STUDY NOTES   **EPISODE 25: ACADEMIC WRITING**

WRITING TASK 1, ACADEMIC MODULE

The instructions given for **Task 1, Academic Writing** require a **summary** of the information supplied in a graphic text. The candidate must select and report the **main features**.

One of the key skills required for this task is the ability to identify the main features of the graphic text supplied. This text might be a table, graph, object, process or procedure.

A further skill, spelt out in the instructions, is the ability to make **comparisons** where relevant.

What do I have to do?

Writing Task 1, Academic Module requires the test candidate to
- summarise the information supplied in a graphic text
- select and report main features
- make comparisons where relevant

What do these graphic texts actually look like?

There are different types of graphic texts:
- table
- graph – line, bar, column, pie chart
- object
- process or
- procedure

The following pages contain some examples:

STUDY TIPS

It is necessary in Task 1, Academic Writing, to quickly identify the main or significant features of a given graphic text (a table, graph, object, process or procedure), summarise these and make comparisons where relevant.

Look for significant features such as trends, which stand out in a graph, key stages in a process or procedure, important characteristics of an object.

Develop your skills in organising a summary of information supplied, including relevant information, using a variety of sentence types, and appropriate vocabulary. Always check your spelling.
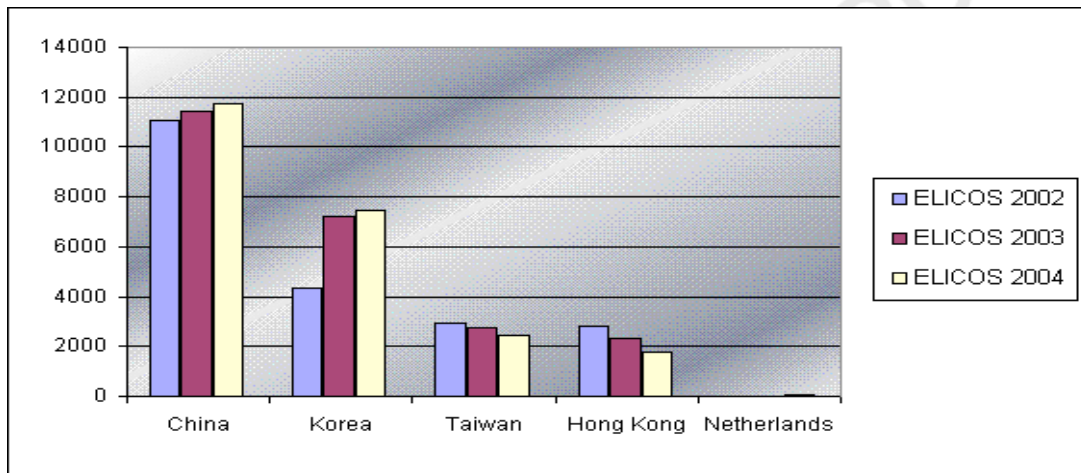
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1. GRAPHS

Here we have a table and on the following page, its corresponding organisation as a column graph.

TABLE

	ELICOS*		
	2002	**2003**	**2004**
China	11070	11426	11748
Korea	4355	7237	7471
Taiwan	2918	2733	2465
Hong Kong	2803	2308	1768
Netherlands	22	18	37

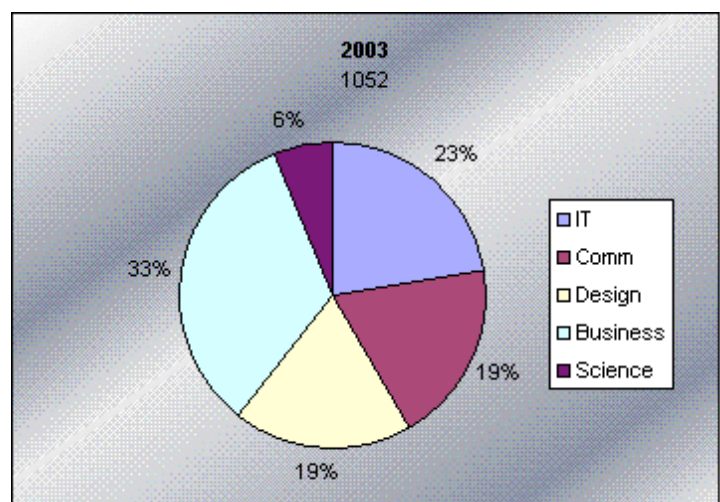NOTE: the acronym ELICOS = **E**nglish **l**anguage **i**ntensive **c**ourses for **o**verseas **s**tudents

COLUMN GRAPH

PIE GRAPH

This table is translated into the corresponding pie graph.

