

## Introduction

In lesson 2 we looked more at how to describe tables for task 1 of the IELTS writing test. You also learned some tips on how to organise an 'advantages and disadvantages' type discursive composition. In this lesson, we'll take a first look at another common kind of task 1: describing charts. Then we'll examine more ways of developing an argument for task 2 compositions.

In this lesson you will...

- learn about different types of chart.
- practise getting information from charts.
- learn to recognise static and dynamic charts.
- review simple verb tenses for describing charts.
- learn how to organise a balanced discussion.
- become more aware of formal language for compositions.

## IELTS WRITING TASK 1: CHARTS

### Activity 1 > Types of chart > 8 minutes

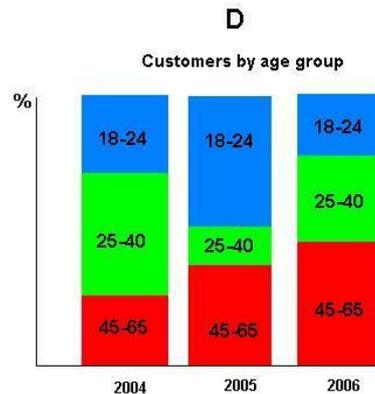
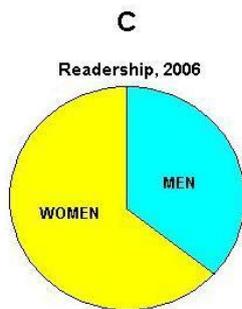
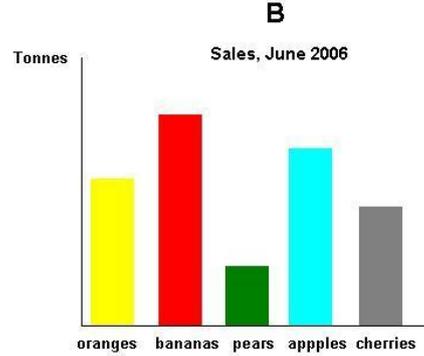
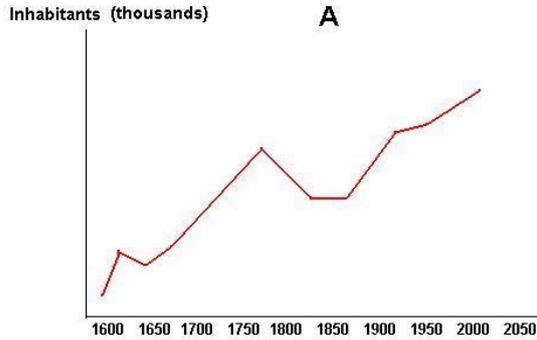
Numbers and statistics can be shown in many different types of chart. Don't worry too much if you are not used to reading charts. The charts in the test will not be complicated. However, you do need to know how to read and understand these basic chart types:

- 1 Bar chart
- 2 Proportional bar chart
- 3 Pie chart
- 4 Line graph

a) Match the four types of chart with the charts shown here.

b) Which of the charts show(s)...

- 1 the situation at one point in time.
- 2 change over time.
- 3 how a total figure is divided into parts.
- 4 comparisons for different groups.
- 5 how one value changes over time.
- 6 how several values change over time.



**Activity 2 > Understanding charts > 10 minutes**

The first things you should do when you attempt IELTS task 1 are...

- read the question *twice* very carefully.
- look at the table or chart very carefully until you are sure what it shows - and what it *doesn't* show.

