

Lesson downloads > IELTS Academic Module preparation > Writing > Lesson 2
Introduction

In the last email lesson we looked at how to describe tables for IELTS writing task 1. We also looked at how to deal with 'problem and solution' type discursive essays for task 2. In this lesson we'll continue looking at how to describe tables for task 1. We'll also be looking at another kind of composition for task 2 - the 'advantages and disadvantages' essay.

In this lesson you will...

- practise identifying the important information in a table.
- learn how to summarise figures from a table.
- look at what makes a good opening paragraph for task 2 discursive essays.
- review language for making comparisons.
- practise planning a composition
- review useful language for structuring an argument.

IELTS WRITING TASK 1: TABLES
Activity 1 > Identifying important information (1) > 5 minutes

The table you are given to describe in task 1 will probably contain far more information than you can describe in the time and word limit. (Remember, you only have about 20 minutes and 150 words.) You will have to **pick out the most important information** from the table, and to **summarise** the figures. In fact, examiners are looking for your ability to do this.

Look at the table below. Which figures do you think are the most important to mention? Circle the figures you think should be mentioned.

Percentage of households with durable goods 1970-2005

	Car	Central Heating	Washing machine	Tumble dryer	Dishwasher	Microwave oven	Phone	mobile phone	Video recorder	Satellite receiver	CD player	Computer	Internet connection
1970	52	30	65	--	--	--	35	--	--	--	--	--	--
1975	57	47	72	--	--	--	52	--	--	--	--	--	--
1980	60	59	79	--	--	--	72	--	--	--	--	--	--
1985	63	69	83	--	--	--	81	--	30	--	--	13	--
1990	67	79	86	--	--	--	87	--	61	--	--	17	--
1994-95	69	84	89	50	18	67	91	--	76	--	46	--	--
1995-96	70	85	91	50	20	70	92	--	79	--	51	--	--
1996-97	69	87	91	51	20	75	93	16	82	19	59	27	--
1997-98	70	89	91	51	22	77	94	20	84	26	63	29	--
1998-99	72	89	92	51	24	80	95	26	86	27	68	32	9
1998-99*	72	89	92	51	23	79	95	27	85	28	68	33	10
1999-2000*	71	90	91	52	23	80	95	44	86	32	72	38	19
2000-01*	72	91	92	53	25	84	93	47	87	40	77	44	32
2001-02 ³ *	74	92	93	54	27	86	94	64	90	43	80	49	39
2002-03*	74	93	94	56	29	87	94	70	90	45	83	55	45
2003-04*	75	94	94	57	31	89	92	76	90	49	86	58	49
2004-05*	75	95	95	58	33	90	93	78	88	58	87	62	53

-- = no data available

Source: National Statistics (see <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/copyright.asp> for copyright details)

Activity 2 > Identifying important information (2) > 7 minutes

Now read the description for the table in Activity 1. As you read, find and circle the information in the table.

This table shows how the percentage of households with certain durable goods changed over a 35 year period. It is interesting to see that goods that were probably luxury items at the beginning of the period have now become almost universal. For example, only around a third of households had central heating and telephones in 1970, but the figure had risen to 95% and 93% respectively by 2004.

Ownership of some goods saw a steady increase over the 35 years. Households with cars, for example, rose from 52% to 75%. Percentages for some goods, however, rose much more slowly. Households with washing machines, for instance, rose by only 8% from 1994 onwards.

In sharp contrast, ownership of other goods rose dramatically over a very short period. Households with mobile phones and Internet connections, for example, rose by around 50% in only 6 years. Finally, it is worth noting that ownership of video recorders actually fell by 2% between 2003 and 2004, no doubt due to the appearance of DVD players on the market.

Activity 3 > Identifying important information (3) > 7 minutes

Here's another table with lots of information - far more than you could include in a short description. Look at the table and then read the sentences which follow. Decide which sentences should be included in your description and which are not important.

