

01 · ACADEMIC WRITING PREPARATION

IELTS Academic Writing Task 1: Graphs

A Complete Guide & Strategic Masterclass for Band 6.5–8.5

Students

STRUCTURE

4-Paragraph Formula for
maximum coherence

VOCABULARY

Academic language for trends
& comparisons

EXAMINER TIPS

Key pitfalls to avoid for Band
7.0+

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What Do You Have to Do?

Core Task Objectives

- **Identify Purpose:** State clearly what the graph or chart illustrates.
- **Highlight Main Trends:** Summarise the central patterns without detailing every number.
- **Make Comparisons:** Contrast significant highs, lows, and intersections.
- **Select Key Data:** Support your statements with relevant precise figures.
- **Format as a Report:** Present objective facts in a clear 150-word report.

CRITICAL RULE

✗ **Never give your personal opinion in Task 1.**

Do not explain *why* trends happened unless explicitly stated in the graph source text.

EXAM EXAMPLE

✗ **Incorrect:** "I think visitors increased because advertising was effective."
✓ **Correct:** "The number of visitors increased steadily from 20,000 to 45,000."

Time and Word Count Management

20

MINUTES TOTAL RECOMMENDED

Spend 3 mins planning, 14 mins writing, 3 mins checking.

150+

MINIMUM WORDS REQUIRED

Aim for 160–180 words to ensure complete response coverage.

Why Strategic Timing Matters

Task 1 represents **1/3 of your total Writing score**, while Task 2 represents 2/3. Managing your time strictly prevents under-writing Task 2.

Pro Tip: Spending 2–3 minutes selecting key data before writing speeds up your drafting and ensures logical paragraph grouping.

Reading the Graph Correctly

4 Essential Questions to Ask

- **WHAT?** What exactly is being measured? (e.g. coffee consumption, car production)
- **WHEN?** What time frame is covered? (Past simple vs future predictions)
- **WHERE / WHO?** Which countries, demographics, or categories are involved?
- **UNITS?** Are figures in percentages, thousands, millions, or currency?

Understanding Task Words

SUMMARISE

Extract big trends and macro changes. Do not list every individual point.

COMPARE

Contrast categories with each other (e.g., highest vs lowest, growing vs shrinking).

WHERE RELEVANT

Focus strictly on pivotal inflection points, peaks, troughs, and crossovers.

Types of Graphs You Will See



Line Graph

Tracks trends and continuous changes over time.



Bar Chart

Compares discrete categories or static groups.



Pie Chart

Illustrates proportions or shares of a 100% whole.



Table

Presents dense numerical data organized in rows.



Mixed Charts

Combines two visuals (e.g. Pie chart + Table).

Core Rule: The chart format influences how you extract information, but the report structure remains identical.

The 4-Paragraph Formula

PARAGRAPH 1

Introduction

1

Paraphrase the task prompt. Explain what the graph shows in your own words (1 sentence).

PARAGRAPH 2

Overview

2

Summarise main trends, highest/lowest points. **No numbers here!** (2 sentences).

PARAGRAPH 3

Details 1

3

Provide key figures, specific numbers, and comparisons for the first visual group (3–4 sentences).

PARAGRAPH 4

Details 2

4

Provide key figures and comparisons for the remaining categories or trends (3–4 sentences).

Crafting the Introduction

Introduction Pattern

"The [chart type] illustrates [what is measured] in [location] between [start year] and [end year]."

Example: The line graph presents data regarding the number of primary students in three European schools from 2015 to 2020.

Paraphrasing Toolkit

Original Prompt Word	High-Band Substitute
shows / gives information	illustrates / presents data regarding
the number of...	the volume of / figure for...
the percentage of...	the proportion / share of...
from 2000 to 2010	between 2000 and 2010 / over a 10-year period

Paragraph 2: The Overview

ESSENTIAL FOR BAND 7.0+

Key Questions to Identify Overview Trends

- Which category showed overall growth or decline?
- Which item remained the highest or lowest throughout?
- Were there major crossovers or sharp fluctuations?
- What was the overall dominant feature?

