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Task 2:

Essay Writing

Preview Only

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About the author

I have been teaching English as a second language for over fifteen years in Taiwan and Australia, in language centres and universities. I have also been working as an IELTS examiner. My area of specialization is teaching students how to pass the IELTS exam. I particularly enjoy teaching IELTS because I find it challenging to teach students the necessary skills and strategies that they need to pass, and I also find that my students are highly motivated – this is a joy for a teacher!

Other books in this series

IELTS Task 1 Writing Academic Test

IELTS Task 1 Writing General Test

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank those responsible for their help in completing this book. I sincerely thank Phil Biggerton for his time editing this book. I would also like to thank some of my faithful students, Nhi Phan, Andrey Polyakov, and Maria Gvozdeva, for providing valuable feedback on this book. Thanks to all my past students as well, for giving me the inspiration and desire to write this book.

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1. Overview

Writing Task 2 is designed to test your ability to write an academic style essay. You must present the information in your own words as complete sentences within paragraphs. You are required to write over 250 words, and the task should be completed in about 40 minutes (both part 1 and 2 must be finished in 1 hour).

Types of Topics

There are many different topics for essays in the exam, but typical topic areas include: education, crime, media, technology, social issues, technology and the future, and the environment. In this case it makes sense to build up vocabulary in these key areas in order to have sufficient language to write an essay well.

You can see the vocabulary pages of my website for ideas:

<http://www.ieltsanswers.com/IELTS-Vocabulary.html>

Types of Questions

There are three main types of essay questions that are included in the IELTS writing exam. It is important to learn how to structure each of these types. Each of these will be described more fully in the sections that follow. Briefly, they are an opinion essay, where you are asked to give your own personal opinion on a topic; a both sides and opinion essay, where you are required to discuss both sides of an argument and then give your own personal opinion on the topic; and a two question essay, which involves responding to two different questions.

Tip!

Read the task carefully and make sure that you clearly understand the topic and type of question before you start writing. This is absolutely essential to score well in the writing test.

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2. Opinion essay

This type of essay tests your ability to state an opinion on an issue and then support it with logical reasons. To score well you need to explain your reasons clearly and use examples to illustrate the key points you are trying to make.

2.1. *Typical question words*

What is your opinion?

Do you agree or disagree?

To what extent do you agree or disagree?

Do the advantages outweigh the disadvantages?

To what extent do the advantages outweigh the disadvantages?

Sample task

Some people believe that the fast pace and stress of modern life is having a negative effect on families.

To what extent do you agree or disagree?

2.2. Task Analysis

It is important to realise that every task contains a topic and a question. You must fully address both the topic and the question to score six and above for task response. An analysis of the topic and question is provided below:

Topic: Some people believe that the **fast pace** and stress of modern life is having a negative effect on families.

Whenever you see the word **and** in the topic you must address both parts of this question. In this case the essay must address both the fast pace and stress of modern life in order to reach six and above for task response. Failure to address both parts of the topic results in a task response of five or below. This is because not all parts of the topic have been addressed.

Question: *To what extent do you agree or disagree?*

The question also has two requirements. You must state whether you agree or disagree and also the extent, or how much, you agree or disagree. In order to score a six and above you need to clearly state your response to the question including the extent to which you agree or disagree. In order to make your opinion clear I believe it is best to give your opinion in both the introduction and conclusion of the essay. Do not forget to mention the extent! Even if the question does not ask the extent, for instance it just asks do you agree or disagree, I still believe it is a good idea to state the extent. You can give the extent using words like totally or completely if you 100% agree or disagree; or somewhat or partly, if you do not fully agree or disagree. I strongly urge you to not 50-50 agree and disagree. This usually ends up being unconvincing and unclear.

2.3. Planning your essay

1. Underline key vocabulary in the topic and write words with the same or related meaning.

Some people believe that the fast pace and stress of modern life is having a

high-speed pressure contemporary lifestyles

negative effect on families.

harmful influence family life

2. Decide what kind of response is needed.

To what extent do you agree or disagree? = *say how much you agree or*

disagree

3. Brainstorm key points for the answer.

Agree with negative effect on families	Disagree with negative effect on families
<i>Fast pace leads to less time for families to be together</i>	<i>Due to the increased time pressure and stress families are forced to cooperate more, which brings them closer together</i>
<i>Stress leads to arguments among family members</i>	

4. **Decide on your position** (totally agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, totally disagree)

You do not need to give arguments for both sides of the topic. It is up to you, as it is your opinion. Rather than thinking about your real opinion, I suggest you look at the points you have brainstormed for each side of the argument, and then choose a side that you think will be the easiest to explain, and for which you have the better language to use. Remember this is a language test and not a test of your knowledge. The key point is to focus on language and structuring your whole task well.

