words, you will outline what the examiner will read in the rest of the essay. This should be one sentence only.

Example:

**Question: There is a good deal of evidence that increasing car use is contributing to global warming and having other undesirable effects on people’s health and well-being.**

**Outline statement**: Firstly, this essay will discuss the production of greenhouse gases by vehicles and secondly, it will discuss other toxic chemicals released by internal combustion engines.

So what I have done is just look at my main body paragraphs and wrote about what they contain. You should have only one main idea per paragraph. In this essay, I have only two main body paragraphs, so I only need to say two things in the outline statement.

Main body paragraph 1- production of greenhouse gases by cars.

Main body paragraph 2- toxic chemical produced by car engines.

Again, your main body paragraphs should have only **one** main idea so it should be easy to spot these and then write a sentence about them.

For advantages and disadvantages essays and problem and solution essays you could write something like this:

**Advantages and disadvantages**: this essay will first discuss the (main advantage(s)) followed by an analysis of the (main disadvantage(s)).

**Problem and Solution:**This essay will analyse the principal problem(s) and offer solutions to this issue.

**Final Example**

**Question: Learning to manage money is one of the key aspects to adult life. How in your view can individuals best learn to manage their money?**

**Good answer**: One of the keys to adulthood is appreciating how to budget your finances. It is clear that the best way someone can learn this, is by managing money during childhood. Firstly, the essay will discuss the importance of parental involvement during childhood and secondly, the essay will look at the importance of having a part time job during childhood.

As you can see, the above introduction follows the structure I laid out above.

**Conclusion tips:**

1. **Never write any new ideas in your conclusion.** A conclusion should always simply restate the ideas you have in the rest of the essay. New ideas should be in the main body and not in the conclusion.
2. **Make sure you answer the question in the conclusion.** The conclusion should state what you think about the question and make it clear how you feel about the issue.
3. **Vary your language.** Just because you are restating the ideas you have in the rest of your essay, doesn’t mean you use the same language. Instead you show the examiner you have a wide vocabulary by [paraphrasing](http://ieltsadvantage.com/2015/03/31/paraphrase-ielts/).
4. **Don’t try to include everything**. You are not required to go into detail, you have already done that in your main body paragraphs. Instead you will just summarise your main points.
5. **Always write one.** It is very difficult to get a good score in task 2 if you haven’t finished your essay with a conclusion. Even if you are running out of time, make sure you write one.
6. **Two sentences are enough.**

First you should start with a linking phrase, but some are better than others . Here are some examples:

* Finally
* In a nutshell
* In general
* In conclusion
* To conclude

Finally isn’t really suitable because it indicates that you are making a final point and therefore a new idea. Finallybelongs in the main body of your essay, not the conclusion.

There are two elements to a good conclusion:

1. Restating the main points of your essay
2. Varying your vocabulary by paraphrasing

Luckily we have already stated our main points in the introduction, so all we have to do is look back at the conclusion and paraphrase this.

Common mistakes:

1. **Use of the word ‘the’**

We use **the**:

* when there is only **one** of something in a particular area: the government, the police, the bridge, the river, the hospital
* when there is only one in the entire world: the internet, the environment, the ozone layer, the atmosphere
* with cardinal numbers: the first, the second, the third
* with superlatives: the worst, the shortest, the lowest, the most beautiful, the least impressive
* with places where the name refers to a group of islands or states: the USA, the UK, the Maldives, the Middle East, the United Arab Emirates
* before nouns which describe general things: exercise is good for***the body***,***the motorbike***is the most common form of transport in Asia, the role of***the teacher***has changed in recent years
* before abstract nouns used to describe a situation, process, quality or a change: over the years***the development***of the town accelerated,***the frequency***of violent crime decreased over the period,***the improvement***in living standards

We don’t use **the**:

* to talk generally we drop the word ‘the’ and use the plural: dogs don’t like cats, people with dyslexia have reading problems, Japanese cars are very reliable, German products are very high quality.
* with a single place or country: Ireland, China, Vietnam, Europe, South America
1. **Countable and Uncountable Nouns**