Average weekly household expenditure (£)

	1994-5	1995-6	1996-7	1997-8	1998-9	1999-2000	2000-1	2001-2	2002-3	2003-4	2004-5
Housing	60.10	60.50	61.00	59.90	61.00	65.60	64.50	70.20	71.30	70.70	72.10
Fuel and power	16.80	16.20	16.10	16.20	14.90	13.40	12.80	13.00	12.70	12.40	12.40
Food and non-alcoholic drinks	65.20	66.30	67.70	68.70	67.60	67.60	67.40	68.00	67.00	68.20	67.00
Alcoholic drink	15.90	14.30	15.30	16.00	16.80	16.10	17.30	16.50	15.50	15.70	15.20
Tobacco	7.30	7.30	7.40	7.60	7.50	6.70	6.80	6.70	5.90	5.70	5.60
Clothing and footwear	22.20	21.50	22.30	22.90	24.10	24.90	23.70	24.10	24.20	23.30	23.10
Household goods	29.30	29.40	29.90	32.60	31.90	34.00	34.80	35.80	35.80	35.90	36.20
Household services	19.50	19.00	19.00	19.80	21.00	21.70	21.40	24.10	25.50	24.80	25.70
Personal goods and services	13.90	14.50	14.70	14.50	15.00	15.30	15.70	16.10	16.20	16.20	16.70
Motoring	46.80	46.40	47.90	51.60	56.00	59.40	59.50	60.50	62.70	65.40	64.40
Fares and other travel costs	8.60	7.70	8.30	9.40	10.20	9.50	10.40	10.40	10.10	8.50	10.00
Leisure goods	18.00	17.20	18.10	19.30	20.60	20.50	21.00	21.70	21.30	21.70	22.10
Leisure services	40.40	40.20	41.00	42.80	46.80	48.20	49.70	55.60	56.20	56.80	56.80
Miscellaneous	3.00	3.00	1.50	1.20	1.30	1.40	1.60	0.80	2.00	2.00	2.00
All expenditure	366.90	363.30	370.30	382.60	394.50	404.40	406.60	423.40	426.30	427.30	429.10

Source: National Statistics (see <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/copyright.asp> for copyright details)

- 1 Overall household expenditure rose by more than £60 per week over the ten year period.
- 2 Between 2001 and 2005, weekly expenditure remained steady at around £427.
- 3 The biggest single rise in total expenditure was between 2001 and 2002.
- 4 Households spent £56 per week on motoring in 1998.
- 5 The amount spent on housing rose by £12 over the ten year period.
- 6 Households spent £12.80 on fuel and power in 2000.
- 7 Generally the amount spent on fuel and power has fallen steadily since 1994.
- 8 Expenditure on tobacco rose by ten pence between 1995 and 1996.
- 9 Clothing was the seventh largest household expense in 2004.
- 10 The biggest rises in weekly expenditure over the ten years were for motoring and leisure services.

Activity 4 > Summarising and grouping figures together (1) > 7 minutes

One way to summarise the information in a big table is to group numbers together. For example, with the previous table about household expenditure, you could group years together and describe the change over a three or five year period.

Alternatively, you could group different expenditures together into one expenditure type. For example, leisure goods and leisure services could be grouped together as one expenditure called 'leisure'.