Diploma Programmes at a University College	2003
IT	237
Comm	208
Design	203
Business	350
Science	65

LINE GRAPH

A line graph looks like this:
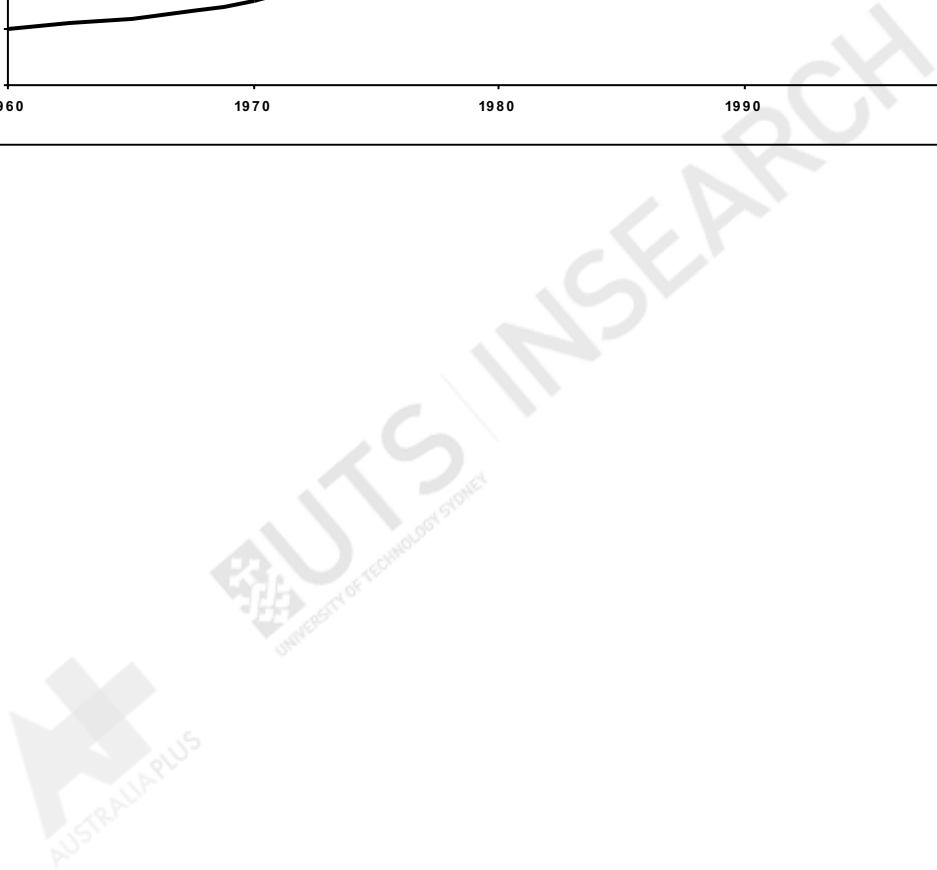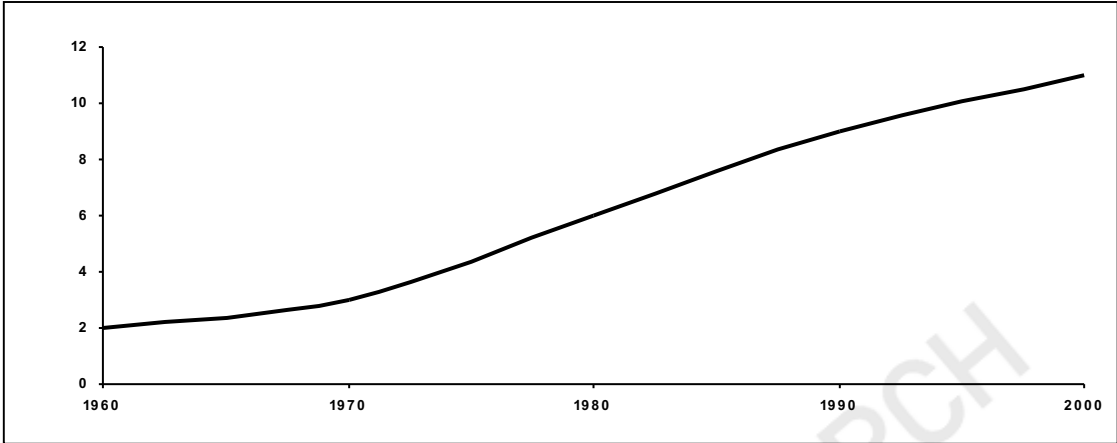
2. PROCESS

Examples of processes can be found in "Study English", Series 1
Look at:

Episode 7 (The Enviro-loo) and Episode 18 (Salinity).

