

## Writing task one: tables

You will be given one table of figures. Your task is to describe the information given in the graph by writing a 150 word report. You are not asked to give your opinion. You should spend around 20 minutes on the task.

What is being tested is your ability to:

- objectively describe the information presented in a table
- compare and contrast
- report on an impersonal topic without the use of opinion
- use language appropriate to the description of tables

## Sample task

---

You should spend about 20 minutes on this task.

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

Write at least 150 words.

Hours of leisure time per year in Someland							
	Teens	20s	30s	40s	50s	60s	70s +
Watching TV/videos	1,200	700	400	500	600	700	1,100
Socialising with 4 or less people	150	150	300	250	250	200	200
Socialising with 4 or more people	350	350	50	50	25	25	25
Individual exercise	150	100	200	200	50	75	150
Group exercise/sport	450	350	200	150	50	0	0
Cinema	100	75	50	25	25	50	75

### Your task

Complete the Task One report exercise above. Spend only 20 minutes. Then look at the notes and the sample answer below.

## 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 table?

### Sample answers

We will now compare two sample answers, one better than the other. How well does each one follow the guidelines?

### Sample answer 1

---

The table shows how people in different age groups spent their leisure time in Someland. It can be clearly seen that the amount of leisure time available varied considerably across the age groups.

Teenagers in Someland spent 1,200 hours a year watching TV and those in the over 70s group spent 100 hours less at 1,100. They spent 150 hours on socialising with 4 or less people compared with 200 hours at the other end of the scale. They spent 350 hours socialising with 4 or more people compared with 25 hours. The teenagers spent 450 hours on group exercise but retired people didn't do any.

In conclusion, we can see that in Someland the teenagers and retired people prefer to spend their free time in different ways.

### Teacher's comments on the sample answer

“The report structure is clear and well organised with an introduction, body and conclusion.

The candidate uses repetitive grammatical structures and vocabulary which would bring the mark down considerably. The tense used is not appropriate as there is no indication on the table that the figures refer to the past. Also the reader doesn't know who is being referred to in the two sentences on socialising. The word 'prefer' in the conclusion is inappropriate because the table does not give any indication of people's reasons for spending their time on one activity rather than another. Someone may choose indoor rather than outdoor activities because of their health although they would prefer to go outside.

In terms of task requirements the report has serious problems. Although in writing about a table you will have the difficulty of there being too much information to put into a 150 word report, you can't solve this problem by ignoring whole sections of the table. In this case the candidate simply compared two age levels and ignored the rest.”

### Sample answer 2

---

The table shows how people in different age groups spend their leisure time in Someland over the course of a year. It can be clearly seen that the amount of leisure time available varies considerably across the age groups and that people of different age levels have very different ways of spending their leisure time.

According to the figures, as people age in Someland their social lives reduce. Teenagers and people in their twenties spend on average 500 hours per year on socialising and 350 hours of that time is with a group of more than 4 people. Although the total hours of socialising in their 30s, 40s, 50s and 60s is fairly constant (between 300-350), socialising with more than 4 people drops dramatically to 50 hours in the 30s and 40s age groups and only 25 from 50 years old. Group and individual exercise follow a similar pattern.

People of all ages spend a good part of their leisure time on entertainment such as TV/video viewing and cinema. In both cases, teenagers and retired people spend around twice as much time as those who are at working age. Home entertainment ranges from just over a thousand hours for teenagers and retired people and an average of 600 hours for everyone else. Cinema accounts for 100 hours of the teenagers and retired people's leisure time and 25-50 hours for the rest.

In conclusion we can see there is a significant trend towards solitary and smaller group activities as people grow older and that teenagers and retired people spend a lot more time on entertainment than those of working age do.

## Strategies for improving your IELTS score

---

### Selecting information

Like the line graphs your report should be structured simply with an introduction, body and conclusion. Tenses should be used appropriately.

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

*The table shows how people in different age groups spend their leisure time in Someland over the course of a year.*

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.

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

*It can be clearly seen that the amount of leisure time available varies considerably across the age groups and that people of different age levels have very different ways of spending their free time.*

Notice the tense used. In this case there is no date given and so we must take the table information as being current now.

The body of the report will describe the information presented in the table in detail. You will need to decide on the most clear and logical order to present the material. Generally you will choose one of the categories given in

the table; that is, the age or activity in the example task above. Your choice would depend on whether you could see the most significant trends occurring by age group or by activity. In this case distinguishing the age group is your primary concern in describing this table, and you would do this by highlighting some differences between the activity preferences of the age groups.

Ideally your report should end with one or two sentences which summarise your report or draw a relevant conclusion.

### **Grammar and vocabulary**

You will receive a higher mark if your writing uses a range of structures and vocabulary correctly rather than a limited number.

### **Selecting your information**

In completing this task it is important that you cover all of the information given. However, this does not mean that you should note every detail. In tables there is invariably too much information for you to mention each figure. You will therefore need to summarise the table in meaningful segments. In other words, you will describe the significant trends in your report.

To see the trends in a table, start by finding patterns under the horizontal and vertical headings. In the sample task you would analyse the age groups and activities. We can see that at different times in their lives Someland people have more or less free time and their priorities for how they spend their free time are different. In analysing the activities we can look for which age groups spend more time on individual or group, cheap or expensive, home or outdoor, strenuous or restful activities. By describing trends in this way, we can avoid having to describe every age group across every activity.