

FORMAL WRITING – LANGUAGE STRUCTURES

The academic module of the IELTS writing test assesses a variety of different skills, including interpreting graphic information, writing a well-structured argument, presenting a solution to a problem, clarifying and supporting ideas, organising information logically, comparing and contrasting evidence, using appropriate language structures and others.

These skills are examined over the range of possible IELTS writing question types in both Task 1 and Task 2.

Focussing on the skill of **using appropriate language structures** specifically, we can identify the main features, which characterise the different question types examined in the IELTS Writing test.

Writing Task 1 types

There are several text or question types, which are used to assess your writing ability. These include:

- describing and interpreting line graphs, tables, bar charts and other graphic information
- describing the stages of a process or procedure
- describing and explaining how something works
- describing a cycle

Using appropriate language structures

It is important to demonstrate in the writing task that you have a good understanding of the text type. This means being able to use appropriate language structures for that question type.

The table on the next page provides a summary of those language structures, which characterise features relevant to each of the text/question types.

STUDY TIPS

Remember there are particular language features, which characterise the different question types assessed in the academic IELTS writing module.

Be aware of which verb tense, voice or modal verb is the most appropriate for each text type, and which transition signal allows you to best express your ideas.

Text type	Describing and interpreting graphic information
Language structures	
Subjects	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> variety of subjects 	the line graph...; the size of the...; this pie chart...; the number of...; a/the majority of...; a/the minority...; a small portion...; a/the large number of; most...; most of...; a/the percentage of; fifteen percent of...; there was a...; the tourists...; the participants...; the table...; just over a quarter...; almost a half...; several...; several of...; some...; some of...; a tendency
Verbs	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> verb tenses – simple past; expressions for the future 	used to describe definite dates and times which happened in the past ; when talking about future changes use expressions such as: it is predicted; it is projected; it is forecast; it is estimated
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> verbs referring to change or trends 	rise; fall; drop; increase; decrease; decline; remain stable; peak; reach a peak; level off; double; triple; grow; tend; stabilise; plateau
Adjectives and Adverbs	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> describing the size and speed of change 	slight(ly); sharp(ly); steep(ly); slow(ly); rapid(ly); significant(ly); dramatic(ally); steady(ily); gradual(ly); noticeable (noticeably); negligent(ly); considerable(ly)
Comparing and Contrasting	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> variety of different comparative and contrastive structures 	comparative structures <i>comparatives/superlatives</i> : bigger; better; smaller; fewer; more; less; as ... as; least; biggest; best; smallest; most <i>expressions</i> : alike; like; prefer; preferable; favour; favourable; similarly; likewise; twice as much/many; three times as much/many
	contrastive structures however; on the other hand; conversely; although; in spite of; despite; in contrast to; whereas; while; unlike; different from; greater than; more than; less than; nevertheless

Text type	Describing the stages of a process or procedure
Language structures	
Verbs	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> passive voice – <i>present passive</i> for a general description; <i>past passive</i> when referring to a specific event in the past 	<p>simple present passive: is/are + participle is connected; are manufactured; is cut ; are dried; is thrown; is shipped; are measured</p> <p>present continuous passive: is/are + being + participle is being connected; are being dried; is being measured</p>
	<p>simple past passive: was/were + participle was harvested; were dried; was manufactured; were transported; was completed; were sent</p> <p>past continuous passive: was/were + being + participle was being harvested; were being dried; was being manufactured;</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> imperatives for giving instructions 	<p><i>boil the water...; connect the hose...; switch off the power... or one must boil the water...; one needs to connect the hose...</i></p>
Chronological order or sequence	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> subordinate conjunctions showing time relationships 	<p>as; as soon as; as long as; after; before; since; until, the moment that; when; while; whenever; once</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> subordinate conjunctions showing purpose 	<p>in order to...; so that...; in order that...; which results in...</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> sentence connectors indicating sequence 	<p>first...; firstly...; first of all...; first and foremost...; second...; third...; next...; at once...; then...; after that...; meanwhile...; finally...; last...; lastly...; subsequently...; now...</p>

Text type	Describing and explaining how something works
Language structures	
Verbs	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> active and passive voice; present and past tenses 	<p>active –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> simple present: send(s); present continuous: is/are sending simple past: sent past continuous: was/were sending <p>passive –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> simple present: is/are connected present continuous: is/are being connected simple past: was/were connected past continuous: was/were being connected
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> infinitives of purpose 	in order to attach...; so as to reflect...; so as not to burn...
Prepositions	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> prepositions of position 	below; beneath; in front (of); next to; inside (of); on top (of); above; behind
Chronological order or sequence	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> sentence connectors indicating sequence 	first...; firstly...; first of all...; first and foremost...; second...; third...; next...; next to...; then...; after that...; meanwhile...; finally...; last...; lastly...; subsequently...; now...

