IELTS Writing: format, criteria, timing

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One-page cheat sheet · both tasks, four criteria, the 60-minute plan

> **Complete the task first, then polish it. Impressive words earn a quarter of the band; too few words, no position in the essay or a missing overview knock out a whole criterion at once.**

Two tasks in 60 minutes — one timer, you choose when to switch

Task	What to write	Min words	Time	Weight
Task 1	Description of a chart, table, process diagram or map — what is shown, overall picture + key figures, no reasons or opinions	150	20 min	one third
Task 2	Essay: a clear position, 2–3 developed arguments with examples, a conclusion	250	40 min	two thirds

Task 2 counts twice as much: 6.0 for the chart + 7.0 for the essay rounds to 6.5 (and the other way round too) — but the chart costs more effort. **When time runs short, the essay saves you.**

The four marking criteria — equal weight, task band = their average

Criterion	What earns the marks (our summary)
Task Achievement (T1) / **Task Response** (T2)	Did you answer what was asked? T1: an overview, key figures, every category mentioned. T2: clear position, developed arguments, examples, every part of the question answered. The penalty for too few words sits here.
Coherence & Cohesion	One idea per paragraph, clear order, linking words where they belong (not in every other sentence), references back without repetition.
Lexical Resource	Precise words, natural collocations, variety without straining, spelling and word formation.
Grammatical Range & Accuracy	Different sentence types, correct tenses, articles, agreement, punctuation. Variety *and* the share of error-free sentences count.

Band 6

Task broadly done, with gaps: overview contains figures and inaccuracies; arguments named but not developed; linkers present but mechanical; errors noticeable, meaning clear.

Band 7

Everything asked for fully done; logical paragraphs; precise words with occasional slips; most sentences error-free. **The difference is completeness and care, not rare words.**

How to split the hour

Min	What you do
0–3	T1: read the picture, note key facts, split into two groups.
3–15	T1: write four paragraphs from the list, without going back.
15–20	T1: check figures against the picture, fix typos. Then never return.
20–24	T2: plan — position, two ideas, one example each.
24–53	T2: write from the plan. Halfway: is body 1 finished and does it have an example?
53–60	T2: three passes — spelling, articles, sentence fragments.

Chart or essay first — both work: **20 min for the chart, not a minute more.**

Computer format

- **Word counter** under the answer box — 240 words are visible at once, no fooling yourself.
- **No spellchecker.** Know your typical mistakes and look for them deliberately.
- Cut / copy / paste work, paragraphs move easily. ✗ Task wording pasted into the answer does not count towards the total.
- Timer always visible; the section closes when it runs out — no “submit early” button.

Task 1 in brief

7 picture types: line, bar, pie, table, two pictures, process, map. **Four paragraphs:** intro in your own words · overview with no figures · two paragraphs of data and comparisons. No conclusion.
✗ describing how the chart is built · numbers in the overview · explaining causes · confusing % with percentage points.

Task 2 in brief

5 question types: agree/disagree · discuss two views · advantages/disadvantages · problem/solution · two direct questions. **Four paragraphs:** intro with your position · two bodies “idea, explanation, example” · conclusion, no new ideas. Aim for **280–320 words**.
✗ wrong question answered · no position in the intro · ideas listed, not developed · journalistic tone · fragments.

Vocabulary — learn by function, not from “100 clever words” lists

- **With its collocation:** not *significant* but `a significant increase in`; not *demand* but `demand for`. Half of vocabulary errors are the right word in the wrong company.
- **With its family:** rise — a rise, grow — growth, sharply — a sharp.
- **In pairs:** doubled — halved, rose — fell, advantage — drawback, support — oppose.
- **Own mistake list:** your 10–15 persistent errors (goverment, belive).
- **Use it the next day:** a word not used within a week is forgotten. 3–5 new words per essay is enough.
- **Countability:** spending, information, advice, research, equipment — no plural. ✗ spendings
- **Read academic texts** (Reading passages) and note phrases: *is widely regarded as, plays a key role in, there is growing evidence that*.
- More → **Trends** and **Linking words** sheets.

Practise: timed texts + a review of mistakes after each. **2–3 texts a week, one of them a Task 1**, and **once a week both tasks back to back in 60 minutes** under exam conditions.