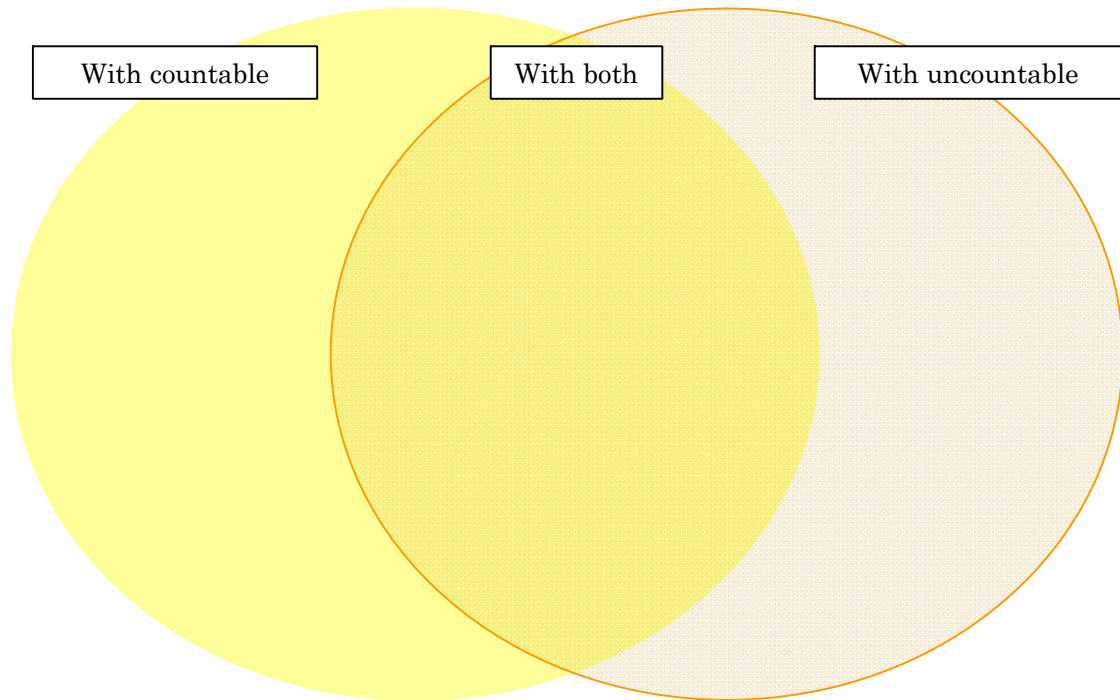
Of course, this means you have to do a little maths! Look again at the table from Activity 3 and then choose the best answer for the questions that follow.

- 1 What was the total weekly expenditure on leisure in 2004-5?
A £78.90
B £100
C £75.20
- 2 What was the rise in all expenditure from 2000-2001 to 2001-2?
A about £35
B about £17
C about £27
- 3 What was the total weekly expenditure on travel, including motoring, in 1994-5?
A £55.40
B £45.40
C £35.40
- 4 What was the fall in weekly expenditure on alcohol and tobacco over the ten years?
A £1.40
B £3.40
C £2.40
- 5 What was the overall rise in expenditure on household goods and services over the ten years?
A about £20
B about £13
C about £10

Activity 5 > Making comparisons (1) > 5 minutes

When you describe tables or charts in task 1, you will almost certainly need to make comparisons between values. Here are some useful phrases for comparing values. Put each phrase into the correct group.

as many as	far fewer	far less	fewer	fewer and fewer	less	less and less
many more	more	most	as much as	much more	smaller and smaller amounts of	
	the greatest number of	the greatest percentage of	the highest percentage of	the		
	largest quantity	the majority of	far more			



Activity 6 > Making comparisons (2) > 5 minutes

Now use phrases from Activity 5 to complete the sentences below. There is often more than one correct answer.

- 1 Men spend [.....] more money on sports and hobbies than women do.
- 2 The amount of money people spend on tobacco is getting [.....] each year.
- 3 The [.....] the population still have some form of religious beliefs.
- 4 The number of people who rent their home has been getting [.....] in recent years.
- 5 The total amount of fuel consumed in 1970 was not [.....] the total amount consumed in 1980.
- 6 Far [.....] children walk to school now compared with twenty years ago.
- 7 Consumption of organic produce was far [.....] ten years ago than it is now.
- 8 The survey shows that over the ten year period, [.....] people became self-employed.

Activity 7 > Writing task > 20 minutes

Now let's put what we've discussed so far into practice. You're going to write a description of the most important information in the table below. But before you write, try to answer the following.