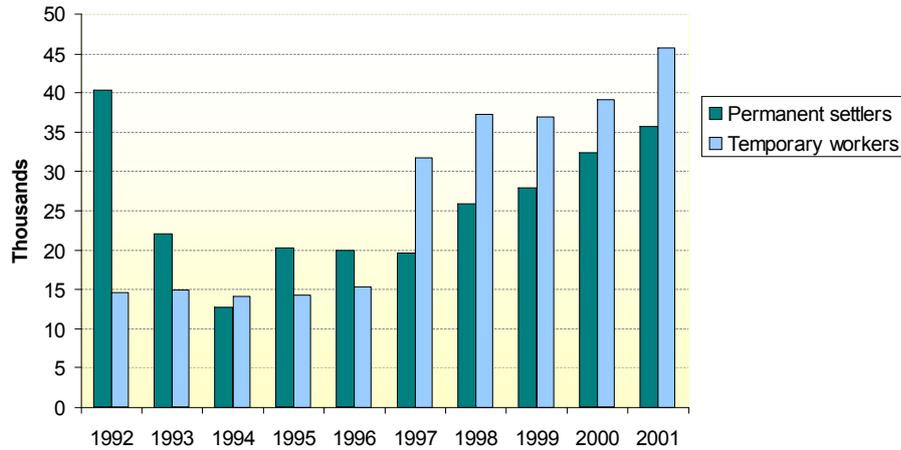
There are three important things to look at in a chart before you write

- the **title** of the chart - this will tell you what is being shown overall, and it usually gives the time period that it represents (e.g. 1980-2000)
- the titles of the vertical and horizontal **axes** - these will tell you what the units of measurement are (e.g. centimetres, kilos, euros) and what groups are being compared
- the **key** or legend (if there is one) - this will tell you what groups or time periods are shown.

[Tip: The titles and labels on the chart also give you useful vocabulary to use in your description]

Look at this chart and decide if the statements below are true (T) or false (F) according to the information shown, or if it is impossible to tell (I).

**Inflow of foreign workers into Australia 1992-2001**



This information is from the OECD statistics website:

[http://www.oecd.org/statsportal/0,2639,en\\_2825\\_293564\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_00.html](http://www.oecd.org/statsportal/0,2639,en_2825_293564_1_1_1_1_1_1_1_00.html)

Specifically: <http://stats.oecd.org/WBOS/default.aspx?DatasetCode=CSP6>

- |   |           |
|---|-----------|
| 1 The chart shows how many Australians travelled abroad for work between 1992 and 2001      | T / F / I |
| 2 The chart shows the numbers of workers immigrating into Australia between 1992 and 2001   | T / F / I |
| 3 The total number of immigrants into Australia in 1992 was about 54 thousand               | T / F / I |
| 4 The chart compares two types of foreign worker.   | T / F / I |
| 5 40 percent of foreign workers who came to Australia in 1992 were permanent settlers.      | T / F / I |
| 6 The total number of permanent foreign workers in Australia in 1995 was about 34 thousand. | T / F / I |
| 7 Just under 15 thousand temporary foreign workers entered Australia in 1992.               | T / F / I |
| 8 In 2001 fewer temporary workers arrived than workers who were permanent settlers.         | T / F / I |

**Activity 3 > Understanding charts > 10 minutes**

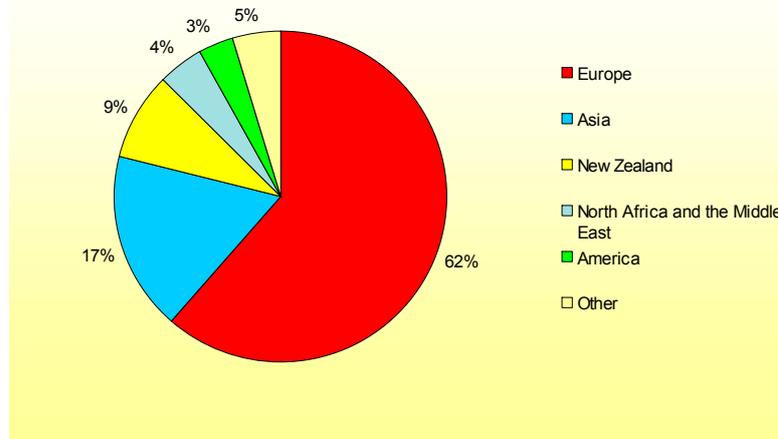
Describing a chart is similar in lots of ways to describing a table of figures. Remember that you have to do the following when you first look at a table:

- check dates to see what the time period is
- check what the units of measurement are
- decide what the most important information is
- decide what details are not so important
- make comparisons between important figures
- round figures up or down when possible

You should do the same things when you study a chart.

a) Look at the pie chart below and look for all the things in the list above.

