

IELTS Academic Writing Task Two tips and useful phrases

What advice would you give on writing IELTS Writing Part Two essays?

Use these topics to extend your discussion:

Before the exam

Analysing the question

Planning/ Paragraphing

Introduction

Writing

Summary/ Conclusion

Editing

Cross off any of the tactics below which are bad ideas/ are not true. Leave any which are not clearly bad ideas as they are.

Preparation for the test

- It's worth doing timed writing practice even if no one can correct it
- The answers at the back of exam practice books are perfect models which you should copy as much as possible
- Memorise model answers from the internet and just change a few words and sentences to make your answer in the exam
- Make a note of your typical errors in IELTS Writing and go back to them many times to check that you can remember the right versions

Analysing the question

- Underline important words in the question
- There's no need to read and underline instructions like "Give reasons", because they are the same in every question
- "To what extent do you agree or disagree?" questions are the same as "Look at both sides and then..." questions
- With "To what extent do you agree or disagree?" questions, you still have to look at both sides of the argument
- With "To what extent do you agree or disagree?" questions, you have to say how strong or weak your opinion is
- With a looking at both sides question like "What are the advantages and disadvantages of...?", one advantage and one disadvantage is enough
- If a question includes a word with -s like "causes", "reasons", "effects", "solutions" or "advantages", then you have to write about more than one

Planning/ Paragraphing

- If you can think of a good plan for your essay (= structure of the essay/ topic of each paragraph), there is no need to brainstorm
- Brainstorm as many ideas as you can before deciding on your paragraph structure
- Spend about 10 minutes planning
- Most IELTS Writing Part Two essays have four paragraphs (two main paragraphs plus an introduction and summary or conclusion)
- If you are just looking at one side of the argument, you might want three main paragraphs with one for each of the reasons for your opinion
- If you are looking at two advantages and two disadvantages, you need four main paragraphs in the body (i.e. six paragraphs in total)

Introduction

- Rephrase the question in your introduction
- Spend a couple of minutes making sure that you don't repeat any words from the question when you are rephrasing it
- If you can't think of a word with the same meaning as one in the question when you are rephrasing, just change the grammar (e.g. changing from a verb to a noun)
- If you can't think of a word with the same meaning as one in the question when you are rephrasing, just use one with more or less the same meaning

- End the introduction with a sentence that explains the structure of the essay (= the topic of each body paragraph)
- Give your opinion in the introduction if you will only look at one side of the argument
- Give your own opinion in the introduction if you will look at both sides of the argument
- It's often a good idea to talk about the background to the question, e.g. why it is topical and/ or important, before rephrasing the question
- Think carefully about the language that you use to talk about the background to a topic, e.g. whether the topic really is "controversial" or if "many people" really believe it

Writing

- Use different kinds of support (personal experience, other people's experiences, things you read or heard, cause and effect, etc) for each argument that you mention
- Make up imaginary data to support your arguments
- Make up quotes and the places they came from to support your arguments
- Avoid personal pronouns like "I", "me" and "my"
- One or two sentences is enough support for each argument that you write about
- Make sure that the body paragraphs are similar lengths to each other

Summary/ Conclusion

- All IELTS Academic Writing Part Two essays should end with a summary and then your own opinion
- One sentence is okay for a final paragraph
- If you've looked at both sides, you need to clearly show why one side is more or less important when you come to a conclusion
- If what you have written leads to a conclusion that is the opposite of your own opinion, write the former rather than the latter
- It's okay to totally sit on the fence between two positions in your conclusion

Editing

- Leave at least three or four minutes for a final edit
- Count the exact number of words
- Count the number of words in two lines, calculate how many words per line, then count how many lines
- Make sure that the examiner can understand without having to read anything twice
- Make sure that your essay is really neat (= tidy = not messy)
- Use an eraser to get rid of all mistakes
- It's okay to correct by crossing things out, using triangular shapes to add extra words, etc
- You can insert one or two extra sentences with an arrow to improve the structure or reach the minimum number of words
- Add higher level language while you edit
- Get rid of repetitions by rephrasing, using reference expressions, etc

Hint: 22 need to be crossed off.

Compare your ideas with the suggested answers below.

Suggested answers *with bad advice in bold*

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Brainstorm useful phrases for doing the things in italics above.