

Guidance for IELTS Writing Tasks

Task 1

This is clearly intended as a descriptive task; the instructions use the verbs *summarise, report, select* and *make comparisons*.

However the candidate has failed to describe what you can see in either picture. General descriptions are offered of both but the detail is missing (*swamp, huts* in the first picture and *restaurant, recreation* in the second). Further, there is barely any attempt to convey the layout (*a lake surrounded by buildings*). This could be done using compass points (*to the north-east of the island is a swamp*) or describing layout relative to a moving observer (*if you walk towards the centre of the island from the wharf, on your right hand side is a restaurant*). Finally, the candidate offers opinion comments, which are inappropriate here, in a far too informal tone. Together these features limit the achievement of the task dramatically and make it the weakest aspect of the response.

The way the clauses and sentences are linked is quite effective: discourse markers (*furthermore, no matter if...*) and connectors (*while, as*) are well used but the ideas in each paragraph do not develop very logically out of those in the preceding one so it is not very coherent.

Both vocabulary and grammatical range and accuracy are the strongest features of this answer. The first sentence, for example, is a well-organised complex sentence with an elaborate clause structure, and the final sentence, although it contains some vocabulary errors, is also complicated. Mistakes (**you cannot see neither from the wording nor from the symbols*) do not risk misunderstanding and are rare.

The text contains a wide range of vocabulary, some appropriate word partnerships (*natural atmosphere, tourist paradise*) and some that nearly come off (**this is what comes into my mind first – this is what comes to mind first*). However, sophisticated vocabulary used in parts of the text that have no bearing on the instructions will not count for much.

If you now compare the model answer, you will notice that it opens with an overview of the main changes, including an introduction to what the text is

about (whereas the first response offers no context at all). Its tone is strictly neutrally descriptive. It is more coherent, using paragraphs to help the reader follow the idea sequence (overview, the original island, after development and final summary). It also allows the reader to picture the island before and after using compass point references. Grammar and punctuation are very well-controlled. For example, the last sentence is a well-formed complex sentence, balancing pros and cons and using active and passive voice structures with the Present Perfect. And a range of uncommon vocabulary is used (*natural features have been accentuated, a wharf juts out into the harbour*).

In summary:

- read the instructions carefully whenever you answer an exam question,
- use a neutral and objective response that allows the reader to imagine and understand the data, circumstances or stages represented in the graphic, only through words rather than a diagram,
- report the underlying information not the way in which it is represented (**the dotted line represents millions of tonnes*),
- decide and report what the main features of the graphic are and illustrate them with specific details (but do not list features mechanically) and
- show a wide range of appropriate vocabulary and varied grammatical structures.

Task 2

Task 2 invites your opinion on a contemporary issue and asks you to support your argument with examples. This particular task opens with a proposition and poses 2 questions, about problems and measures respectively.

The candidate opens much more effectively than in Task 1, using the first paragraph to introduce the answer and rephrase the issue in more depth. The text continues by disputing the location of the problem and defining where the candidate thinks it lies. This is fine and matches the instructions. However, the invitation to suggest measures is dealt with far too generally (*create a system which provides more jobs that employee love doing...*). It seems as if the candidate wants to twist the question round so as to be able to write about the

things s/he wants to, which is not a good tactic. The final comment is not linked to the main text by any argument and has the tone of a slogan.

The model answer uses a simple 4 paragraph structure, consisting of introduction, associated problems, possible measures and a brief summary/evaluation of their possible effect. Paragraphs 2 and 3 open with a short summarising sentence, which is subsequently developed.

In contrast, in the candidate's response, the paragraphs 1 and 3 open with a similar summarising sentence which is then expanded, however the opening sentence of paragraph 4 seems only loosely related to what follows. Within paragraphs, however, there is a clearer sense of development (the sequencers *firstly, secondly* in paragraph 1 or the rhetorical repetition of *problem* in paragraph 3) and this provides some cohesion.

The overall effect of these decisions is to make the development of the argument rather unsatisfactory and the storyline hard to follow.

The candidate has a wide vocabulary (*good health-care, social security and wealth*) combined with a few basic errors (**a good health-care* – the word is uncountable), there are occasional spelling mistakes (**prophit* for *profit*) and inexactness (**the young pay for the elders for the young pay for their elders or the young pay for the elderly*). Grammatically, this response is weaker. A wide range of structures are attempted but with a lot of errors, with auxiliaries (**thus do I avoid it for I thus avoid it*), literal translation from German (**so it is the young people, if ever, the problem for so it is young people, if it's anyone, that are the problem*).

In summary:

- once again, read the instructions carefully and make sure you have answered all parts of the question,
- adopt a calm reasoning tone, appropriate to that of an academic essay,
- open with a re-phrasing of the issue under discussion and close with a summary of your argument,
- make a few general points and support them with specific examples,

- remember that examiners are not assessing the originality of your ideas or the validity of your statements but your competence in expressing yourself appropriately in English, and
- take a couple of minutes before you start to plan your essay and a couple of minutes at the end to check. It is obvious why a sense of time pressure can encourage a candidate to start writing immediately but very few people can produce an articulate structured text, making up the shape as they go along. It is also worth noticing that both of the candidate's texts are well over length. No extra credit is available for extra wording so the time would have been better used for planning and checking afterwards.