Some nouns in English are uncountable and will therefore always be in the singular form and never plural. Some common nouns that students often get wrong in the IELTS test are:

* Advice
* Advertising
* Food
* Information
* Knowledge
* Education
* Money
* Traffic
* Shopping
* Travel
* Entertainment
* Happiness
* Literature
* Work
* Research

If a noun is uncountable you **cannot** use:

* a plural verb: ~~There were many traffic in the city~~.
* a number: ~~three advice, four food~~
* a few, a couple, many, a number of: ~~a number of literature, a few research~~
* a/an: ~~a happiness, an entertainment~~
1. **Noun Verb Agreement**

The verb must agree with the noun. If you use a plural noun, you must use a plural verb and vice versa.

Example:

~~There is some dogs outside.~~

There **is** some **food** in the kitchen.

~~Here are some homework for you.~~

There **are** some **eggs** in the kitchen.

1. **–ing or to + infinitive**

We use **to + infinitive verb** after the following verbs: learn how, would like, want, seem, refuse, promise, prepare, offer, learn, hope, help, deserve, decide, afford, and ask.

Example:

It is important to **learn how to speak** English

Most people cannot **afford to go** on holiday every year.

I **would like to study** overseas.

Note: ‘like’ can be followed by –ing **or** to + infinitive.

We use **verb–ing** after the following verbs: suggest, recommend, practice, mind, keep, involve, imagine, give up, finish, enjoy, deny, consider, carry on, and avoid.

Example:

I would **recommend checking** your writing for mistakes.

You should **avoid drinking** coffee after 6pm.

I’ve **finished writing** my essay.

1. **Use Of Articles Before Noun Phrases**

You should include a/an before adjective singular noun combinations: a massive improvement, a steady increase, an overall majority, a very small percentage, a really strong argument.

Some exceptions include the word ‘of’ after the noun phrase: a wide range of, an equal number of, a large/small number of, a small/large/equal proportion of.

Exceptions: **quite a**few people,***to***a certain extent/degree

1. **Use of Commas**

In the IELTS writing test we often use phrases called ‘discourse markers’ or ‘liking phrases’ to link our ideas together, such as on the one hand, on the other hand, however, for example, nevertheless, firstly, secondly, in conclusion, in summary.

We normally use a comma after a discourse marker that introduces a sentence:

* Firstly, the main cause of pollution is motor vehicles.
* On the one hand, motor vehicles are said to be the main cause.
* However, pollution from industry may also be to blame.
* To sum up, the causes of pollution are mostly man-made.

We also use commas on either side of discourse markers in the middle of sentences:

* Fossil fuels are mostly to blame for global warming, however, some people believe this is a natural process.
* Fossil fuels are mostly to blame for global warming, for example, from cars and factories.
1. **Verb Tenses**

Always consider which of the following tense you should use:

* Present simple:
	+ things that are always true (the sky is blue)
	+ general statements of fact (I was born in 1982)
	+ habits (I go to sleep every night at 11pm)
* Present continuous:
	+ an action at the moment of speaking
	+ something in progress this week, month or year
	+ to talk about a future planned event
* Present Perfect:
	+ an action that took place at an indefinite time in the past
	+ an action that was repeated before now
	+ an action that began in the past and continues until now
* Present Perfect Continuous:
	+ to show the duration of something that happened in the past and continues until now
	+ a general activity in progress recently
* Past Simple
	+ action that began in the past and finished in the past
* Past Continuous
	+ talk about an action that was happening in the past when another occurred
	+ an action that was in progress at a specific time in the past
* Past Perfect
	+ talk about something that was completed before another activity or another time in the past
* Past Perfect Continuous
	+ talk about duration of activity that was in progress before another event in the past
	+ an activity in progress that is recent to another time or activity in the past
* Future Simple
	+ to predict or plan for the future
	+ to express a willingness to do something
* Future Continuous
	+ an action that will be in progress at a time in the future
* Future Perfect
	+ an action that will be completed before another time or event in the future
* Future Perfect Continuous
	+ the duration of an action that will be in progress before another time or event in the future
1. **Prepositions After Adjectives and Nouns**