3. CYCLE

An example of a cycle can be found in "Study English", Series 1, Episode 12 (Carbon Cycle).
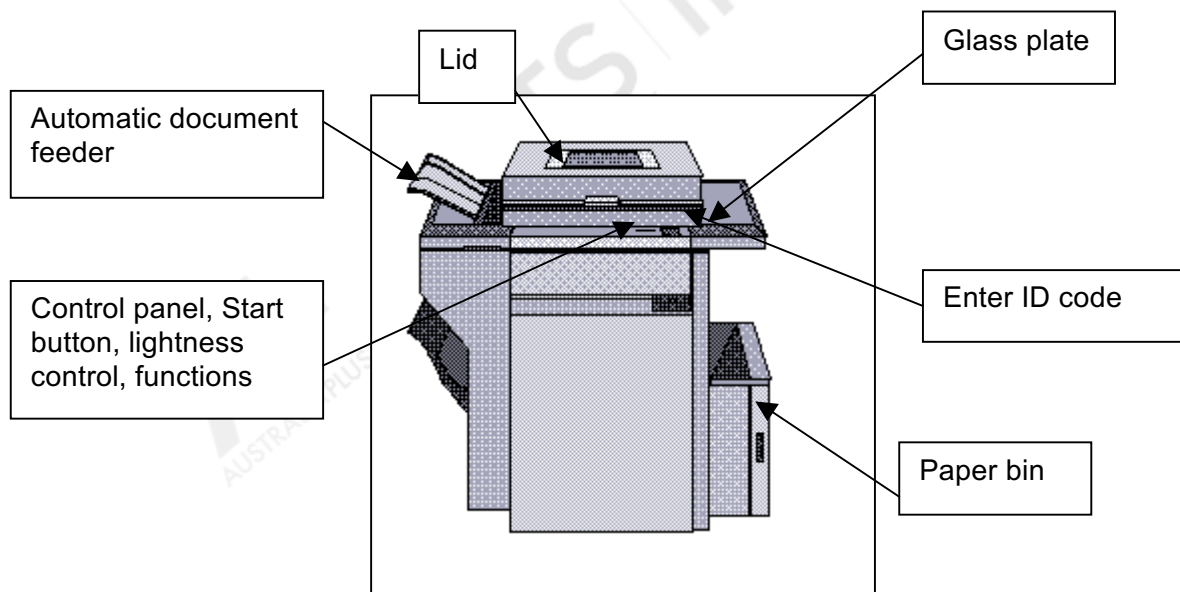
4. PROCEDURE

A Procedure is different from a Process.

Example: How to make a copy of a document using a photocopier

Question: Below is an illustration of a photocopier, which is used to make copies of documents.

Summarise the information by selecting and reporting the main features, and make comparisons where relevant.

Lid	Glass plate
Automatic document feeder	
	Enter ID code
Control panel, Start button, lightness control, functions	
	Paper bin

Sample answer

> The illustration is of a photocopier, which is designed to make good copies of all types of documents. A photocopier has several components including the paper source, a glass plate covered by a lid, the document feeder, and the control panel.
>
> To start with, make sure that the document you want to copy is a good, clean copy. Turn on the photocopier if it is not already on and make sure there is enough paper in the paper bin. If required, enter your password.
>
> It is possible to use either the automatic feeder, or place the document, if it is a page from a book, on the glass plate. Make sure the page you want to copy is flat on the glass plate and aligned against the edges of the glass.
> Remember to keep the lid down when photocopying.
>
> Next, select the number of copies you want. Try one copy by pushing the start button. Adjust shading if required. While continuing the copying, remember to monitor and check that the copies are acceptable.
>
> Word count: 171

Introduction with 2 sentences:
1. Orientation
2. Outline for essay

Key vocabulary

Transition Signals

Verbs in Imperative – series of orders – are underlined.

5. OBJECT

Describing an Object is different again.

For an example of describing how something works, see "Study English", Series 2, Episode 6 (Technology).

How do I organise a response for a question incorporating a graphic text or a combination of graphic texts?

Example 1

Question: The table below shows how many students studied English language courses at an English language centre from 2003 till 2005.

Summarise the information by selecting and reporting the main features, and make comparisons where relevant.