- 1 Does the table show dynamic or static data?
- 2 What three factors affecting earnings does the table show?
- 3 Compare the figure earnings for all men with those for all women. Who earns more?
- 4 At what age do men earn the most?
- 5 At what age do women earn the most?
- 6 How much more do men with degrees earn than men with no qualifications?
- 7 How much more do women with degrees earn than women with no qualifications?

Average weekly earnings (£): by sex, highest qualification attained and age, 2005

	16–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–59/64	All working age
Men						
Degree or equivalent	356	619	810	862	732	726
Higher education below degree level	366	501	588	619	583	554
GCE A level or equivalent	290	446	545	536	436	470
GCSE grades A* to C or equivalent	253	410	469	463	503	410
Other (including GCSE below grade C)	253	389	453	435	417	407
No qualifications	250	325	359	366	335	342
All men	283	483	574	575	487	506
Women						
Degree or equivalent	319	528	627	679	651	561
Higher education below degree level	267	384	464	491	488	440
GCE A level or equivalent	250	353	421	364	390	347
GCSE grades A* to C or equivalent	227	330	331	329	309	308
Other (including GCSE below grade C)	187	378	299	315	302	313
No qualifications	182	300	235	262	259	251
All women	253	425	433	424	381	397

Now write a paragraph describing the most important information in the table. Organise your paragraph like this:

- 1 Discuss the effect of gender on earnings. (See the yellow cells)
- 2 Discuss the effect of age on earnings. (See the blue cells)
- 3 Discuss the effect of qualifications on earnings. (See the red cells)

IELTS WRITING TASK 2: ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES
Activity 8 > Analysing the question > 7 minutes

In part 2 of the IELTS writing test you may be asked to write a discursive composition discussing the advantages or disadvantages of something. Here's an example:

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

More and more colleges and universities are offering courses via distance learning. Distance learning has many benefits, but there are also drawbacks, and not every learner will be suited to this mode of study.

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.

Before you begin writing you should take a few moments to consider what your answer should include - and what it should not include! Read the example writing task again, and then answer the questions below.

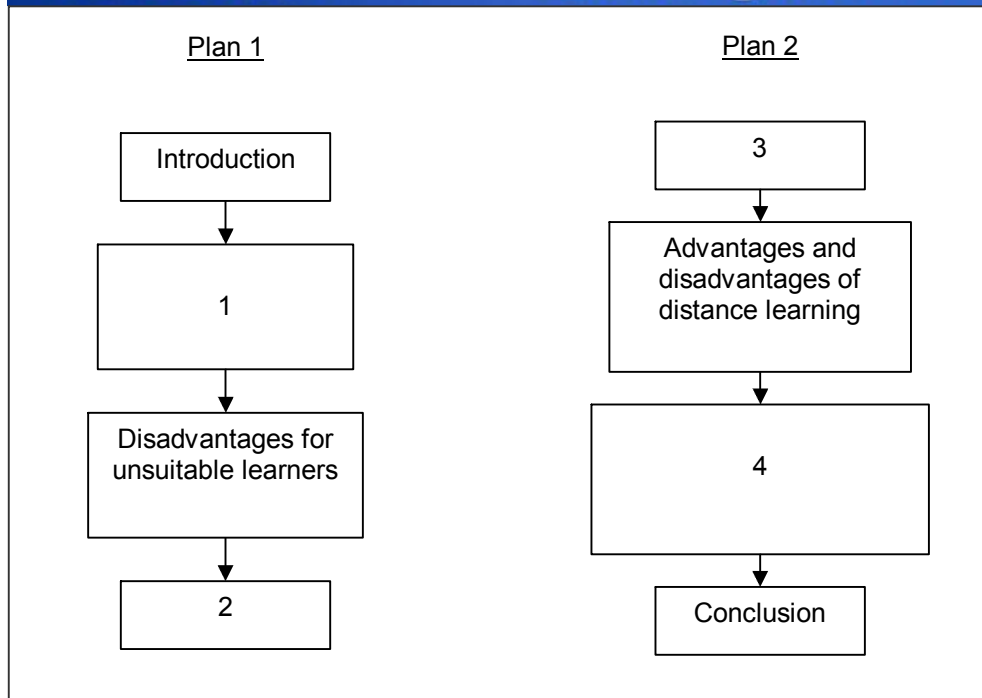
	When answering the question, you should ...	YES	NO
1	discuss reasons why distance learning can be good for learners		
2	discuss reasons why distance learning is good for colleges and universities		
3	discuss the history of distance learning		
4	discuss the problems associated with distance learning		
5	discuss reasons why distance learning is not suitable for some learners		
6	give a detailed account of the types of course that can be followed by distance learning		
7	discuss reasons why distance learning is bad for colleges and universities		
8	describe the kind of learner that would be suitable for distance learning		
9	come to a logical conclusion about the value of distance learning in your view		
10	say what you would like to learn by distance if you had time		

