Writing task one: single line graph

You will be given a graph with a single line. Your task is to write a 150 word report to describe the information given in the graph. You are not asked to give your opinion. You should spend around twenty minutes on the task. Task one is not worth as many marks as task two and so you should make sure that you keep within the recommended twenty minute time frame.

What is being tested is your ability to:

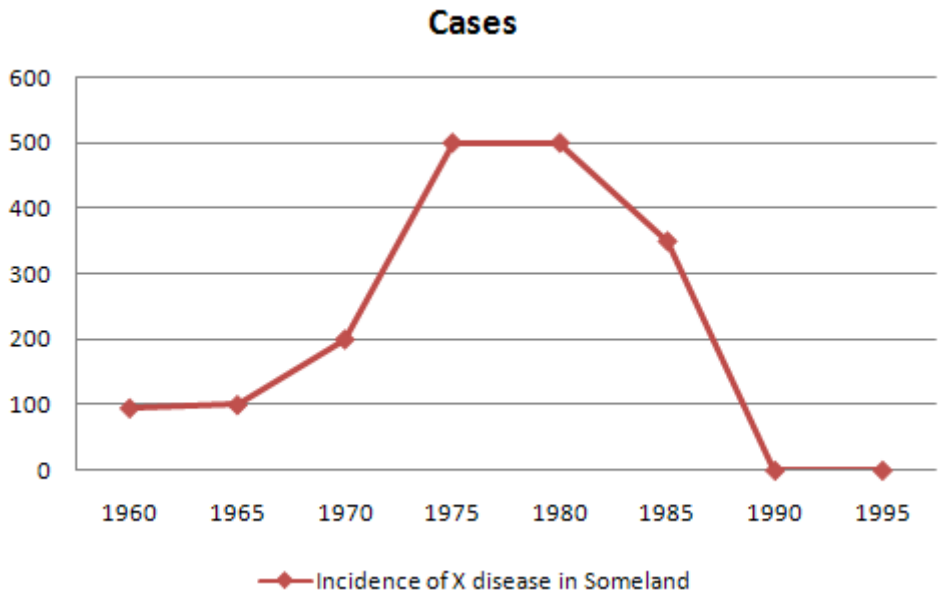
- objectively describe the information given to you
- report on a topic without the use of opinion
- use suitable language to describe the graph

Sample task

You should spend about 20 minutes on this task.

Write a report for a university lecturer describing the information in the graph below.

Write at least 150 words.



When you've finished the task
How good is your answer? Check the guidelines bellow and read the sample answer.

Guidelines for a good answer

Does the report have a suitable structure?

- Does it have an introduction, body and conclusion?

- Does it include connective words to make the writing cohesive within sentences and paragraphs?

Does the report use suitable grammar and vocabulary?

- Does it include a variety of sentence structures?
- Does it include a range of appropriate vocabulary?

Does the report meet the requirements of the task?

- Does it meet the word limit requirements?
- Does it describe the whole graph adequately?
- Does it focus on the important trends presented in the graphic information?

Sample answer

The graph shows the number of cases of X disease in Someland between the years 1960 and 1995. As an overall trend, it is clear that the number of cases of the disease increased fairly rapidly until the mid seventies, remained constant for around a decade at 500 cases before dropping to zero in the late 80s.

In 1960, the number of cases stood at approximately 100. That number rose steadily to 200 by 1969 and then more sharply to 500 in 1977. At this point the number of cases remained stable until 1984 before plummeting to zero by 1988. From 1988 to 1995 Someland was free of the disease.

In conclusion, the graph shows that the disease was increasingly prevalent until the 1980s when it was eradicated from Someland.

What do you think?
What is your opinion of this sample answer? How well does it meet the requirements of the guidelines? Read the teacher's comments on this answer.

Teacher's comments on the sample answer

“The report structure is easy to follow and logical with a clear introduction, body and conclusion. The candidate uses cohesive words to connect pieces of information and make the writing flow such as ‘until’ and ‘before’ in the second sentence. The candidate uses a variety of grammatical structures and vocabulary so that the writing is not repetitive.

In terms of task requirements the report is a little short but this is because the simple graph used as an example does not have sufficient information for the candidate to describe. In the real IELTS test the graph will have more information and so the need to look for trends will be even greater than in this example.”

Strategies for improving your IELTS score

Selecting information
It is important that you describe the whole graph fully. However, this does not mean that you should note every detail. In most cases there will be too much information for you to mention each figure. You will therefore need to summarise the graph by dividing it into its main parts. This is what we mean by describing the trends.