	ELICOS*		
	2002	**2003**	**2004**
China	11070	11426	11748
Korea	4355	7237	7471
Taiwan	2918	2733	2465
Hong Kong	2803	2308	1768
Netherlands	22	18	37

* NOTE: the acronym ELICOS = **E**nglish **l**anguage **i**ntensive **c**ourses for **o**verseas **s**tudents

English language enrolments in full-time study at a university college from 2002 until 2004.
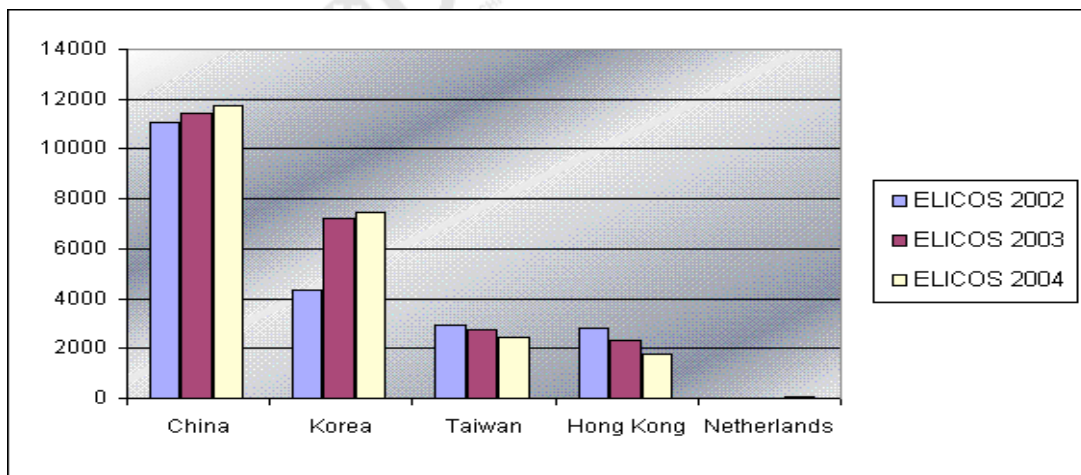
The first thing a test candidate must do when given such a question is to quickly decide how to organise a response, how to organise or summarise the information presented.

There are several options.

Option 1 – 3 body paragraphs one for each of the years, 2002, 2003, and 2004, describing data for the 5 countries.

Option 2 – 5 body paragraphs, one for each of the five countries, describing the data for the three years.

In general, fewer body paragraphs is better. So Option 1 would be the better choice.

There is, however, another option, **Option 3** – another way to organise the data. The five countries can be grouped in 2 sets – the 4 Asian countries (China, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong) and the single European country, the Netherlands.

Thus we would have the following schemes or plans:

OPTION 1 – FOUR PARAGRAPHS

Paragraph	Structure of Essay
1	The table presents figures of the number of international students studying intensive English (ELICOS) courses in Australia from four Asian countries, namely China, Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong, and one European country, the Netherlands. The figures are for the years **2002**, **2003** and **2004**.

2	**B**ody **P**aragraph **1**
	
	2002
	  • **4 Asian countries – China, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong**
	  • **1 European country – the Netherlands**

3	**B**ody **P**aragraph **2**
	
	2003
	  • **4 Asian countries – China, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong**
	  • **1 European country – the Netherlands**

4	**B**ody **P**aragraph **3**
	
	2004
	  • **4 Asian countries – China, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong**
	  • **1 European country – the Netherlands**

OPTION 2 – SIX PARAGRAPHS

Paragraph	Structure of Essay
1	The table presents figures of the number of international students studying intensive English (ELICOS) courses in Australia for three years, 2003 till 2005. These students come from four Asian countries, namely China, Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong, and one European country, the Netherlands.
2	**B**ody **P**aragraph **1** **CHINA** • **2003** • **2004** • **2005**
3	**B**ody **P**aragraph **2** **KOREA** • **2003** • **2004** • **2005**
4	**B**ody **P**aragraph **3** **TAIWAN** • **2003** • **2004** • **2005**
5	**B**ody **P**aragraph **4** **HONG KONG** • **2003** • **2004** • **2005**
6	**B**ody **P**aragraph **5** **THE NETHERLANDS** • **2003** • **2004** • **2005**

OPTION 3 – THREE PARAGRAPHS

Paragraph	Structure of Essay
1	The table presents figures on the number of international students in Australia studying intensive English (ELICOS) courses for the years 2002-2004. These students come from **four Asian countries** (China, Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong) and **one European country**, The Netherlands.
2	**B**ody **P**aragraph **1** **4 ASIAN COUNTRIES – CHINA, KOREA, TAIWAN, HONG KONG** • **2002** • **2003** • **2004**
3	**B**ody **P**aragraph **2** **1 EUROPEAN COUNTRY** • **2002** • **2003** • **2004**

Option 3, consisting of 3 paragraphs is the best choice – it is tight and succinct.

It will be further noticed that of the four Asian countries, two increase (China and Korea) during the period while the other two (Taiwan and Hong Kong) decrease. The Netherlands fluctuates.

Remember – it is NOT necessary to comment on why these patterns might occur.
The instruction is *summarise*, and NOT *explain*.

What do I include in the introduction of the essay?

Look closely at the introductory paragraph, comprising 2 sentences. Each sentence has a function.

