



# IELTS Writing Task 1- Charts Lesson

This post will cover:

1. Common Problems
2. Different Kinds of Chart Question
3. What IELTS Examiners Expect
4. Structure
5. Identifying Main Features
6. Sample Answer

In part 1 of the writing exam, it is likely that you will have to answer a question on charts. This lesson will help you to effectively answer IELTS writing task 1 chart questions.

We will also look at grammar and vocabulary used in IELTS writing task 1, but this is in a separate post.

## Common Problems

1. Not knowing which information to include in your answer.
2. Being unaware of what the examiner expects.
3. Including opinion and drawing conclusions.
4. Not using an appropriate structure.
5. Not using appropriate grammar for describing data, trends and making comparisons.
6. Not using a wide variety of appropriate vocabulary.
7. Failing to write an effective overview.
8. Copying words and phrases from the question.
9. Failing to support descriptions, trends, and comparisons with accurate data.
10. Writing one long paragraph.

These common problems will stop you getting the IELTS band score you deserve. The advice below will help you prevent these problems and achieve the score you want.

## Different Kinds of Chart Question

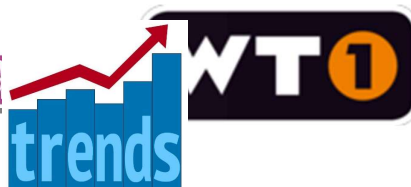
All of these charts do one principal thing- represent numbers. Your task is to describe these numbers.

There are four different types of chart you may have to describe. They are:

1. Line Chart (sometimes called a line graph)
2. Bar Chart
3. Pie Chart
4. Proportional Bar Chart

IELTS task 1 does have other kinds of questions, including maps, process diagrams and comparing two different charts. These require a different approach and I will write about these in the future.

You also need to ask yourself if it is a *static* or *dynamic* chart. A static chart shows data from one time period. A dynamic chart shows change over time. These will obviously require different tenses.



### What IELTS Examiners Expect

The key to the speaking and writing tests is to know exactly what the examiners want and give it to them. On the IELTS writing test you will be assessed on four things:

1. Task Achievement
2. Coherence and Cohesion
3. Lexical Resource
4. Grammatical Range and Accuracy

### **Task Achievement**

This requires the students to accurately reflect the relevant information in the graph. If you gave your answer to a stranger, would they be able to accurately reproduce the graph? If they could, then you have fulfilled this task.

### **Coherence and Cohesion**

This part of the marking criteria judges students' ability to produce an answer that is clear, fluent and easy to understand. Structure, appropriate vocabulary and good grammar help to boost your score here. Good paragraphing and appropriate use of cohesive devices can also be used to gain a higher score.

### **Lexical Resource**

This section is all about vocabulary and is often the most misunderstood. It is NOT about inserting as many long words as you can think of. It is about choosing relevant, appropriate and accurate words. You will help your score here by using a variety of vocabulary and not simply copying the words in the question.

### **Grammatical Range and Accuracy**

Obviously, you have to produce grammatically accurate sentences to do well in this section, but it is also about using the appropriate structures. You are expected to use different structures for describing numbers, trends and making comparisons. The most common grammar mistake students make in IELTS task 1 is not using articles and plurals properly.

If at least 50% of your sentences are not grammatically correct it is hard to score over a band 7.

I will refer to these four categories in the rest of the post to help you focus on them.

### **Sample Answer**

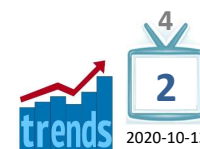
The diagram shows the levels of charitable donations of people living in Britain, separated by age, between 1990 and 2010.

Overall, there was a general decrease in the percentage of people who donated money over the two time periods. However, the pattern differs between the three age groups before 50 and the two age groups after the age of 50.

The highest decrease was in the 18-25 category, which saw a decrease of 10%, from 17% in 1990 to 7% in 2010. 42% of people in the 36-50 age group gave to charity in 1990, the highest on the chart, and this fell to 35% in 2010. There was also a significant decline in donations among 26-35 year olds, from 31% to 24%.