Students often get confused about which prepositions to use after adjectives and nouns. Here are some common expressions:

**At**:

* Bad **at** (something)
* Good **at** (something)
* Surprised **at** (something)

**About or with**:

* Pleased **about** (something)
* Pleased **with** (someone)
* Angry **about** (something)
* Angry **with** (someone)
* Disappointed **about** (something)
* Disappointed **with** (someone)
* Worried **about**(something **or** someone)

**In**:

* rise in
* decrease in
* increase in
* fall in
* drop in

**Between**:

* difference between

**Of**:

* advantage/disadvantage of
* example of
* number of
* percentage of
* use of
1. **Apostrophes**

We use apostrophes to shorten words or make contractions:

* Cannot-Can’t
* Do not- Don’t
* I will- I’ll

Contractions are normally used in spoken English and should therefore not be used in the academic writing tasks.

We can also use apostrophes to show possession:

* John’s book
* Mary’s brother

We don’t use apostrophes with possessive pronouns such as:

* The dog has broken **its**
* The book is not **theirs** it’s **ours**.
1. **Common Spelling Mistakes**

Some common spelling mistakes:

* to or too
* there or their
* though or through
* programme
* accommodation
* advertisement
* beginning
* business
* commercial
* country
* environment
* Wednesday
* February
* government
* occurred
* practice

SPEAKING TEST

# IELTS Speaking Part 1- Dos and Don’ts

Speaking Part 1 lasts between 4-5 minutes and you will be asked questions about familiar topics, such as:

* Your job/studies
* Your family
* Your home
* Your hometown
* Your hobbies

Notice that these questions are all about **you**. It is considered easier than the other two parts because it is much easier to talk about yourself than more abstract topics, but that doesn’t mean it is not important.

**Below are 5 Dos and Don’ts to make sure that you start your Speaking test in the best possible way.**

## Do # 1- Know What to Expect

You will probably be a little nervous and you don’t want any surprises that will make you even more anxious, so you must be aware of exactly what will happen when you walk into the room.

**Before Part 1 begins four things will happen.**

1. The examiner will introduce themselves and ask you what your name is. You can simply reply ‘My name’s \_\_\_\_\_\_\_’. Make sure that you use the contraction ‘name’s’ rather than ‘name is’. This will remind you to use contractions (e.g. I’m, We’d, they’ll) in the rest of the test.
2. The examiner will then ask you ‘What can I call you?’. You can simply say ‘You can call me\_\_\_\_\_\_\_’. If you have an English name, it is fine to use it, but make sure that you pronounce it correctly. If you can’t say your own name properly, it does not create the best first impression. If unsure, just use your normal name.
3. They will then ask you where you are from. Simply state “I’m from\_\_\_\_\_”. There is no need for you to give any extra information about your answers at this stage.
4. The examiner will finally ask to see your identification. Show it to them and then the test can begin.

By knowing these four things will happen you will be more confident and start the exam well.

## Do # 2- Create a Good First Impression

My students often ask me, if they smile, are friendly and give the examiner good eye contact, will they get a higher mark. The answer is no and yes.

There is nothing in the marking criteria which says that being nice, or looking the examiner in the eye will improve your grade. However, being confident helps you because it will have an effect on your answers.

If you look at the floor and give the impression that you would rather be anywhere in the world apart from in the room with the examiner, you will normally give very short monotone answers and this will lower your score.

However, if you are open and friendly with the examiner, you are more likely to give natural sounding answers.

Don’t overdo the eye contact thing. It feels really strange when someone looks you straight in the eye for 15 minutes. Pretend that you are having a normal conversation with a friend. If you were looking at the floor the entire time, a friend would ask you if you were OK. If you were staring them dead in the eye, they would get a bit freaked out.

Pretend it is just a normal conversation and you will be fine.

## Do # 3- Pretend You’re Interested in the Questions

Let’s face it, most IELTS questions are really boring. If you listen to someone answer a boring question you will notice one thing- their voice is monotone i.e. it does not go up or down in pitch at all, it sounds very flat. If you speak like this you will get a lower mark for pronunciation because one of the crucial factors you will be tested on is intonation.