> The column graph presents figures on the number of international students in Australia studying intensive English (ELICOS) courses for the years 2002-2004. These students come from four Asian countries (China, Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong) and one European country, The Netherlands.

Sentence 1 – Orientation

Sentence 1 is the orientation and is a **paraphrase** of the information about the graphic, taken from language and text supplied in the question itself.

For example:

> "English language enrolments in full-time study at a university college from 2002 until 2004."
> "ELICOS = English language intensive courses for overseas students."

This information is expressed (paraphrased) as follows:

"The column graph presents figures on the number of international students in Australia studying intensive English (ELICOS) courses for the years 2002-2004."

It is important **NOT** to simply copy out this language. There are no marks for copying! – only marks for your work. Use the language and information and compose **your own** sentence from it (ie **paraphrase**).

Supplied in Question	Paraphrase
ELICOS = English language intensive courses for overseas students	international students in Australia studying intensive English (ELICOS) courses
from 2002 until 2004	for the years 2002-2004

Sentence 2 – outline of the argument

Sentence 2 provides the **outline** of the argument and shows the structure of the body paragraphs.

> These students come from four Asian countries (China, Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong) and one European country, The Netherlands.

Body Paragraphs

From the sentence above, which leads straight into the body of the essay, we know that there should be 2 body paragraphs, one on the four Asian countries, and the other on The Netherlands. The order of the paragraphs should follow the order given in the introduction – the Asian countries first, followed by the Netherlands.

Remember, within the first body paragraph on the Asian countries, the two whose enrolments are increasing should be treated first, namely China and Korea, while the two who have decreasing enrolments, namely Hong Kong and Taiwan, would be tackled second.

Example 2

Look at the following two pie graphs and question.

> **The two pie graphs below present information on enrolments in 2003 and 2004 at a university college in five diploma subjects.**
>
> **Summarise the information by selecting and reporting main features, and make comparisons where relevant.**

Diploma Programmes at a University College
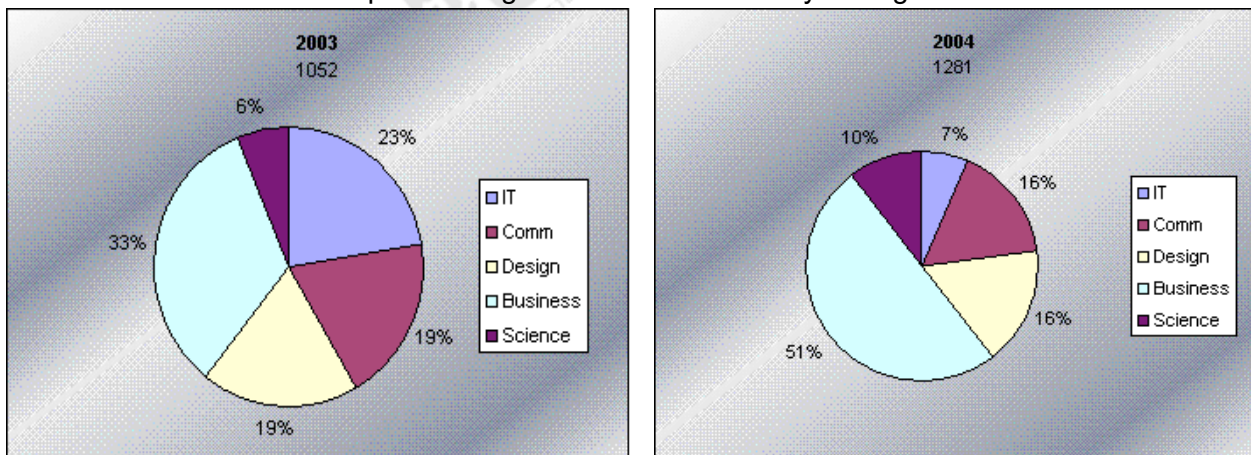
NB: **Comm** is Commerce

There are three possible ways to organise a response.

OPTION 1 – FIVE BODY PARAGRAPHS + INTRODUCTION

Paragraph	Structure of Essay
1	**I**ntroductory **P**aragraph - **2** sentences 1. Paraphrase the question 2. Outline the argument – your attack on the data
2	**B**ody **P**aragraph **1** **INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY** • **2003** • **2004**
3	**B**ody **P**aragraph **2** **COMMERCE** • **2003** • **2004**
4	**B**ody **P**aragraph **3** **DESIGN** • **2003** • **2004**
5	**B**ody **P**aragraph **4** **BUSINESS** • **2003** • **2004**
6	**B**ody **P**aragraph **5** **SCIENCE** • **2003** • **2004**

Six paragraphs are too many. A better way to organise the information is by organising the diploma programmes by year – 2003 and 2004. This would allow two body paragraphs and a much tighter organisation.

