The Writing Test

The test takes 60 minutes
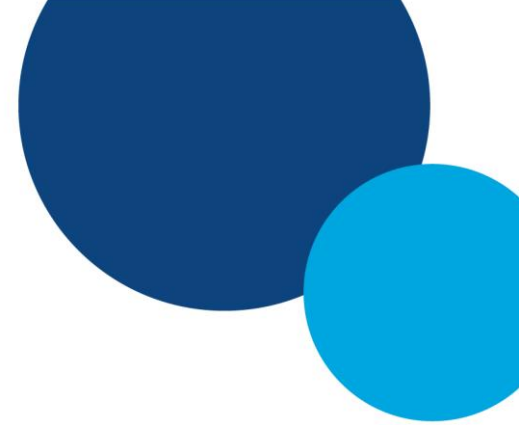
There are two tasks:

Task 1: a description of information usually in the form of a diagram (an object, a process or a set of data)

- **minimum 150 words**
- **recommended time c. 20 minutes**

Task 2: an essay in the form of an argument, discussion or report on a given topic

- **minimum 250 words**
- **recommended time c. 40 minutes**

Task 1

This task demands that students describe clearly the main trends, parts of a process, and/or important events that can be extrapolated from the data given.

They should **not** interpret the data.
They should **not** give a personal opinion.

Task 1: Writing Criteria

task achievement
– how effectively the candidate has identified, illustrated and reported the key features of the information in the task

cohesion and coherence
- how well the information and ideas are organised, and how well the information is linked

grammar range and accuracy
- the range of structures, e.g. verb tenses, used, how accurately they are used, and how appropriate they are for the task

lexical resource
- the range of vocabulary used, how accurately it is used e.g. collocations, and how appropriate it is for the task.

Problems with task 1

1. Understanding the task (task achievement)

2. Lexis for describing data (lexical resource)

Understanding the task

A model

Introduction – state what the graphic is, and the main/overall points/trends/events

Description – expand on the points in the introduction, giving specific data and examples

Conclusion – restatement of main points/trends/events
This can be written as one paragraph or more.

The introduction

Look at the information on the diagram itself (title, headings, labels, axis information, etc.)

Use synonyms and grammar transformation to re-write this information into introductory sentences.

Analyse the question to find out what type of information is required

Main trends and patterns

- Look at the diagram and decide what are the main trends/patterns/events e.g. overall, do things increase, decrease, stay the same?
- Consider how you might describe the information to a colleague over the phone (long-distance and very expensive)
- Write the principal points in one or two sentences in the introduction to the essay

Body (paragraph(s))

Think of the most logical approach to describing the data (chronological, by gender, by country etc.)

Find specific data to support the main pattern/trend/event described in the introduction

Highlight the data that *must* be included

Do not try to describe every piece of data

Plan your response, write it, check it

Conclusion

This should not be a full-blown paragraph.

A sentence (or two) paraphrasing the main points from the introduction is all that is required.

Introducing the final sentences is improved by the use of linkers e.g.

Overall, then, the diagram . . .

To conclude / In conclusion, the diagram . . .

To summarise, the diagram . . .

Problem areas - Lexis

a) **words for describing line graphs**
    e.g. a slight increase/increased slightly
b) **associated prepositions**
    e.g. dropped by/fell to/ rose from ... to ....
c) **words for describing bar and pie charts**
    e.g. a third/30%/ the vast majority
d) **linking devices**
    e.g. in the same way / However / in contrast / after that / finally

Last reminders

Timing is essential – do not go over 20 mins

150 words is the *minimum* – make sure you write at least this amount, 20 or 30 more words would be fine but don't waste time counting them!

Do not interpret the data

Do analyse the question – what type of description is required

Do not add a personal opinion

Do not use: bullet points / headings / note form

The Writing Test: Task 2

Task 2: an essay in the form of an argument, discussion or report on a given topic

- minimum 250 words
- recommended time c. 40 minutes

NB Task 2 carries twice as many marks as task 1

Task 2

This task demands that students write an essay or report for a university tutor or examiner, or educated non-specialist

It is assessed on the basis of:
- the ability to clearly present an argument with supporting evidence/examples
- the ability to select relevant arguments and to organise these logically

Task 2: Writing Criteria

task response

– how fully and appropriately the candidate has answered all parts of the task; the extent to which the candidate's ideas are relevant, developed and supported; the extent to which the candidate's position is clear and effective

cohesion and coherence

- how well the information and ideas are organised and presented, including paragraphing, and how well the information is linked

grammar range and accuracy

- the range of structures, e.g. verb tenses, used, how accurately they are used, and how appropriate they are for the task

lexical resource

- the range of vocabulary used, how accurately it is used e.g. collocations, and how appropriate it is for the task.

Understanding the question

It is essential that the task is analysed carefully as the question itself is not always clear.

Very often the title consists of 2 statements: one factual and one subjective.

Modern high-technology is transforming the way we work and is of benefit to all of society

The first part is factual, the second part an opinion.

Understanding the question

Strategy

1 Analyse the question to check how many different parts there are. (It is important to answer all parts of the question otherwise points will be lost.)

2 Highlight key words.

3 Decide which part of the title is fact and which opinion.

4 Turn the opinion statement into a question.

Generating, selecting and organising ideas

Strategy

Brainstorm – mind map

Select 3 or 4 arguments

Organise into logical order (based on strength of argument, chronology, etc.)

Ordering and supporting

Organise the ideas into a logical order

    - add numbers to the mind map

    - list them

Think of examples or evidence, or personal experience if asked for, to support each idea

Summary of strategy (so far)

Analysis of question
Brainstorming for ideas
Selection and ordering of ideas
Examples and evidence

This whole process should take no longer than 5 minutes.

Writing the essay - Introduction

Rephrase the vocabulary in the question to form a thesis statement for the whole essay

Give an indication of the organisation of the essay (main areas to be discussed)

If part of the question, express a personal opinion

Writing the essay - Body paragraphs

Using the first main idea write the topic sentence for the first paragraph of the body of the essay. This sentence is like an introduction to the paragraph and tells the reader what main idea is discussed in the paragraph.

Add supporting sentences to the topic sentence. These should contain the evidence/ examples to help develop and support the main idea of this paragraph.

Writing the essay - Conclusion

Sum up what you have written in the main body of your essay.

Do not add any new points.

End with a concluding sentence which gives your opinion and links back to the introduction of the essay.

Remember not to contradict yourself, if you have more evidence/ examples for one opinion over another then make sure your conclusion reflects this.