When native English speakers talk, their voice naturally falls and rises depending on how they feel about what they are saying.

Imagine you are late for class, you walk into the room and the teacher says to you in a falling tone ‘Sit down, please.’ They are probably telling you, through their intonation, that they are not very happy with your lack of punctuality. However, if they said it with a rising tone at the start, they would probably be telling you they don’t mind that you are late and are happy to see you.

Similarly, if you pretend that you are interested in what the examiner is saying your intonation should become more varied. However, be careful not to overdo it and make your voice really high, or really low because you will sound like a crazy person.

Listening to native speakers talk and copying their intonation will give you a good idea of what natural intonation sounds like.

## Do # 4- Extend Your Answers

There is no set amount of words or sentences that you should use in Part 1.

They shouldn’t be too short because you want to show the examiner that you can actually use English, so ‘I’m a student.’ is not really long enough.

However, they should not be too long either, because Part 1 is on familiar topics (family, work, hobbies etc.) and you don’t normally talk for 2 minutes when someone asks you where you are from. Also, you will have lots of opportunities to give longer answers in Parts 2 and 3.

As a general rule, if you only give a single sentence answer, with a single clause like ‘I’m from Ireland.’, then your answer is too short. I also don’t think Part 1 answers should ever have more than three sentences. Somewhere in between is just right.

## Do # 5- Practice

It is a very bad idea to prepare memorised answers before your speaking test, but because Part 1 is very predictable, you should practice the familiar topics mentioned above in number one.

Try recording yourself and then listen back and think about the following:

1. Could you improve the vocabulary?
2. Did you make any grammar mistakes that could be fixed?
3. Did you speak fluently or did you speak at an unnatural speed?
4. How was your intonation?
5. Did you extend your answer enough?
6. Did you speak clearly?

Try again and keep practicing until you are really confident about talking about the common topics.

See my article on [Part 1 sample answers](http://ieltsadvantage.com/2015/05/18/ielts-speaking-topics-part-1/) for ideas.

## Don’t #1- Give Yes/No Answers

This might sound very obvious, but you would be surprised how many people simply answer with ‘Yes’ or ‘No.’ This is probably because many of the questions would naturally lead to a yes or no answer, but you must remember that you are in a test and you have to show the examiner how good your English is.

Giving yes or no answers does not allow the examiner to judge your ability and you will get a low mark no matter how good your English is.

Some people give yes or no answers because they are very nervous and they want the test to be over as soon as possible. The examiner is not there to trick you and most of them are nice people who want you to do your best, so don’t be afraid to tell them you are a little nervous and this will normally relieve the tension.

## Don’t # 2- Go Off Topic

Some students try to tell you their life story or the entire history of their hometown when you ask their name and where they are from. Remember that these are very simple questions and if you have given more than 3-4 sentences you are probably giving irrelevant details.

For example, I recently asked a girl what she did in her free time and she told me everything there was to know about badminton. I did not ask about the rules, history, great players, positives and negatives of the sport, just which sport she liked and why.

## Don’t # 3- Give No Answer

You don’t get to choose the question and if you don’t know the answer to a question, or you simply don’t like the question, you don’t have a choice- you must answer it.

Remember that Part 1 is about YOU. There will be no question you don’t understand because they will all be about you.

If you don’t understand one word in a question, it is acceptable to ask the examiner to explain what that one word means. It is also acceptable to ask the examiner to repeat the question if you didn’t quite understand what they said. However, do not abuse this privilege and use it for every question; only use it when absolutely necessary.

If you really have no idea, be honest with the examiner and tell them you don’t really know and then have a guess. It is not an examination of your knowledge, it is a test of your English, so it is perfectly acceptable to make something up if you are really stuck.

## Don’t # 4- Speak Very Quietly

This is one of the most annoying things for the examiner because no matter how good your English is, if we can’t hear you, we can’t give you a high score.

This has a lot to do with confidence and shyness. Make sure that you are not talking to the floor and speak a little louder than normally. The examiner will also be recording the test, so it has to be loud enough for the recording device to pick up your voice.

Try recording yourself and play it back. If you can’t hear yourself clearly then you need to increase the volume of your voice a little more.