Activity 9 > Planning your composition > 5 minutes

Once you're sure you understand what the question is asking you to discuss, it's time to plan. It's worth spending 2 or 3 minutes thinking about how you're going to organise your answer. There's never any single 'correct' way to organise an essay, but it should have some kind of logic.

Here are two ways of organising an answer to the example question in activity 8. Use the phrases in the box to complete the two plans.

Advantages for suitable learners Conclusion Introduction Suitable and unsuitable learners for distance learning
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Activity 10 > Introductory paragraphs > 10 minutes

It's important that you make a good start to your composition - remember that first impressions last, and your opening paragraph will give the examiner his or her first impression of your work.

Your opening paragraph should not be too long. The function of the paragraph is to introduce the topic, but also to tell the reader how your essay is going to be organised. A mistake that many IELTS candidates make is to use the opening paragraph to make general statements about the topic. Instead, make sure that your first paragraph is completely focused on the question.

Here is an opening paragraph for the example question about distance learning. Read the questions again, and then read the paragraph. Cross out the sentences which you think should not be included.

The number of courses offered by distance has increased a great deal over the last few years. In the past, this type of learning was sometimes called correspondence learning. The advent of the Internet as a learning medium has helped to create distance learning opportunities worldwide. Learners need to have a computer and an Internet connection in order to follow these courses. However, is it really possible to learn from home? Are such courses suitable for all learners? I know several people who have tried this type of course and they all gave up after a few weeks. I will examine these questions below, firstly by considering the advantages and disadvantages of learning in this mode, and then by looking at the kind of learner that suits distance learning. But first, here is a brief history of distance learning.

Activity 11 > Brainstorming ideas (1) > 5 minutes

In the last lesson we looked at 'brainstorming' as a way to generate ideas before you start writing. Spend five minutes now brainstorming ideas for the example question we have been working on. Use the following headings:

Advantages of distance learning

Disadvantages of distance learning

What makes a learner suitable for distance learning

Activity 12 > Brainstorming ideas (2) > 5 minutes

Here are some ideas that could possibly be included. Put each idea under the correct heading.

it can be difficult to fit time for study into a busy working or family life
 it's difficult to get quick feedback on course work from tutors
 learners are isolated and get little opportunity to meet fellow students
 learners have to wait some time before tutors can answer their questions
 learners learn at their own pace
 need to be highly motivated
 need to be self disciplined
 need to be well organised
 should have a good learning environment at home
 should be good at using technology, especially computers
 should have a good idea about what they need to study
 students can study in the comfort of home
 technology break-downs can hinder learning
 the content of the course can be viewed or read again and again by learners
 there are possibilities to study at universities from all over the world

Activity 13 > Structuring and argument (1) > 5 minutes

Once you have brainstormed ideas, you need to pick out the best ones and build them into a structured argument. There are two ways you can do this:

The first way is to put a series of supporting points one after another. For example, *Distance learning allows you to study from home. **Furthermore**, it means you can study at your own pace.*

The second way is to join together two opposing points of view. For example, *Presentation of distance learning material through the Internet or television broadcasts can often be more interesting than classroom presentations. **However**, not all learners are comfortable using the computer technology.*

Here are some useful phrases for joining ideas. Which phrases are for joining supporting ideas and which ones are for joining opposing ideas? Put each phrase into the correct group.