Immigrant labour force in Australia by region or country of birth, 1991 (thousands)



This information is from the OECD statistics website:

[http://www.oecd.org/statsportal/0,2639,en\\_2825\\_293564\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/statsportal/0,2639,en_2825_293564_1_1_1_1_1,00.html)

Specifically: <http://stats.oecd.org/WBOS/default.aspx?DatasetCode=CSP6>

b) Now complete the text with phrases, words and numbers from the box.

1991 a fifth a tenth four majority second largest smaller smallest the third largest three (x2) two thirds

The chart shows the different nationalities that made up the immigrant work force in Australia in 1..... . It's clear from the chart that there were 2..... main groups of workers: Europeans, Asians and New Zealanders. Only a relatively small number of workers were from other regions.

The 3..... of foreign workers came from Europe. In fact, nearly 4..... of all immigrant workers were of European origin. The 5..... group of foreign workers in the labour force were Asians. They represented just under 6..... of the immigrant labour force. New Zealanders, who made up almost 7..... of the foreign workforce in that year, were 8..... group.

The number of workers from other nationalities was much 9..... Workers from North Africa and the Middle East, for example, were only 10..... per cent of the whole foreign labour force. The 11..... nationality group, however, were Americans. These represented only 12..... per cent of all foreign workers in Australia in 1991.

**Activity 4 > Static and dynamic charts > 10 minutes**

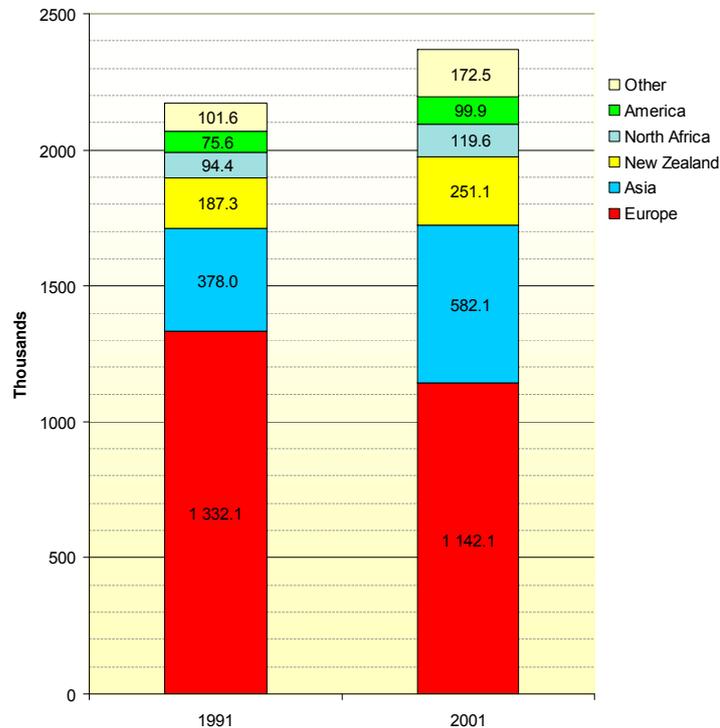
The pie chart in activity 3 showed the situation at one point in time. This kind of chart is called a static chart. When you describe a static chart, you only need to use simple tenses (present simple or past simple, for example).

a) Look again at the description you completed in Activity 3 and underline all the verbs in past simple.