## Don’t # 5- Be a Perfectionist

The examiner knows that you are speaking in a non-native language and does not expect perfection. Even people who get a 9 make small mistakes, and people who get Band 7 and 8 make quite a few mistakes.

If you are constantly thinking about the perfect grammar and vocabulary, it will reduce your fluency and pronunciation. Fluency and pronunciation make up 50% of your marks, so there is no point in trying to use perfect grammar and vocabulary, if you are losing half your marks in the process.

Speak as naturally as possible, with a focus on speaking at a natural speed and clear pronunciation and the grammar and vocabulary will look after itself.

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# IELTS Speaking Part 2 Strategy

This post will help you give better answers in part 2 of the IELTS speaking test.

In IELTS speaking part 2 you will be given a topic or cue card similar to this:

* Describe a plant grown in your country. You should say
– what the plant is
– where it is grown
– why you like or dislike it
and explain why it is important to your country.

You will have 1 minute to make notes and then will be asked to speak for between 1-2 minutes.

Speaking for 2 minutes on an unfamiliar topic scares most IELTS students and that’s why IELTS speaking part 2 is one of the most feared parts of the exam. The problem seems to be running out of things to say or not knowing what to say because you are unfamiliar with the cue card suggestions.

To overcome this problem, I have developed a strategy to help students and it has proved very successful.

A common error is thinking you have to talk about exactly what is written on the card. You don’t! Having spoken to several IELTS examiners and students who achieved very high marks in their speaking test, I can assure you that you don’t have to cover everything on the card. The band descriptors also don’t mention anything about answering all the suggested parts of task 2.

Following the suggested sentences on the card is fine and many candidates do very well following them but others run out of ideas. More importantly, if you have a structure to follow for every question you can practice and prepare more effectively.

My strategy is to talk about what you feel comfortable talking about. In other words, talk about the things you think will get you the highest marks. If you like the suggestions on the card, then talk about them. But if you don’t, or you want some extra things to talk about, then follow the strategy below.

When you get the cue card you will be given one minute to write down some ideas. You are going to use this time wisely by using the following structure. On the piece of paper provided write down five headings with a little space between each one.

Introduction
Past
Description
Opinion
Future

Now you will start to write keywords beside each of these headings. Let’s look at each in a little more detail.

**Introduction**

Start off by saying ‘I’d like to talk about (X).’ Then say ‘I chose this topic because…’ and you will be able to say why you choose this topic. If you can’t think of a reason just make one up, although it’s always better to talk about real experiences.

**Past**

Now pause and use a linking word like ‘anyway’ or ‘anyhow’ to transition into talking about the past. This will allow you to demonstrate that you are confident using a range of past structures. For example-

Used to + infinitive to talk about past habits or states that are now finished.
Would + infinitive to describe past habits.
Past simple to talk about things you did in the past that you no longer do or are no longer true.
Past continuous to talk about the background of a story or how you felt at a particular time.
Past perfect to say something happened before something else in the past.

**Description**

Now pause and say ‘So let me tell you about (X) in a little more detail.’ This is your opportunity to impress the examiner with specific vocabulary. Get to know the common topics and have some specific adjectives ready. If you use an adjective to describe something, make sure you expand on it or explain it with examples. Again, if you can’t think of specific examples, it is fine to make these up. Make sure your examples match the adjective and you will be fine.

**Opinion**

Now you can pause and say ‘If you ask me/In my view/I would say + (opinion on topic). This give you a chance to express how you feel about the topic. It could be your personal opinion or it could be a comparative or superlative. Using a wide range of phrases to express your opinion will help you get a higher mark. If you want to give a stronger opinion you could say:

I strongly believe that…
As far as I’m concerned…
I’m strongly against…
I’m strongly in favour of….
I’m skeptical of the idea that…
I must admit, I think….

**Future**

Finally you can display your ability to use future tenses. Start off by saying ‘With regards to the future….’ A range of tenses will help you gain extra marks. For example you could use:

Present continuous to talk about fixed arrangements.
Be going + to + infinitive to talk about future plans.
Will or won’t + infinitive is used with predictions based on opinions or experiences. It can also be used to talk about hopes and assumptions.
The future perfect- will have + past participle- is used to say something will have happened or will have been completed by a certain point in the future.