The exception to this general trend downwards was among the 51-65 year olds and over 65s. In 2010, the 51-65 year olds gave the highest percentage with nearly 40 percent and this rose from 35% in 1990. Finally, those over 65 displayed a slight percentage increase of 3 percent.

(174 words)





## Structure

The structure I advise all my students to write is a very simple four paragraph structure. You can use a different structure if you like, but this one has been proven to be successful and approved by IELTS examiners.

### Paragraph 1 (Introduction)

Sentence 1- Paraphrase Question

This paragraph should be one sentence long and demonstrates your ability to paraphrase. You do this by using synonyms and we will look at it in more detail below.

### Paragraph 2 (Overview)

Sentence 1- Overview of first main feature

Sentence 2- Overview of second main feature

Sentence 3- Make general comparison, if appropriate

An overview is a general statement, highlighting the most important information in the table. It should not include any numbers. This is just a summary of the main features. You can use numbers to support your answer in paragraphs 3 and 4.

The examiner is testing your ability to identify the most important information and then summarise it. Important information could include general trends, increase/decreases, differences, comparisons etc. More on how to identify significant features and write an effective overview below.

### Paragraph 3 (Details of significant feature 1)

Sentence 1- Supporting details

Sentence 2- Supporting details

Sentence 3- Supporting details/comparison details/exceptions, if appropriate

In this paragraph, you take the first general statement from paragraph 2 and support it with details from the graph. The examiner is looking for your ability to choose the correct data and ability to describe data, trends, comparisons etc..

You then repeat this process for paragraph 4, only this time you describe the second sentence in paragraph 2.

### Paragraph 4 (Details of significant feature 2)

Sentence 1- Supporting details

Sentence 2- Supporting details

Sentence 3- Supporting details/comparison details/exceptions, if appropriate

That's it. Four paragraphs and 9-10 sentences. Obviously, you need to be flexible and write 8-12 sentences depending on the question. There may also be three significant features, in which case you can adjust the structure slightly.

You should not write a conclusion. Conclusions are for opinion or discursive essays and we are not expected to do this in task 1.

This structure will allow you to practice this kind of question over and over, giving you confidence and a consistent model in the exam.



### Identifying Main Features

This is often the area most students struggle with and it is because of one main reason. Students need to prioritise. Prioritising means you should choose two or three significant features and just write about these. The examiner expects you to do this and the question will often specifically say 'select main features.' There should be 2 or 3 main features for you to comment on.

When students don't do this they write about every single piece of data they see. This results in them not summarising (this is a summarising task), not writing an effective overview and spending too much time on this task. How many students do you know who spent too much time on task 1 and didn't finish task 2? Things that you should be looking for include:

- High/low values
- Erratic values
- Biggest increase/decrease
- Volatile data
- Unchanging data
- Biggest majority/ minority (pie charts)
- Biggest difference/similarities
- Major trends
- Notable exceptions

Looking for these things should allow you to pick out the most important features.

Another thing students often do is overthink the question. They think that the answer is too obvious and therefore don't write about it. A common main feature is a general increase or decrease. Some students see this as too simple and ignore it all together. Don't do this, reporting obvious or simple features is fine.

### **Step by Step Instructions**

I will now take you through my thought processes and show you step by step how to answer a question like this.

1. Read the question twice very carefully.
2. Look at the data. What data is represented on the axis? What groups are represented? What time periods are shown? What are units of measurements?
3. What are the main features?
4. Can I make any comparisons? Are there any exceptions?
5. Make a quick plan using above structure.
6. Write introduction by paraphrasing question.
7. Write second paragraph, which is summary or overview of main features.
8. Support the ideas in second paragraph with more detail in third and fourth paragraphs.
9. Make sure I've not repeated any words and used a range of vocabulary.
10. Check for any grammar mistakes and make sure I've got at least 150 words.

After writing, I should be able to hand this to a stranger and they would be able to draw the graph.