OPTION 2 – TWO BODY PARAGRAPHS + INTRODUCTION

Paragraph	Structure of Essay

1	**I**ntroductory **P**aragraph - **2** sentences
	   1. Paraphrase the question
	   2. Outline the argument – your attack on the data

2	**B**ody **P**aragraph **1** **2003** • 5 diploma programmes
3	**B**ody **P**aragraph **2** **2004** • 5 diploma programmes

The five diploma programmes can be treated one by one. This, however, is a little tedious. Because it is necessary to identify the significant trends, it would be better to focus on the trends for these diplomas. This will also help with the organisation of the body paragraphs.

Trends

Two diploma programmes, namely Business and Science, **increase** their enrolments dramatically in the 12-month period, while the other three, Commerce, Design and IT lose their share (**decrease**). Although Commerce and Design increased enrolments, they lost percentage share of overall enrolments. IT collapsed in the period.

So the new organisation would look like this:

Paragraph	Structure of Essay

1	**I**ntroductory **P**aragraph - **2** sentences
	   1. Paraphrase the question
	   2. Outline the argument – your attack on the data

2	**B**ody **P**aragraph **1**
	
	2003
	   • Business and Science
	   • Commerce, Design and IT

3	**B**ody **P**aragraph **2**
	
	2004
	   • Business and Science
	   • Commerce, Design and IT

It is now possible to see a third option for organising the essay:

OPTION 3

Paragraph	Structure of Essay
1	**I**ntroductory **P**aragraph - **2** sentences 1. Paraphrase the question 2. Outline the argument – your attack on the data
2	**B**ody **P**aragraph **1** **Diplomas of Business and Science** • **2003** • **2004**
3	**B**ody **P**aragraph **2** **Diplomas of Commerce, Design and IT** • **2003** • **2004**

Which is better – Option 2 or Option 3? Both are acceptable.

However, the Introductions will be different for these two Options.

OPTION 2

Paragraph	Structure of Essay
1	**I**ntroductory **P**aragraph - **2** sentences The two pie graphs present information on enrolments as a percentage of total enrolments for five diploma programmes, IT, Commerce, Design, Business and Science at a university school. The enrolments are for two years, 2003 and 2004.
2	**B**ody **P**aragraph **1** **2003** • Business and Science • Commerce, Design and IT
3	**B**ody **P**aragraph **2** **2004** • Business and Science • Commerce, Design and IT

OPTION 3

Paragraph	Structure of Essay
1	**I**ntroductory **P**aragraph - **2** sentences The two pie graphs present information on enrolments as a percentage of total enrolments for five diploma programmes at a university school for two years, 2003 and 2004, Two diplomas increased their share of total enrolments (Business and Science), while three (Commerce, Design and IT) decreased.
2	**B**ody **P**aragraph **1** **Diplomas of Business and Science** • **2003** • **2004**
3	**B**ody **P**aragraph **2** **Diplomas of Commerce, Design and IT** • **2003** • **2004**

It is critically important when answering a Task 1 question in IELTS Writing to take a few minutes to study the graphic and determine the best way to attack the information, or organise your response – a summary of the information presented.

It is clear that once you have decided the best way to organise your summary, the structure of the essay will fall into place, enabling you to quickly complete the task.

THE GRAMMAR FOR A DESCRIPTION OF A GRAPHIC TEXT

Particular graphs require certain language choices.

Graphic Text	Verb Tense	Grammar choices	Examples
Line graph	• Simple Present used to introduce the graph		The graph shows/presents/summarises…
	• Data in the past, use Simple Past	Grammar of line graphs • Describing trends	sales increased, profits rose, imports plateaued, a slight fall, fluctuated dramatically
	• Data in the future, use Simple Future	• Comparisons	the great**est** increase, sales rose **more** in the first quarter, improved **more** quickly, profits are expected to rise
		• Time phrases • Prepositional Phrases	**from** 1997 to 1999, **until** the introduction of, **by** 6%, **for** 10 years, **at** $45,000, peaked **at** US $5600, **between** 2% and 2.7%
Bar/Column, Pie Graph, Table	• Simple Present used to introduce the graph		The graph shows/presents/summarises…
	• Data in the past, use Simple Past	Grammar of Bar Graphs • Comparisons	Enrolments were higher, fees were lower, prices reached the highest point, more people visited museums
		• Time Phrases • Prepositional Phrases	Exports doubled in 1997, for several months, by the end of the year, after the introduction of the new tax
	• Data in the future, use Simple Future		It is expected, it is predicted, it looks like sales will continue to increase