5. Decide on the structure of the essay

Based on your position (extent you agree or disagree) put numbers next to each of the points you have brainstormed above in the order you will cover them. You should always cover the side you support more strongly first in the body of the essay. Also, you should always organise your points from strongest and weakest.

2.4. *Steps in writing your essay*

Once you have written a solid plan for your essay, you can begin the task of actually writing the essay. Having a good plan will speed up this process and ensure that you are consistent with your opinion throughout the essay. What I mean here is that the opinion you give in the introduction will fit the body of the essay, and the conclusion will restate the same opinion you gave in the introduction and summarise the body of the essay. If you achieve this high level of fit, you are likely to score well for task response and cohesion and coherence.

WRITING THE INTRODUCTION

1. Paraphrase the question

Given that you have already rephrased the keywords of the topic, in the planning stage, this step should be relatively easy. When you do write this sentence, in addition to rephrasing words also try to rearrange the order of words in the sentence. This may necessitate changing some of the word forms. For instance you might have to change nouns into verbs. This shows the examiner your ability to use language flexibly and can increase your score for vocabulary and grammar.

Some people believe that the fast pace and stress of modern life is having a negative

high-speed pressure contemporary lifestyles
harmful

effect on families.

influence family life

Many people feel that family life is being harmed by the high-speed and pressure of contemporary lifestyles.

2. State your position [totally/strongly/somewhat + agree/disagree]

it is important to state your position in the introduction of the essay because it makes it clearer for the examiner what your position is and also when the examiner reads the body of your essay they already have an overall idea of what your essay is about. Then, in the likely event that you have errors with vocabulary and grammar they may be less serious because the examiner will have more of a context in order to guess the meaning of what you are trying to express. You can simply state your opinion, and this may be best if you only need a score of around six or seven and you struggle to finish your essay on time. However you can state your opinion and also the reasons. If you are trying to get to 8 I believe it is better to state both your opinion and the reasons. Although this will slightly increase the word length, this adds to the quality of your introduction, and also assists your task response as the introduction and conclusion of your essay are considered as important in establishing a clear task response.

I somewhat agree with this opinion because the fast pace leads to less time for families to be together, stress leads to arguments among family members; however, due to the increased time pressure and stress families are forced to cooperate more, which brings them closer together.

[I realise this is quite long and it may be beyond some writers. This is why a sentence of this quality can enable a candidate to get to level eight or nine]

BODY

After you have written the introduction, you will need two or three body paragraphs. For this type of essay, I suggest putting only one reason in each paragraph. A good paragraph should only have one main idea. You may write only two paragraphs if you are a person who likes to explain things in detail and use illustrative examples. If you prefer, you can write three shorter paragraphs. Whether you write two or three paragraphs may depend on the question and also the quality of points you have brainstormed. Personally, I would use three paragraphs if I were writing about both sides of the argument. This is because it is safest to have two paragraphs for the side you support more strongly and only one paragraph for the side you support less. This structure ensures your opinion is supported well, and prevents the risk of the body of the essay not matching your opinion. What I mean here is that sometimes someone says they somewhat agree, but then go on to argue more strongly about why they disagree. This sends both your task response and coherence and cohesion tumbling down!

1. Write topic sentences for each body paragraph

Each body paragraph should start with a topic sentence. For this type of essay the topic sentence consists of three parts, which are the sequencing word, topic, and reason to support the opinion.

Sequencing word + topic + **reason**

The main reason why I believe family life is being compromised is because families have less time to be with each other.