For example, in a chronological line graph it might seem sensible to describe the information year by year or period by period. The graph above gives the information in five year sections so we could write our report like this:

The number of cases of X disease started at 50 in 1965 and then went up gradually to 100 in 1965 and continued up to 200 in 1970 and then went up more sharply to 380 in 1975.

While this way of describing the information may be accurate, it does not meaningfully sum up the information in the graph. In fact, the information in the graph would most meaningfully be described in four chronological sections following the shape of the graph.

In the Sample Task, the graph shows four main trends:

- first, a gradual increase from 1960 to 1968
- second, a steeper increase from 1968 to 1977
- third, a plateau from 1977 to 1983
- fourth, a drop from 1983 to 1988

The structure of the report must show these four main trends clearly.

Report structure
Your report should be structured simply with an introduction, body and conclusion. Tenses should be used appropriately.

Introduction
Use two standard opening sentences to introduce your report. These opening sentences should make up the first paragraph. Sentence one should define what the graph is about; that is, the date, location, what is being described in the graph etc. For example:

The graph shows the number of cases of X disease in Someland between the years 1960 and 1995 …

Notice the tense used. Even though it describes information from the past, the graph shows the information in the present time.

Notice that the sample opening sentence does not simply copy the words used on the graphic material. Copied sentences will not be assessed by the examiner and so you waste your time including them.

Describing the overall trend
Sentence two (and possibly three) might sum up the overall trend. For example:

It can be clearly seen that X disease increased rapidly to 500 cases around the 1980s and then dropped to zero before 1999, while Y disease fell consistently from a high point of nearly 600 cases in 1960 to less than 100 cases in 1995.

Notice the tense used. Here we are talking about the occurrence of the disease in the past.

Describing the graph in detail
The body of the report will describe the graph or graphs in detail. You will need to decide on the most clear and logical order to present the material.
Line graphs generally present information in chronological order and so the most logical order for you to write up the information would, most probably be from earliest to latest. Bar graphs, pie charts are organised in different ways and so you need to decide on the organisation of each one.

Concluding sentences
Your report may end with one or two sentences which summarise your report to draw a relevant conclusion.

Grammar and vocabulary

Avoiding repetition
You will receive a higher mark if your writing uses a range of structures and vocabulary correctly rather than a limited number. For example, the candidate who writes:

The number of cases of X disease started at 50 in 1965 and then went up to 200 in 1970 and then went up to 500 in 1980 and then went down to zero in 1990.

will lose marks for being repetitive. You should therefore practise writing reports using a wide variety of terms to describe the different movements in the graphs and different structures to vary your writing.

Describing trends
Trends are changes or movements. These changes are normally expressed in numeric items, for example, population, production volumes or unemployment. There are three basic trends:

Expressing movement: nouns and verbs
For each trend there are a number of verbs and nouns to express the movement. We can use a verb of change, for example:

Unemployment levels fell

Or we can use a related noun, for example:

There was a fall in unemployment levels

Direction	Verbs	Nouns
	**Rose (to)** **Increased (to)** **Went up (to)** **Climbed (to)** **Boomed**	**A rise** **An increase** **Growth** **An upward trend** **A boom (a dramatic rise)**
	**Fell (to)** **Declined (to)** **Decreased (to)** **Dipped (to)** **Dropped (to)** **Went down (to)** **Slumped (to)** **Reduced (to)**	**A decrease** **A decline** **A fall** **A drop** **A slump (a dramatic fall)** **A reduction**
	**Levelled out (at)** **Did not change** **Remained stable (at)** **Remained steady (at)** **Stayed constant (at)** **Maintained the same level**	**A levelling out** **No change**
	Fluctuated (around) **Peaked (at)** **Plateaued (at)** **Stood at (we use this phrase to focus on a particular point, before we mention the movement, for example: In the first year, unemployment stood at …)**	**A fluctuation** **Reached a peak (of)** **Reached at plateau (at)**

Describing the movement: adjectives and adverbs

Sometimes we need to give more information about a trend as follows:

There has been a slight increase in the value of the dollar (degree of change)

Unemployment fell rapidly last year (the speed of change)

Remember that we modify a noun with an adjective (a slight increase) and a verb with an adverb (to increase slightly).