Now look at the chart below. It compares the size of the immigrant workforce in Australia 1991 with that of 2001. In other words, it shows *change over time*. This kind of chart is sometimes called a dynamic chart. To describe dynamic charts, you need to use a variety of tenses, such as:

- simple past - *Between 1991 and 2001, the population increased.*
- past perfect - *By 2001, the population had increased*

**Immigrant labour force in Australia by region or country of birth (1991-2001)**



This information is from the OECD statistics website:  
[http://www.oecd.org/statsportal/0,2639,en\\_2825\\_293564\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/statsportal/0,2639,en_2825_293564_1_1_1_1_1,00.html)  
 Specifically: <http://stats.oecd.org/WBOS/default.aspx?DatasetCode=CSP6>

b) Now complete the description of the chart below by putting the verbs in the correct tense.

The bar chart compares how the immigrant labour force in Australia 1..... (change) between 1991 and 2001. The first thing to note is that the total number of immigrant workers 2..... (increase) over this period by about 200,000. However, there 3..... (be) other important changes in the make up of the immigrant workforce. By 2001, for example, the number of European immigrant workers 4..... (fall) by almost 200,000. In contrast, the number of all other nationalities in the workforce 5..... (rise). In 1991 the number of Asian workers, for instance, 6..... (stand) at around 380,000. Ten years later, this figure 7..... (go) up to over 580,000.

**Activity 5 > More about dynamic charts and verb tenses > 10 minutes.**

Some dynamic charts, like the one in Activity 4, show a change in values from one time in the past to another time in the past. Other charts, however, may compare the past with the present. Occasionally, charts even show predictions about the future. In each case, you need to make sure that you are using the correct verb tenses to describe the chart. For example, you could use...

Present perfect: *The price of oil has risen by €0.10 every month since January.*

Present perfect continuous: *Average temperatures have been increasing since the beginning of the century.*

Future perfect: *The population will have reached sixty million by 2030.*

a) Remember that it is important to use the correct time phrases with the tense you are using. Choose the phrases which can go in the gaps (there may be more than one):

1 ..... prices fell.

- A In 2005
- B By 2005
- C After 2005
- D Since 2005

2 ..... prices had fallen.

- A In 2005
- B By 2005
- C After 2005
- D Since 2005

3 ..... prices have fallen

- A In 2005
- B By 2005
- C After 2005
- D Since 2005

4 ..... prices have been falling.

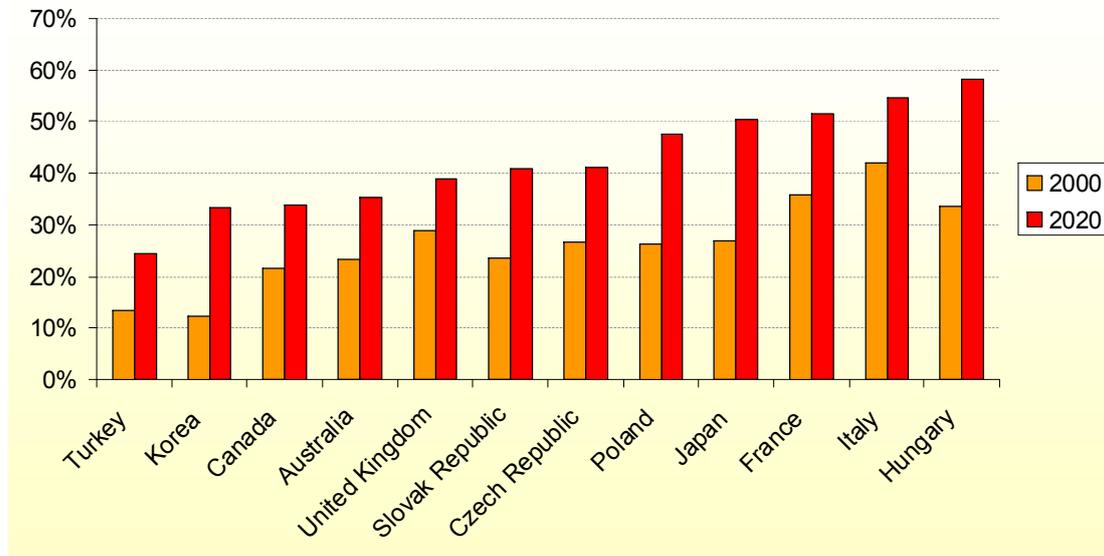
- A In 2005
- B By 2005
- C After 2005
- D Since 2005