Joining supporting ideas

Joining opposing ideas

also
 besides this
 furthermore
 however
 in addition
 in contrast
 moreover
 nevertheless
 on the other hand
 what is more

Activity 14 > Structuring and argument (2) > 5 minutes

Now use the phrases from Activity 12 to join these ideas.

1 Classroom based courses provide opportunities for learners to meet each other and socialise. [.....], distance learners can often feel isolated.

2 A key advantage of distance learning is that learners work at their own pace. [.....], they can choose the parts of the course that suit their learning needs.

3 Distance learning demands that learners are highly motivated and organised. [.....], many learners find they need a lot of guidance and cannot study independently.

4 It can be difficult for distance learners to contact their tutor to ask questions. [.....], they may need to wait weeks for feedback on assignments.

5 Distance learning these days can be difficult for people who find computers difficult to use. [.....], if the technology breaks down, learning is disrupted.

Activity 15 > Writing Task > 15 minutes

Here is another example of an ‘advantages and disadvantages’ style question for task 2 of the IELTS test.

- **Read the question**
- **Brainstorm ideas**
- **Make a plan**
- **Write an opening paragraph**

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

Many city centres these days have traffic flow problems, causing congestion and pollution. One solution is to build fast ring roads on the outskirts of a city, taking traffic away from the centre. While this is helpful in some ways, it also causes new problems.

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 em@il lesson you have:

- practised identifying the important information in a table.
- learned how to summarise figures from a table.
- looked at what makes a good opening paragraph for task 2 discursive essays.
- reviewed language for making comparisons.
- practised planning a composition
- reviewed useful language for structuring an argument.

Answer key > IELTS Academic Module preparation > Writing > Lesson 2
Activity 3

- 1 include
- 2 include
- 3 include
- 4 not include
- 5 include

- 6 not include
- 7 include
- 8 not include
- 9 not include
- 10 include

Activity 4

- 1 A – Add up leisure goods and leisure services for 2004-5: (£22.10 + £56.80 = £78.90)
- 2 B - See 'all expenditure' Subtract 2000-1 from 2001-2 : (£432.40 – £406.60 = £16.80 = about £17.00)
- 3 A - Add up motoring and fares and other travel costs for 1994-5: (£46.80 + £8.60 = £55.4)
- 4 C - Add tobacco and alcohol for 1994-5 (£15.90+£7.30 = £23.2) and for 2004-5 (£15.20 + £5.60 = £20.8). £23.2 – £20.8 = £2.40
- 5 B – Add household goods and household services for 1994-5 (£48.70) and 2004-5 (£61.9) : £61.90 – £48.70 = £13.20 = about £13

Activity 5

With countable nouns	Both	With uncountable nouns
fewer	more	less
many more	most	far less
far fewer	the largest quantity	less and less
the greatest number of	smaller and smaller amounts of	much more
fewer and fewer	the highest percentage of	far more
as many as	the greatest percentage of	as much as
the majority of		

Activity 6

- 1 much / far
- 2 less and less
- 3 majority of/highest percentage of/
- 4 fewer and fewer / smaller and smaller
- 5 as much as
- 6 fewer
- 7 less
- 8 more and more

Activity 7

- 1 static
- 2 gender (sex), age, and qualifications
- 3 men
- 4 45-54
- 5 35-44
- 6 almost £400
- 7 just over £300

Example description

The table shows the effect that gender, age and qualifications have on weekly earnings. It is clear that gender has a strong influence on an individual's earning potential. This is true for all age groups and regardless of educational achievement. The average weekly pay for all men is over £100 more than that for women.