2. Write supporting sentences for the topic sentences

You can think of the topic sentence you have just written as being the introduction for the paragraph. It introduces the reason for your opinion, which forms the key point for the paragraph. Having a clear key point for the paragraph makes it easy for the examiner to understand what you are saying in the paragraph. In addition, if the key point of the paragraph is clear any errors with vocabulary or grammar will be less likely to prevent communication. This is because the examiner will have more of a context to guess any parts that are unclear. After you have written the topic sentence, you should support it by developing the key point. There are three ways to develop your key point: Explanation, example, adding details

Explanation: *As individual family members are busier at work and with their social lives they have less time to spend with their family.*

Adding details: *As well as this, people have many things they have to do these days such as checking e-mail, updating their online social status and so less time is left for family life.*

Example: *To illustrate, I spend about two hours online every night attending to daily correspondence before chatting with my family members, whereas ten years ago I would spend time with my family from the moment I walked in the door.*

[The example above could just consist of the first sentence. However, to fully make the point the second sentence is needed. This is the difference between a level 6 writer and a more competent writer.]

CONCLUSION

In order to write an excellent conclusion, you should start by using a phrase that signals you are concluding your essay. Then, you should restate the position to reinforce it in the mind of the examiner. After this you should summarise the main points you made in the body of the essay because this is a standard feature of a concluding paragraph and also it will remind the examiner of your key points and make your opinion more persuasive. Finally if you want to write a truly outstanding conclusion, and you have enough time, you could give a final comment based on your summary. If you are short of time just try to complete as many of the steps below that time permits. Note that if you are aware you are running out of time when writing the body of the essay, try to finish the body quickly and at least write something for this paragraph. If you do not have some sort of concluding paragraph the essay will be incomplete and the examiner may penalise you for cohesion and coherence. It will also make it difficult to get a high score for task response because the concluding paragraph is an important factor in assessing the task response.

Send a signal you are concluding your essay

I like *in conclusion*. This is a universally accepted way to finish an academic essay. There are other choices but this works well and can be used for all three types of essays. Some students think it is boring to use this phrase. However, keep in mind there are no marks for creativity and flair. You are not doing creative writing; instead you are taking a language exam. Every time I read phrases like *in a nutshell*, I am not impressed; in fact, the word yuck comes to mind! You can use phrases like *to summarise*; the reason why I'm against these is because they do not fit my structure for a both sides and opinion essay (for that essay the final paragraph will be your opinion and not a summary). I believe it is better to have a standard phrase that you can use for all three essays to avoid the need to remember different ones and to correctly applied them under pressure in the exam.

Restate your position

You should restate your opinion along with the extent. This is good essay writing. This is the way it's done. Many students don't want to do this and feel they have already said it, so they don't want to say it again. Up to you! I believe you should restate your opinion.

I somewhat believe that the rapid pace and stressful nature of contemporary lifestyles are having negative consequences on family relationships.

Summarise the main points

If you have time it is very helpful for your task response to summarise the reasons for your opinion. Note that you should ideally use different words and phrases than in the body of your essay. If you do this well it can increase your score for vocabulary because it shows the examiner your range of vocabulary.

This is because family members have less time, and when they are together they feel less relaxed. However, I admit that sometimes adversity can bring people closer together.

Give your final opinion or recommendation/ restate your position

If you have time, based on a summary, give your final opinion or make a recommendation. This is a way to really show the examiner your talent and reach a score of 8 or 9 for task response. This will really impress the examiner as it will show your understanding of what you've written and your ability to make further comment on it. This is a high-level language function.

Given this situation it seems that family members should try to be more supportive to one another and also parents need to set aside regular times for families to relax together.

2.5. Model essay version 1: somewhat agree

Some people believe that the fast pace and stress of modern life is having a negative effect on families.

To what extent do you agree or disagree?

Many people feel that family life is being harmed by the high-speed and pressure of contemporary lifestyles. I somewhat agree with this opinion because the fast pace leads to less time for families to be together, and stress leads to arguments among family members; however, due to the increased time pressure and stress families are forced to cooperate more, which brings them closer together.

The main reason why I believe family life is being compromised is because families have less time to be with each other. As individual family members are busier at work and with their social lives, they have less time to spend with their family. As well as this, people have many things they have to do these days such as checking e-mail, updating their online social status and so less time is left for family life. To illustrate, I spend about two hours online every night attending to daily correspondence before chatting with my family members, whereas ten years ago I would spend time with my family from the moment I walked in the door.