5 ..... prices will have fallen.

- A In 2015
- B By 2015
- C After 2015
- D Since 2015

b) Now look at the chart below and complete the description with the correct verb tense.

Ratio of the population aged 65 and over to the labour force



This information is from the OECD statistics website:  
[http://www.oecd.org/statsportal/0,2639,en\\_2825\\_293564\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/statsportal/0,2639,en_2825_293564_1_1_1_1_1,00.html)  
 Specifically: <http://stats.oecd.org/WBOS/default.aspx?DatasetCode=CSP6>

The chart **1**..... (show) the ratio of the population aged 65 and over to the labour force of twelve different countries, and how this **2**..... (change) by 2020.

It is clear from the chart that in 2000 some countries already had a high ratio. In Italy, for example, the population aged 65 and over **3**..... (be) over 40% of the size of the working population. Hungary also **4**..... (have) a high ratio in 2000. Its retired population was over 30% the size of its working population. However, the figure varied a lot between countries. In Turkey and Korea, for example, it **5**..... (be) only just over 10%.

The chart also **6**..... (make) predictions about how this ratio **7**..... (change) in the future. It is clear that all the countries shown have an aging population. Hungary **8**..... (have) the biggest change. By 2020 the ratio of retired people to workers **9**..... (reach) almost 60%. This is an increase of almost 25%. Even in Korea the ratio **10**..... (increase) to over 30% by 2020.

**IELTS WRITING TASK 2: DEVELOPING AN ARGUMENT**
**Activity 6 > Analysing the question > 7 minutes**

In part 2 of the IELTS writing test you may be asked to express your opinion about a controversial issue or debate - in other words, a subject for which people tend to have strongly opposing opinions. Here's an example:

Present a written argument or case to an educated reader with no special knowledge of the following topic.

***Relying on fossil fuels such as oil and coal for our energy needs is becoming increasingly impractical. The rising cost and decreasing supply of these fuels, along with concerns about the global warming they cause, means we must find an alternative. The only realistic alternative is nuclear energy.***

***To what extent do you agree or disagree?***

You should use your own ideas, knowledge and experience and support your arguments with examples and relevant evidence.

As always, before you start writing, spend a few minutes thinking about what the question asks, and what the best way to answer is. Read the example question above one more time, and then decide whether the statements below are true or false.

- |  |            |
|--|------------|
| 1 The question asks whether or not fossil fuels are impractical.                   | <b>T/F</b> |
| 2 You should give a detailed description of how fossil fuels cause global warming. | <b>T/F</b> |
| 3 The question asks whether nuclear energy is a good alternative to fossil fuels.  | <b>T/F</b> |
| 4 You should discuss the arguments for and against nuclear energy.                 | <b>T/F</b> |
| 5 You should discuss the arguments for and against fossil fuels.                   | <b>T/F</b> |
| 6 You should mention other alternative energy resources.                           | <b>T/F</b> |
| 7 You should give detailed historical accounts of nuclear disasters.               | <b>T/F</b> |
| 8 You should only mention your opinions.   | <b>T/F</b> |
| 9 You should express your opinions, but show awareness of others.                  | <b>T/F</b> |
| 10 You should include relevant facts that help to support your opinions.           | <b>T/F</b> |

**Activity 7 > Getting ideas > 5 minutes**

The example question you saw in the previous activity invites you to express your opinion about nuclear energy. One way to do this is to discuss arguments for and against this energy source.