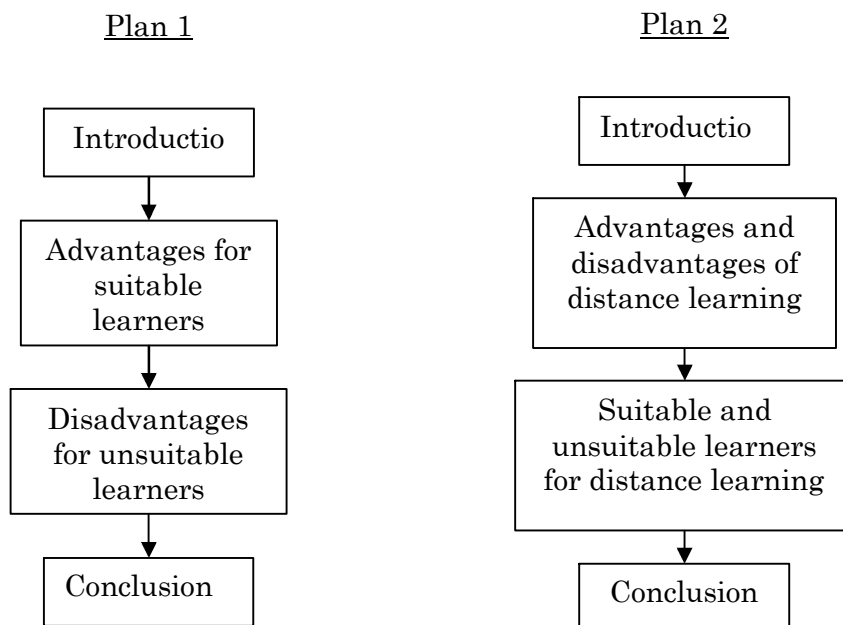
Generally speaking, people earn more as they get older. However, men's earnings peak at a slightly higher age than women's. The highest earnings for men are £575 per week, at the age of 45-54. Women's highest salaries, on the other hand, are £434 at the age of 35-44.

The table clearly shows that qualified people earn more money than those without qualifications. Again, though, the effect of qualifications on earnings is far stronger for men than for women. Men with degrees earn approximately £400 per week more than unqualified men. Graduate women, on the other hand, earn £300 more per week than unqualified women.

Activity 8

- 1 yes
- 2 no
- 3 no
- 4 yes
- 5 yes
- 6 no
- 7 no
- 8 yes
- 9 yes
- 10 no

Activity 9



Activity 10

Sentences which should be deleted are:

In the past, this type of learning was sometimes called correspondence learning.
 Learners need to have a computer and an Internet connection in order to follow these courses.
 I know several people who have tried this type of course and they all gave up after a few weeks.
 But first, here is a brief history of distance learning.

The paragraph should read:

The number of courses offered by distance has increased a great deal over the last few years. The advent of the Internet as a learning medium has helped to create distance learning opportunities worldwide. However, is it really possible to learn from home? Are such courses suitable for all learners? I will examine these questions below, firstly by considering the advantages and disadvantages of learning in this mode, and then by looking at the kind of learner that suits distance learning.

Activity 11Advantages of distance learning

learners learn at their own pace

there are possibilities to study at universities from all over the world

the content of the course can be viewed or read again and again by learners

students can study in the comfort of home

Disadvantages of distance learning

learners are isolated and get little opportunity to meet fellow students

it's difficult to get quick feedback on course work from tutors

learners have to wait some time before tutors can answer their questions

technology break-downs can hinder learning

it can be difficult to fit time for study into a busy working or family life

What makes a learner suitable for distance learning

need to be self disciplined

need to be well organised

should have a good learning environment at home

need to be highly motivated

should be good at using technology, especially computers

should have a good idea about what they need to study

Activity 12Joining supporting ideas

in addition

furthermore

what is more

besides this

moreover

also

Joining opposing ideas

however

in contrast

on the other hand

nevertheless

Activity 13

1 In contrast

2 Furthermore / In addition / Moreover

3 However / In contrast

4 Besides this / Moreover / Furthermore

5 In addition / What is more / Moreover