Describing the degree of change

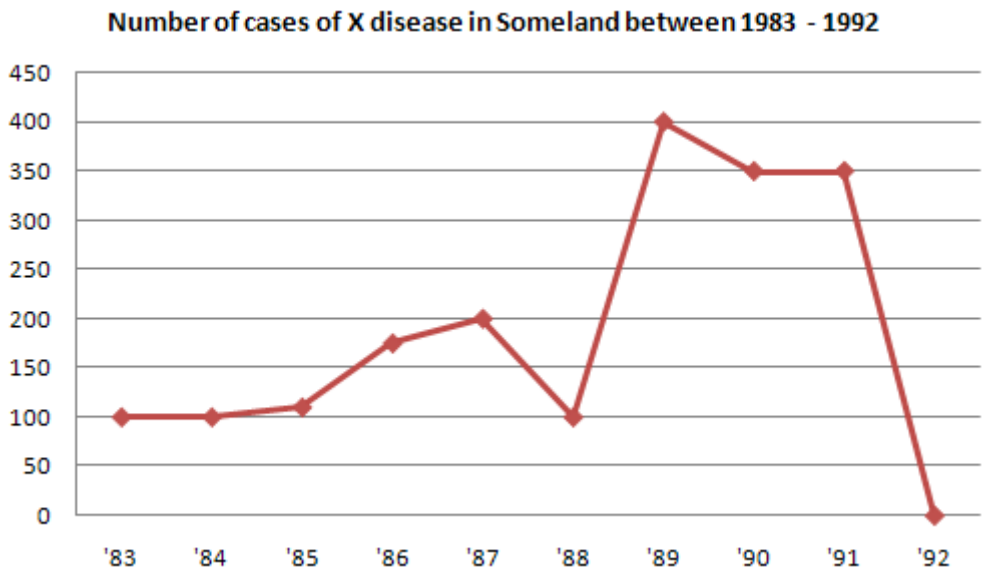
Adjectives	Adverbs
dramatic	dramatically
sharp	sharply
huge	
enormous	enormously
steep	steeply
substantial	substantially
considerable	considerably
significant	significantly
marked	markedly
moderate	moderately
slight	slightly
small	
minimal	minimally

Describing the speed of change

Adjectives	Adverbs
rapid	rapidly
quick	quickly
swift	swiftly
sudden	suddenly
steady	steadily
gradual	gradually
slow	slowly

Exercise 1

Use the following terms and any others necessary to describe the graph below.



initially, stood at, dip/dipped, peak/peaked, level/levelled out

We can describe a trend by looking at:

- the difference between two levels
- the end point of the trend

Describing the difference between two levels

*This year unemployment has increased **by** 20,000 cases (the difference between this year and last year is 20,000 cases).*
*This year there has been an increase in unemployment **of** 5%.*

Notice the prepositions. We use to increase **by** (with the verb) and an increase **of** (with the noun).

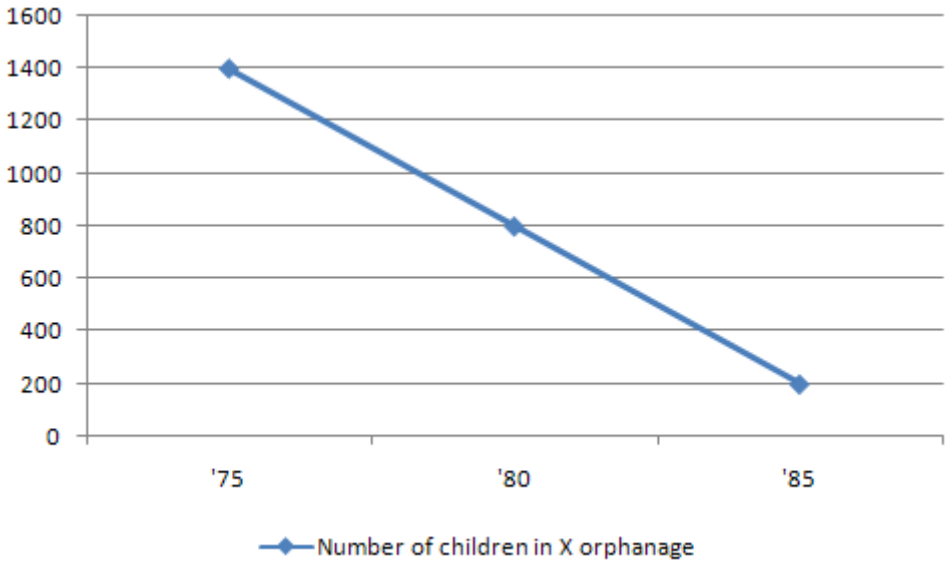
Describing the end point

This year unemployment has risen to 10% (the end result is that unemployment is up to 10%).
This year there has been a rise in unemployment to 10%.

Notice the prepositions. We use to rise **to** (with the verb) and a rise **to** (with the noun).

Exercise 2

Write 3 sentences describing the graph below using **by**, **of** and **to**.



Expressing approximation

We use words to express approximation when the point we are trying to describe is between milestones on the graph.

just under	**well under**	**roughly**	**approximately**
about	**just over**	**well over**	**nearly**