In addition, the pressure of life these days means that even when families do get together arguments are more likely. This is because everyone feels tired and they are more likely to get irritated and to react to their heightened emotional levels.

However, it does seem reasonable that this pressure may also lead to positive outcomes. One such possibility is that family members will cooperate more in order to overcome time limitations. For instance, they may share household chores, so that everybody has time to relax afterwards.

In conclusion, I somewhat believe that the rapid pace and stressful nature of contemporary lifestyles are having negative consequences on family relationships. This is because family members have less time, and when they are together they feel less relaxed. However, I admit that sometimes adversity can bring people closer together. Given this situation, it seems that family members should try to be more supportive to one another and also parents need to set aside regular times for families to relax together.

Comments about the previous model essay

You may have noticed that the previous essay was rather long. It was about 340 words. This is because of a high level of paragraph development in paragraph 2. Paragraph development can increase the score for task response and also cohesion and coherence. However, if we do a lot of paragraph development we should consider having fewer paragraphs. The following model has only two body paragraphs. In addition, it only covers one side of the argument [totally agree/disagree]. I believe this is a better approach because it is more persuasive and there is less risk that when you cover the other side of the argument you end up contradicting what you have previously said. It also means that your introduction and conclusion will be shorter because there are fewer things you have to mention.

2.6. *Template for opinion essay*

The template below has been used to write the second version of the essay.

Introduction

There is currently a contentious argument over whether XYZ [XYZ is the topic]

I totally agree/disagree with this opinion because [reason 1 + reason 2]

Paragraph 2

The main reason why I believe/don't believe XYZ is because... [reason 1]

Paragraph 3

Another reason why I support/don't support the notion that XYZ is due to the fact that...
[reason 2]

Conclusion

In conclusion, I completely agree/disagree that XYZ because [rephrase reason 1] and [rephrase reason 2].

Given this situation, it seems that [give a final recommendation or opinion]

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3. Vocabulary for common topics

The following is intended as a brief outline of some useful vocabulary for common topics that occur on the exam. For further instruction on vocabulary see my website at:

<http://www.ieltsanswers.com/IELTS-Vocabulary.html>

3.1. Education

Rephrasing of some common topic words:

children = juveniles, youngsters

education= learning, instruction, acquiring knowledge

students = pupils

parents = caregivers, guardians, mothers and fathers

schools = educational institutions

society = community, citizens

teachers = educators

Some useful Nouns

Word	Meaning
the curriculum	the entire school program including course materials and testing of students. Everything that a school aims to teach students.
graduate	a person who has graduated from a school
illiteracy	the inability to read and write
literacy	the ability to read and write
nurture	to help grow or develop
pedagogy	the way of teaching including the instructional methods that is used
qualification	what someone gets when they graduate from school. For instance, a diploma is a qualification.
social skills	the ability to communicate and interact well with others
student centred education	a philosophy of education where the student is the central focus
tuition	the fees for studying a course

Some useful verbs

Word	Meaning
graduate	to pass a course or level of study
concentrate	to focus attention towards a particular activity, subject or problem
revise	to review materials that have already been taught
enrol	to join a class
indoctrinate	to teach following a biased belief or point of view. For example: Hitler indoctrinated young Germans with a hatred for other races.
interpret	to understand in a particular way. For example, we need to interpret the meaning of the painting.
persevere	to not give up. To keep doing something for the success is achieved.
procrastinate	to delay or put off doing something

Some useful Adjectives

Word	Meaning
academic	relating to education especially universities.
co-educational	when male and female students are taught together in the same school.
single sex	when only need male or female students are taught in the same school.
hands-on	to learn by actually doing. We can get hands-on experience by actually doing things.
multi-disciplinary	involving several different subjects or areas of study.
pedagogical	relating to teaching methods and principles.
primary education	an elementary school or the first years of formal schooling.
secondary education	high school
segregated	separated. For example, the classes are <u>segregated</u> by gender.
tertiary education	university or vocation school
vocational	concerns teaches the skills necessary for a particular job. This concept is often applied to trade schools. So if you studying cooking or the penetration you are going to a vocational school.

End of preview

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I believe it is extremely beneficial to have an experienced person read your essays and give you feedback on how to improve them. This can avoid many of the typical errors that occur on test day and help you to maximise your score.