That’s it! Five simple headings that will allow you to speak for at least two minutes without any difficultly.

The most important thing is that you practice using this strategy with many different topics. Get some past IELTS speaking part 2 questions and ask a friend or classmate to give you them at random. You can start off slowly by using this post to help you, but after a lot of practice, this strategy will become natural for you and you will be able to answer any part 2 question with confidence.

There is no magic formula or trick to getting the IELTS band you want but there are good strategies you can use and, more importantly, strategies you can use to help you practice.

Here is an IELTS speaking task 2 question. Try using the strategy above with this question and please post your answers in the comments below and I will get back to you.

Question:

Describe a teacher that you know.

You should say:

what the teacher looks like
what sort of person this teacher is
what the teacher helped you to learn
and explain why this teacher is popular.

Remember, you don’t have to talk about what the teacher looks like, what sort of person they are, what the teacher helped you to learn or explain why this teacher is popular. You can talk about these things but you don’t have to. Do whatever you feel most confident talking about. All you have to do with my strategy is talk about:

Introduction
Past
Description
Opinion
Future

# IELTS Speaking Part 3- 7 Common Questions

IELTS speaking part 3 lasts 4-5 minutes and allows the examiner to ask you questions related to part 2.  The conversation is more general, abstract and, you will be expected to give answers in greater depth than in part 1.

Many students fear part 3 because they don’t know what to expect. It is this supposed unpredictability that can cause students to not do as well as they should. Luckily, a quick analysis of the questions reveals that there common question types and this allows students to practice the grammatical structures and phrases used to talk about them.

This post will look at:

* + the 7 common question types;
	+ the grammatical structures used to answer each question type;
	+ example answers.

**7 Common Question Types**

The seven common question types that appear in IELTS speaking part 3 are:

1. **Opinion**– What do you think about ‘this’? Remember to say why you think that way and give examples.
2. **Evaluate**– What do you think about someone else’s opinion?
3. **Future**– What do you think will happen in the future?
4. **Cause and Effect**– What caused ‘this’ and/or what effects has ‘it’ had?
5. **Hypothetical**– Talk about imaginary or unreal situations.
6. **Compare and Contrast**– Talk about the difference and/or similarities between two things.
7. **Past**– How were things different in the past and how have they changed?

**Grammatical Structures**

**Opinion**

One thing you should not do is start every sentence with ‘I think…’ or ‘In my opinion…’ The IELTS examiner will be looking for how you vary your language. Below are a number of ways you could do that:

* As I see it,
* Personally,
* For me,

If you feel very strongly about something you could use:

* I’m convinced that….
* I’m certain that….
* I’m sure that….

If you are less sure about your opinion you could give a weaker opinion by using:

* I guess that…
* I suppose that….
* I’d say that…..

Please have a look at my [**IELTS speaking part 3 guide**](http://ieltsadvantage.com/2015/03/25/ielts-speaking-part-3-guide/) for more information on how to extend your answers.

**Example Question**

What are some of the ways people can help others in the community?

As I see it, there are many ways one can help the needy, but the best way is by making charitable donations. People can choose a charity and simply donate a sum of money and leave it to them to help others in need. For instance, I recently gave money to an orphanage. I don’t have time to help them personally, so I’ll leave it up to them to use the money as they see fit.

**Evaluate**

In these kinds of questions you will be asked what you think about someone else’s opinion. We will therefore need to use expressions that allow us to agree or disagree.

For **agreement** we can use:

* I couldn’t agree with you more.
* That’s so true.
* That’s for sure.
* That’s exactly how I feel.
* No doubt about it.
* I suppose so./I guess so.
* You/they have a point there.

For **disagreement** we can use:

* I don’t think so.
* I’m afraid I disagree.
* I totally disagree.
* I beg to differ.
* I’d say the exact opposite.
* Not necessarily.
* That’s not always true.
* That’s not always the case.

Remember that you will have to extend your answers with explanations and examples.