Writing Task 2 types

There are several different text or question types, which are used to assess your writing ability, and include:

- presenting an argument
- presenting a solution to a problem
- presenting an opinion or point of view

Using appropriate language structures

It is important to demonstrate in the writing task that you have a good understanding of the text type, which means using appropriate language structures for that question type.

The table on the next page provides a summary of those language structures, which are important to and characterise language features relevant to Task 2 text types.

Text types	<p>Presenting an argument Presenting a solution to a problem Presenting an opinion or point of view</p>
Language structures	
Subjects	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> because ideas, things or events are discussed in general, it is appropriate to use the plural form of nouns or, collective or uncountable nouns 	<p><i>plural nouns</i>: varieties; passengers; vehicles; industries; cities; departments <i>collective nouns</i>: majority; minority; crowd; couple; pair; staff; team; committee; class; family; group <i>uncountable</i>: information; evidence; health; people; money; knowledge; advice; equipment; news; publicity; progress; research; travel; work; traffic; transportation; pollution</p>
Verbs	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> simple present tense is mainly used because it is the tense which is used to talk about general truths, facts and habits 	<p>infinitive + -s or -es: is; are; has; have; reads; lives; makes; requires; suggests; produces; advertises</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> modals are used to make an assessment, or interpretation 	<p>modals express a variety of meanings: <i>tentative</i> – can; may; could; might (especially in argument or opinion essays); <i>possibility</i> – can; may; could; might (especially in body paragraphs); <i>suggestion/advice</i> – should; ought to; must; need to (especially in solution paragraphs); <i>recommendation</i> – should; need to (especially in the conclusion)</p>
Transition signals: sentence connectors; coordinating and subordinating conjunctions, and other word forms	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> expressing an opinion; justifying an opinion 	<p>in my view/opinion...; I believe/feel/think... (use personal forms in introductory or concluding paragraphs only); according to...; some people say/argue/think...; the majority of people accept...; it could be argued...; it is often said/thought...; it is possible (that)...</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> introducing an opposite idea 	<p>however...; on the other hand...; nevertheless...; nonetheless...; although; even though; though; despite; in spite of; but; yet</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> adding similar ideas 	<p>similarly; likewise; equally; also; furthermore; in addition; moreover; another...; an additional...; and; as well as; both...and; not only...but also;</p>



Transition signals (continued): sentence connectors; coordinating and subordinating conjunctions, and other word forms	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> contrasting 	however; nevertheless; nonetheless; yet; still; in contrast; on the other hand; although; even though; though; while; whereas; in fact; on the contrary; rather
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> comparing 	similarly; likewise; compared with/to; in comparison with/to; to be similar to; just like; just as
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> cause and effect language (especially in problem/solution essays) 	consequently; as a consequence; therefore; hence; thus; as a result; as a result of...; results from...; in that case; so; accordingly; because of...; reason for...; cause of...; caused by...; due to...; causes; results in; leads to; produces; on account of...; owing to...; so + adjective/adverb + that; to have an effect on...; to affect; for these reasons; since
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> generalising 	on the whole; in general; generally; normally; as a rule; it is generally accepted/believed that...; in many cases...; for the most part...;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> being precise 	in particular...; specifically...; especially...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> emphasising a point 	most important...; above all...; most of all...; the most significant...; ... is crucial/vital;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> explaining 	in other words...; that is...; this means that...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> expressing alternatives 	either...or; one is...the other is; alternatively
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> giving examples 	for example...; for instance...; to exemplify...; such as...; an example of...; a case in point is...; in particular; ... serves to illustrate...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> listing ideas 	first...; firstly...; first of all...; the first...; second...; secondly...; another...; finally...; the final...; last...; last of all...; subsequently
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> concluding 	in conclusion...; to conclude...; in summary...; to summarise...; in brief...; in short...
Other	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> structures to avoid in formal writing 	personal pronouns, such as 'I', 'we', 'my' 'mine' (except in the introduction or conclusion); contractions, such as 'can't', 'couldn't', 'shouldn't', 'I've'; 'they've'; abbreviations, such as 'TV', 'ie', 'eg'