

IELTS Writing Sample #183

You should spend about 40 minutes on this task.

Write about the following topic:

Many people believe that formal “pen and paper” examinations are not the best method of assessing educational achievement.

Discuss this view and give your own opinion.

Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge or experience.

Write at least 250 words.

Exam Tip

Timing is critical in any test or exam. Running out of time leads to underlength essays and essays that are really a set of notes or bullet point. The latter will lead to the candidate losing points due to poor paragraphing. Although taking a watch into the test will help, it is by practising before the test and improving writing speed that the candidate will really help themselves. Try to keep a note of how many words you are able to write within a time limit and record how your writing speed improves with practice.

Sample answer

Examinations are one of the most common methods of measuring learning in education systems throughout the world. At virtually every stage of the learning process, exams are used to verify that the learner is ready to move on to the next stage. However, many people believe that the role of examinations should be reconsidered.

There are clearly certain advantages to exams. They help to ensure fairness by imposing the same conditions on all exam candidates. They are also relatively versatile; different types of exam questions, for example, multiple-choice questions and essay tasks, can test different sorts of reasoning ability. However, exams also have clear drawbacks. Test-wise candidates can often perform well on exams without having good underlying knowledge or skills. On the other hand, some test-takers perform poorly in exams simply because of anxiety. Some teachers and learners focus only on those aspects of the curriculum that are likely to be tested, thus narrowing the educational experience for all.

A number of measures should be taken to address these concerns. Wherever possible, exams should match the content and activities of the learning environment. Exam tasks should be varied to give fair opportunities to candidates with different types of skills. Other types of assessment should also be considered; assignment writing, for example, to assess independent learning and research skills, or group projects, to measure teamwork ability.

Exams clearly have a role to play in ensuring proper, objective assessment of achievement. However, exams need to be carefully designed and supplemented with other forms of assessment if they are to be a truly useful component of the educational system.

(266 words)