- a) Take a few minutes to jot down arguments for and against the use of nuclear power.

b) Here are some ideas we thought of. Which of these points are for and which against? Write F (for) or A (against) next to each point.

- All waste is contained instead of going directly into the atmosphere.
- The mining of uranium causes environmental damage.
- Modern nuclear power stations are designed with many safety features.
- There is always a danger that human error or negligence could cause an accident.
- Nations that have no oil and gas reserves can produce their own energy independently.
- Nuclear power stations could be targeted by terrorists.
- Nuclear power is a much more economical way to produce energy.
- Safely disposing of radioactive waste is expensive.
- There are other alternatives to fossil fuels, such as wind and solar power, which pose fewer risks.
- Nuclear power offers an almost limitless supply of energy.
- Nuclear power stations are safer places for people to work than coal-fired power stations.
- There is the danger of a huge environmental disaster.
- Nuclear power stations do not produce greenhouse gases.
- Radioactive waste poses a danger for centuries.

### Activity 8 > Organising a balanced discussion > 10 minutes

One way to organise a balanced discussion is simply to divide the arguments for and the arguments against into two separate central paragraphs. You would need to connect ideas using words and expressions such as those you learned in Lessons 1 and 2.

a) Connect the ideas in the example paragraph below with words from the box.

As a result   Finally   First of all   Furthermore   Instead   Secondly

What are the factors in favour of nuclear power as an energy source? [1]....., it is an economical source of energy. The power generated by nuclear power stations costs much less to produce than from coal or oil fired stations. [2]....., unlike traditional power stations, nuclear power plants do not pollute the atmosphere with their waste. [3]....., the waste is stored in safe containers deep underground. [4]....., a move to nuclear power will reduce greenhouses gases that are responsible for global warming in the atmosphere. [5]....., statistics show that power stations are actually safer places for people to work than coal-fired power stations. [6]....., nuclear power can potentially supply all our energy needs for many centuries to come.

However, another effective way to organise your discussion is to match *argument* with *counter-argument* in the same paragraph. This can often be a more persuasive way to present your views. You demonstrate awareness of others' opinions, but at the same time you show why these are mistaken. Again, connecting words and phrases help to hold the paragraph together.

b) Connect the ideas in the example paragraph below with words from the box.

causing   despite   for instance   more importantly   moreover   while

The claims made by those in favour of nuclear power do not stand up to close examination. It is often said, [1]....., that nuclear power does not damage the environment. [2]..... it is true that greenhouse gases are not produced, mining for uranium causes real damage to the environment. [3]....., many reactors use rivers for cooling. This raises temperatures in the river water,

[4]..... harm to life in and around those rivers. It is also argued that the technology of modern reactors makes accidents almost impossible. [5]..... these claims, accidents have happened - most famously at Chernobyl. No amount of technology can prevent human error, carelessness or laziness. All of these can cause deadly accidents. [6]....., nuclear power plants could become the target of terrorist attacks. Technology could do very little to prevent such an attack, and the consequences are unthinkable.

### Activity 9 > Developing a more formal style > 10 minutes

Notice that in the example paragraph above, which contrasts argument with counter-argument, the writer uses the passive to introduce ideas:

**It is often said....**

**It is also argued that...**

This is one way to give your writing a more formal style.

a) Rewrite each of these sentences by putting the main verb in the passive.

1 People say that wind power turbines are completely harmless.

It is said that wind power turbines are completely harmless.