Graphic Text	Verb Tense	Grammar choices	Examples
Line graph	• Simple Present used to introduce the graph		The graph shows/presents/summarises…
	• Data in the past, use Simple Past • Data in the future, use Simple Future	Grammar of line graphs • Describing trends	sales increased, profits rose, imports plateaued, a slight fall, fluctuated dramatically
		• Comparisons	the great**est** increase, sales rose **more** in the first quarter, improved **more** quickly, profits are expected to rise
		• Time phrases • Prepositional Phrases	**from** 1997 to 1999, **until** the introduction of, **by** 6%, **for** 10 years, **at** $45,000, peaked **at** US $5600, **between** 2% and 2.7%
Bar/Column, Pie Graph, Table	• Simple Present used to introduce the graph		The graph shows/presents/summarises…
	• Data in the past, use Simple Past	Grammar of Bar Graphs • Comparisons	Enrolments were higher, fees were lower, prices reached the highest point, more people visited museums
		• Time Phrases • Prepositional Phrases	Exports doubled in 1997, for several months, by the end of the year, after the introduction of the new tax
	• Data in the future, use Simple Future		It is expected, it is predicted, it looks like sales will continue to increase
		• Imperatives	**Press** the button **Choose** the number of copies **Adjust** for brightness **Select** the number of copies

| Graphic Text	Verb Tense	Structure	Examples
Machine, Tool, Object	• Simple Present used to describe the object, its parts and how they operate to perform the function	1. Orientation	The drawing/illustration **shows/is** of a laser scanner.
		2. Purpose statement	A laser scanner is designed/made to…
		3. Parts	It consists of/is made up of/comprises three main parts.
		Grammar	First/firstly, second/secondly, finally/lastly, the last part
		• Transition Signals	
		• Active/Passive Voice	is made up of, is designed to

TENSE CHOICE

In general when describing something as it is now, or someone as s/he is now, then we use the Present Simple Tense. So, if we are describing a graph, machine, process etc we would use the Present Simple Tense.

However, if the graphic includes information dated in the past or the future, then we might have to consider other tense choices.

For example, look at the Line Graph:

Car sales in Australia in millions of vehicles
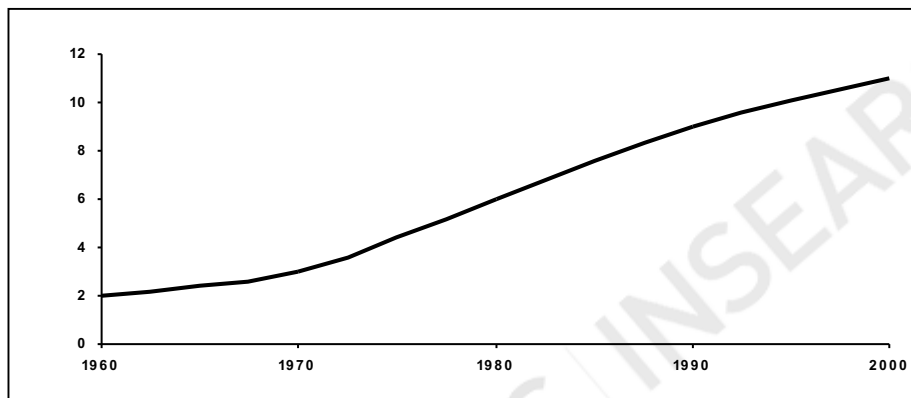
Tense choices:

The line graph **gives** sales of automobiles in Australia from 1960.	Simple Present (general opening description)
Sales **increased** gradually from 1960 till 1970.	Simple Past (for data in the past)
Since 1970 sales **have grown** considerably.	Present Perfect (for period of time)
It is predicted that sales **will continue** to grow after 2000.	Future Tense (for future prediction)
Prior to 1970 sales **had shown** a modest increase.	Past Perfect (completed action in past)

LANGUAGE CHOICES

It must be remembered that there are many language choices in English. For variety it is important to use as many choices as possible. This will demonstrate your English language proficiency – your command of the range of choices available.

When describing trends in Line Graphs it is possible to use Adjective and Noun combinations, or Verb and Adverb constructions.

ADJECTIVE	NOUN	VERB	ADVERB
fast quick sudden significant dramatic large major	the rise the increase the explosion	to go up (went/gone) to rise (rose/risen) to increase (d) to explode (d) to skyrocket (ed) to balloon (ed) to soar (ed)	fast quickly suddenly significantly dramatically
slow small gradual slight insignificant minor	the drop the decrease the plummeting the sinking	to go down to drop (-ped) to decrease (d) to plummet (-ed) to sink (sank/sunk) to nose dive (d)	slowly gradually slightly insignificantly

It is possible to describe the same information in different ways, using different language choices:

Adjective + Noun
There was a rapid increase in car sales for the period.