**Example Question**

Some people say that people helped others more in the past than they do now. Do you agree or disagree?

I don’t think so. When it comes to my parent’s generation I think they are quite sceptical about helping other people in the community, but my generation are regularly doing things to improve it, such as volunteering for various environmental and charitable organisations. Young people are actively encouraged to help out in the community and I don’t think this happened in the past, so I’m afraid I’d disagree.

**Future**

You are often asked to predict how a certain topic will change in the future.

For making future predictions we normally use ‘will + verb’, however this is quite simple and the examiner will be looking for your ability to use more complex structures to predict the future. More complex structures could include:

* X plans to…..
* It is predicted that….
* X intends to….
* I foresee…..
* It is foreseeable….
* Conditionals- If X + verb…..
* It is likely that…
* It is probable that….
* It is unforeseeable that….
* I envisage….

As always you will have to explain why you think this will occur in the future. You may also want to use future conditionals to extend your answer.

**Example Question**

Some people say that working from home will be quite common in the future. Do you agree?

It is foreseeable that more people will work from home in the future. If the internet becomes faster and there are more programs, such as Skype, that allow people to work from home more easily, I’d predict that more people will stay at home. If you think about it, most people don’t need to be physically present to do their jobs and I envisagethat face to face meetings will be a thing of the past.

**Cause and Effect**

You may also be asked to discuss what has caused a certain situation and what effects this has. This language will also help you in IELTS writing task 2.

To talk about cause and effect you can use:

* …because…
* …as a result….
* …resulted in…
* …as a consequence…
* …due to….
* …caused…
* …led to….
* …means that….

These are just some examples and the form of the words may change depending on the words around them in the sentence. Only use them if you are sure your sentences are grammatically correct.

**Example Question**

How does advertising influence what people choose to buy?

I think advertising has a big influence on what people purchase and often leads to them always sticking with the same brand. For example, I always drink Coca Cola and I believe this is because I grew up watching all those ads on TV and I instinctively buy it as a result. I mean, why would companies spend so much money on adverts, unless it led to more sales?

**Hypothetical**

The second conditional is used to talk about ‘unreal’, ‘unlikely’ or ‘impossible’ situations. You might get asked a question about an ‘unreal’ situation, for example ‘If you were mayor of your city, what would you do to improve it?’

The grammar we use for this is:

If + (subject 1) + past participle, then (subject 2) + would + verb

**Example Question**

If you could choose any country to live in, where would you choose?

If I could live in any country, I would probably choose Australia. The weather is great; the people are super friendly and just imagine living beside all those beaches. If I could choose another country, it would have to be Italy, for the architecture, the culture and its fascinating history.

**Compare and Contrast**

To compare two things, use a comparative adjective + than e.g. He’s taller than his sister.

Some comparative adjectives are irregular:

Good- better

Bad- worse

Far- further

For short adjectives, add –(e)r. If they end in –y change to –ier. For example:

Hard- harder

Cheap- cheaper

Easy- easier

Lazy- lazier

For longer adjectives, use more. For example:

More interesting

More difficult

**Example Question**Do you think primary school children should learn a second language or should they wait until secondary school?

It’s obvious that the earlier children start a language the easier it becomes in later life. However, some parents might think that subjects like maths are more important than languages at primary level. They may also think that a foreign language is less important than their first language and this should be prioritised.

**Past**

* We may use the **present perfect continuous** to talk about something that started in the past and continues up until the present. Example: They have been developing the city centre for the past five years. For this tense we use the structure has/have + been + past participle.
* Used to + infinitive to talk about past habits or states that are now finished.
* Would + infinitive to describe past habits.
* Past simple to talk about things you did in the past that you no longer do or are no longer true.
* Past continuous to talk about the background of a story or how you felt at a particular time.
* Past perfect to say something happened before something else in the past.

**Example Question**

How has teaching changed in your country over the past few decades?

In the past, teachers simply lectured students and the students just listened to what they said. We were given lots of facts to learn and there was no room for creativity or freedom of expression. I remember learning lots of things without thinking about the theory behind it. Now, there’s been a movement towards students thinking for themselves.