2 There are people who argue that solar power will never replace fossil fuels.

\_\_\_\_\_

3 Experts predict that very soon China will be the world's leading economic and political power.

\_\_\_\_\_

4 Many people regard the Internet as a great force for democracy and freedom of speech.

\_\_\_\_\_

5 Researchers hope that they will soon find a vaccine for avian flu.

\_\_\_\_\_

6 Everyone knows that heart disease is the highest cause of death.

\_\_\_\_\_

There are a number of other ways to make your writing more formal in style. As a general rule, remember that formal writing is different from spoken language, and your composition shouldn't sound too chatty. Here a number of things you should avoid.

b) Match the rules on the left with the examples on the right.

1 Do not use contractions

2 Avoid using phrasal verbs

3 Avoid using idioms

4 Do not use tag questions

5 Do not use irony or sarcasm

6 Avoid conversational style

7 Avoid exaggeration

a Of course, we all know what big nature-lovers car manufactures are.

b Nobody wants war, do they?

c It isn't only the government who are to blame.

d If you ask me, what we should do is...

e If we keep on like this, we will have used up all our resources.

f There are loads and loads of reasons why this will not work

g That idea is just a pipe dream.

c) Now rewrite the sentences from exercise b in a more formal style.

- a
- b
- c
- d
- e
- f
- g

### Activity 10 > Example question > 10 minutes

Finally, here is a chance to put what you have learned in this lesson into practice.

- Read the example question below twice to make sure you know what it is asking (and isn't asking).
- Brainstorm ideas and opinions - organise them into a 'for' and 'against' list.
- Decide how you want to organise the whole composition - make a paragraph plan.
- Write only one paragraph, but use the 'argument and counter-argument' format.
- Check that your paragraph uses appropriately formal language and style.
- When you've finished, compare your paragraph with the example answer in the answer key.

Present a written argument or case to an educated reader with no special knowledge of the following topic.

***The teaching of Information Technology (computers) has become a standard part of the curriculum in most secondary schools. The same is now happening in primary schools, where children as young as six are learning how to use computers. However, there is a danger that IT skills are being taught at the expense of more basic skills.***

***To what extent do you agree or disagree?***

You should use your own ideas, knowledge and experience and support your arguments with examples and relevant evidence.

### Lesson Review

**In this lesson you have:**

- learned about different types of chart.
- practised getting information from charts.
- learned to recognise static and dynamic charts.
- reviewed simple verb tenses for describing charts.
- learned two ways to organise a balanced discussion.
- become more aware of formal language for compositions.

Lesson downloads > IELTS Academic Module preparation > Writing > Lesson 3 > Answer key

### Activity 1

a)

- 1 Bar chart **B**
- 2 Proportional bar chart **D**
- 3 Pie chart **C**
- 4 Line graph **A**

b)

- 1 B,C
- 2 A,D (however, bar charts (B) can also be used to show change over time - but not in this example)
- 3 C,D (we could also include B if the chart shows *all* types of fruit sold that year.)
- 4 B,C,D
- 5 A
- 6 D

### Activity 2

- 1 F - The chart shows workers coming into Australia
- 2 T
- 3 I - The chart only shows immigrant workers; there's no information about other immigrants
- 4 T
- 5 F - The vertical axis is 'thousands' not percentage
- 6 I - The chart doesn't give information about total numbers of foreign workers in Australia
- 7 T
- 8 F - More temporary workers arrived than workers who were permanent settlers.

### Activity 3

- 1 1991
- 2 three
- 3 majority
- 4 two thirds
- 5 second largest
- 6 a fifth
- 7 a tenth
- 8 the third largest
- 9 smaller
- 10 four
- 11 smallest
- 12 three

### Activity 4

a)

The chart shows the different nationalities that made up the immigrant work force in Australia in 1991. It's clear from the chart that there were three main groups of workers: Europeans, Asians and New Zealanders. Only a relatively small number of workers were from other regions.

The majority of foreign workers came from Europe. In fact, nearly two thirds of all immigrant workers were of European origin. The second largest group of foreign workers in the labour force were Asians. They represented just under a fifth of the immigrant labour force. New Zealanders, who made up almost a tenth of the foreign workforce in that year, were the third largest group.