Verb + Adverb
Car sales increased rapidly during the period.

INCLUDE DATA

It is necessary in academic English to always support what you write with evidence – data and examples. It is also important to provide a commentary to demonstrate your understanding or appreciation of the significance of what you are describing.

Descriptions of what graphs tell us can have three parts:
1. Statement – "automobile sales increased gradually"
2. Data – "from 1974 till 1994", "from 2 to 3 million"
3. Comment – "a rise of 50%", a dramatic rise

The following sentence is a description of "car sales in Australia". It is barely adequate. It needs to be expanded and supported with evidence and a commentary, which demonstrates an understanding of the significance of the trends.

> Car sales in Australia increased slowly and then began to increase more quickly. They have continued to increase and it is predicted they will continue.

The following two sentences show how this is done:

Adjective/Noun Construction From 1960 till 1970, there was a gradual increase in car sales in Australia, from 2 to 3 million – a rise of 50%.
Verb/Adverb Construction
From 1974 till 1994, car sales in Australia increased gradually from 2 to 3 million – a rise of 50%.

WHICH PREPOSITION TO USE

TIME & PLACE

AT	IN	ON
a point in time a place/particular point	in a period in an area or region	on a day/date on a floor/corner/surface

MOVEMENT
from A to B   from 2002 till 2004   (use *till* or *until* for TIME)
       from Peking to Paris   (use *to* for PLACES)

MEASURE
Inflation remained steady **for** the next decade.
From 1999 **till** 2005 prices fluctuated rather dramatically.
Between 2000 **and** 2005 demand weakened.
Prices rose **by** 10%
Inflation increased **by** 1%
The dollar improved against the Pound Sterling **by** 3 cents in the pound.

What is the examiner looking for?

For information on the criteria used by IELTS examiners when marking an essay for Task 1, go to www.ielts.org

There are four criteria, which IELTS examiners refer to:
1. Task Response
2. Coherence and Cohesion
3. Lexical Resource
4. Grammatical Range and Accuracy

What do these criteria mean?

1. Task Response
This criteria is a measure of your ability to construct a summary which:

1. **presents, highlights and illustrates** key aspects of the graphic text in the test question, using a minimum of 150 words, in the time allowed (20 minutes is recommended). The content must be **relevant** and **accurate**.

2. is **organised** in a particular way with:
   i. an opening paragraph or orientation to the essay
   ii. clear **paragraphs** addressing main trends, differences or stages

3. **adopts** an **appropriate tone. Level of formality** is achieved in the use of:
   i. **objective** statements
   ii. more **formal vocabulary**, less use of **slang** and **phrasal verbs punctuation**

2. Coherence and Cohesion

It is important that your essay is easy to follow – that it is **logically organised**, from sentence to sentence, and from the beginning to the end, from the opening paragraph, to the closing. Information and ideas should be sequenced logically through the essay so that it is easy for the examiner to follow.

Coherence means **logical organisation of information and ideas** across the whole essay and is achieved through:
   i. clear use of **paragraphs**, from the opening to the closing paragraphs. Each paragraph should open with a clear **topic sentence** and have a series of **supporting and developing sentences**.
   ii. **transition signals** and **conjunctions**, **time words** and **phrases**, and **discourse markers**.

Cohesion means the **organisation of language at the sentence level**, inside and between sentences. This is achieved through:

  i.   correct **word order**
  ii. agreement of **subject and verb** (in number and case); **noun and pronoun** agreement (number, case and gender)
  iii. correct use of **articles** (a/an and the)
  iv. choice and sequence of **tenses**, and
  v.   correct use of **conjunctions**.

3. Lexical Resource

Here the examiner looks at your **vocabulary** and your ability to communicate meaning **precisely** and **accurately**. Do you have the vocabulary to carry out the requirements of the task? Lexical resource means:

  i.   extensive vocabulary to enable you to easily write an essay in response to the instructions in the task question. These questions will be on a broad **range of topics**.
  ii. command of **word forms**. There should be a degree of **flexibility** in your use of language, so that you can move smoothly from adjective/noun constructions to verb/adverb constructions. You should have a command of **word forms** (economical/economy/economise/ economically etc)
  iii. ability to **paraphrase**
  iv. an understanding of **usage** (**collocation** – "high building" or "tall building"; "beautiful man" or "handsome man"; "white and black" or "black and white"?)
  v.   **spelling**

4. Grammatical Range and Accuracy

This criteria includes:

  i.   range of **sentence types** – **simple, compound and complex sentences**. Complex sentences contain a dependent clause introduced by a subordinating conjunction, relative pronoun or participle.
  ii. range of **structures** – active/passive voice; cause/effect language; reported speech and projections; conditionals
  iii. level of error
  iv. **punctuation**