Overview Model

"Overall, it is clear that coffee remained the most consumed beverage throughout the period, whereas tea experienced a dramatic decline."

GOLDEN RULE: Do NOT include exact figures or data points in the overview paragraph. Reserve all stats for Body Paragraphs 3 & 4.

Paragraphs 3 & 4: Organizing Details

Selecting Key Data Points

Do not describe every line or point step-by-step. Select significant figures:

- Starting and ending figures for each trend
- Peak highs and lowest troughs
- Points of intersection or equal values
- Significant gaps or sudden surges

Logical Grouping Strategies

By Category: Group similar items together (e.g. Paragraph 3 = Coffee & Tea; Paragraph 4 = Water & Juice).

By Trend Type: Group items by pattern (e.g. Paragraph 3 = Increasing items; Paragraph 4 = Decreasing items).

Language for Change: Up & Down

Going Up

Verbs: increase, rise, grow, climb, surge, soar.

Nouns: an increase, a rise, a growth, an upward trend.

Going Down

Verbs: decrease, fall, drop, decline, plunge, plummet.

Nouns: a decrease, a fall, a drop, a decline.

—No / Little Change

Verbs: remain stable, level off, plateau, fluctuate.

Nouns: a period of stability, fluctuations.

Preposition Precision: "Increased from 20 to 35" (start & end) vs "Rose by 15" (amount of change).

Describing Scale and Speed of Change

BIG CHANGES

Significant Impact

- significantly
- dramatically
- sharply / substantially

"Sales rose dramatically to \$5M."

SMALL CHANGES

Minor Shifts

- slightly
- marginally
- modestly

"Figures decreased slightly in 2019."

SPEED OF CHANGE

Pace & Velocity

- rapidly / quickly
- gradually / steadily
- slowly

"The count grew steadily over 5 years."

Language for Comparison

Comparative & Superlative Forms

- **Higher / Lower:** "The figure for London was significantly higher than that of Paris."
- **The Most / Least:** "Coffee was the most popular beverage, while tea was the least favoured."
- **Multiple Factors:** "Sales of Item A were twice as high as Item B."

Similarity & Contrast Linkers

SIMILARITY

"In a similar fashion...", "Likewise...", "Almost identical to..."

CONTRAST

"In contrast...", "Whereas coffee rose, tea plummeted...", "Compared to..."

Numbers, Dates and Tenses

Unit & Data Accuracy

Always match your nouns to the exact unit measured:

- Percentages → *"25 percent" / "a quarter"*
- Currency → *"5 million dollars" (Not 5 millions)*
- Time expressions → *"Between 2010 and 2020" / "From 2010 to 2020"*

Tense Selection Rules

Past Simple: Dates prior to present year (e.g. 1995, 2018).

→ *"The figure increased significantly in 2015."*

Future Structures: Dates in future years (e.g. 2035).

→ *"Is projected to increase..." / "Is expected to reach..."*

Common Mistakes to Avoid

Common Student Mistake	High-Band Fix
Giving personal explanations (e.g. "due to weather")	Only describe data directly visible on the graphic visual.
Writing every single number and date in the visual	Select key highlights, peaks, troughs, and crossovers only.
Missing overview paragraph or adding stats in overview	Write a clear overview in Paragraph 2 with zero specific numbers.
Copying prompt wording word-for-word	Paraphrase prompt key words using high-level academic synonyms.
Using incorrect verb tenses for historical/future dates	Check graph timeline first (Past simple vs future expectations).

Your Task 1 Pre-Submission Checklist

- ☐ Did I write **at least 150 words**?
- ☐ Did I write a clear, paraphrased **introduction**?
- ☐ Does my **overview** capture main trends with no numbers?
- ☐ Are my body details organized in **logical paragraphs**?
- ☐ Did I include accurate comparisons between figures?
- ☐ Did I select the correct tense (past vs future)?
- ☐ Did I check my spelling and unit expressions?



Key Takeaway

"Describe the graph. Show the main information. Compare the important points clearly and objectively."