The number of workers from other nationalities was much smaller. Workers from North Africa and the Middle East, for example, were only four per cent of the whole foreign labour force. The smallest nationality group, however, were Americans. These represented only three per cent of all foreign workers in Australia in 1991.

- b)  
1 changed  
2 increased  
3 were  
4 had fallen  
5 had risen  
6 stood  
7 had gone

### Activity 5

- a)  
1 A,C  
2 A,B  
3 D  
4 D  
5 B,C

- b)  
1 shows  
2 will have changed  
3 was  
4 had  
5 was  
6 makes  
7 will change / will have changed  
8 will have / will have had  
9 will have reached  
10 will have increased

### Activity 6

- 1 F - The question assumes that this is a fact - this is not the debate..  
2 F - This is not necessary. The question is about the impact of nuclear energy as an alternative.  
3 T  
4 T  
5 F - Again, this is not the debate here. The question is about the pros and cons of the alternatives to fossil fuels.  
6 T - It is appropriate to mention other alternatives, because the question suggests that nuclear is the only realistic alternative. However, the main focus of your answer could be the pros and cons of nuclear energy in more detail.  
7 F - Support your arguments with historical evidence if you know any, but just a brief comment is enough.  
8 F - It is good to have a clear opinion of your own on the issue, and you can organise your composition around this opinion. However, you ought to mention other views also.  
9 T  
10 T

### Activity 7

#### For

Nuclear power stations do not produce greenhouse gases.  
Nuclear power is a much more economical way to produce energy.

Nuclear power stations are actually safer places for people to work than coal-fired power stations.

Nuclear power offers an almost limitless supply of energy.

Modern nuclear power stations are designed with many safety features.

All waste is contained instead of going directly into the atmosphere.

Nations that have no oil and gas reserves can produce their own energy independently.

### Against

Safely disposing of radioactive waste is expensive.

Radioactive waste poses a danger for centuries.

There is the danger of a huge environmental disaster.

The mining of uranium causes environmental damage.

Nuclear power stations could be targeted by terrorists.

There is always a danger that human error or negligence could cause an accident.

There are other alternatives to fossil fuels, such as wind and solar power, which pose fewer risks.

### Activity 8

#### a)

- 1 First of all
- 2 Secondly
- 3 Instead
- 4 As a result
- 5 Furthermore
- 6 Finally

#### b)

- 1 for instance
- 2 while
- 3 moreover
- 4 causing
- 5 despite
- 6 more importantly

### Activity 9

#### a)

- 1 It is said that wind-power turbines are completely harmless. (Example)
- 2 It is argued that solar power will never replace fossil fuels.
- 3 It is predicted that very soon China will be...
- 4 The Internet is widely regarded as a great force for...
- 5 It is hoped that a vaccine for avian flu will soon be found.
- 6 It is widely known that heart disease is...

#### b)

- 1c
- 2e
- 3g
- 4b
- 5a
- 6d
- 7f

#### c)

- a Car manufacturers have shown little concern for the environment.
- b Nobody wants war.
- c It is not only the government who are to blame.
- d In my view, people ought to...

- e If this continues, we will have exhausted all our resources.
- f There are a number of good reasons why this will not work.
- g This idea is simply not feasible.

**Activity 10**

## Example paragraph

The arguments that are used to support the teaching of IT skills at primary schools are not very convincing. For instance, it is often claimed that IT skills are essential for survival in today's world. This may be true in the world of work, but these skills are easily learned later on in life when needed. There is no need to sacrifice valuable time at primary school for this. Learning how to use computers is also believed to be an engaging and creative activity for young children. Despite the popularity of this belief, nothing could be less motivating or creative than sitting passively in front of a computer screen. This is not what the spirit of primary school is all about. School is about building relationships with others and learning how to communicate. IT training does neither of these.