

STUDY ENGLISH

IELTS PREPARATION

STUDY NOTES

EPISODE 6: QUESTION TASKS AND TOPICS IN WRITING

QUESTION TASKS AND TOPICS IN WRITING

IELTS Writing Task 2 assesses your ability to present a clear argument supported with reasons and examples based on your own experience or knowledge. So, it is important to understand what the question is asking you to do and then support your answer with ideas that are relevant to the question.

An IELTS question consists of two parts:

Question Topic

Question Task

IELTS Tip

Reading newspapers regularly and watching programs on current affairs and stories of general interest can help you build a bank of ideas.

Think about whether you agree or disagree with topics discussed or look out for any causes or consequences of problems and solutions to these problems.

Remember, you will need to state your opinion and take a position on the IELTS topic in the Writing module.

Question Topic

The topics around which writing tasks are designed are of general interest and do not require you to have specialist knowledge. It is important though that you do have an opinion on and interest in general issues in society.

The range of topics and subtopics discussed in the episode as well as other examples is listed in the table below.

Topic	Subtopic
Media	privacy issues; censorship; influence of advertising
Education	testing and assessments; public and private education; home-schooling
Environment	eco-tourism; global warming; pollution
Health and Nutrition	obesity; alternative medicine; diet; exercise; health care
Communication	the internet; mobile phones; text messaging
Society and Culture	communities; traditions, habits and customs; arts and music; traditional versus popular culture
Family	parents and children; responsibilities in a family; generation gap; relationships – marriage and divorce
Employment	unemployment; workplace conditions; job training; apprenticeships
Transport	infrastructure; vehicle safety; road tolls; choice of transport
Technology	dependence on technology; computers and mobile phones; trends and changes
Sciences	marine biology, archaeology, architecture; geography

Reading the newspaper and watching programs on current affairs in particular, will help you keep up-to-date with social and community issues and therefore will help you develop a bank of ideas.

Question Task

The Question Task provides the focus of an IELTS question or the requirements of the task. Its purpose is to test a range of skills which would produce different types of writing.

Question tasks are designed around the following skills and assess your ability to:

- present a solution to a problem
- present two sides of an issue
- evaluate and challenge an issue
- compare and contrast an opinion or evidence
- justify an opinion and use appropriate examples

There are many different ways question tasks can be worded to assess the different types of writing. Here are some examples.

- What are the causes and effects of ...
- Provide a solution or suggestion to the problem of
- What is a possible solution to the problem of ...
- To what extent do you agree or disagree ...
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of ...
- Is this a positive or negative development ...
- Discuss both these views.
- What are your views?
- What is your opinion?

The question task not only determines the type of writing or “essay type” but the kind of language structures you will need to use. For example, if the task asks for ‘causes’ and/or ‘effects’, then the language of cause, effect and result will need to be used.

Cause, effect and result language structures

The relationship between cause and effect can be summarised as follows

active voice		
cause	markers	effect
Obesity	causes leads to results in can lead to	many chronic diseases. high blood pressure. heart disease. premature death.
The number of children in the obese category has doubled.	Consequently, As a result, Because of this,	the rate of disease is higher.
markers	result	cause
The cause of The reason for	obesity is	a sedentary lifestyle.
marker	result	effect
The effect of One consequence of	obesity is	diabetes. premature death.
passive voice		
effect	markers	cause
Obesity	is caused by is the result of	excess body fat. a sedentary lifestyle.

Sample Question Topics and Tasks

Here are some sample IELTS questions to practise identifying:

- The topic area
- the skill tested
- the main topic of the question
- task requirements
- topic ideas
- topic vocabulary

Sample Question 1

WRITING TASK 2

You should spend about 40 minutes on this task.

Write about the following topic.

While the number of smokers in the industrialised world has been steadily decreasing, the same cannot be said for developing nations. Despite the warnings by health care workers about the dangers of smoking, the advice has gone unheeded.

What are some of the effects of smoking and how can governments address this problem?

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

Write at least 250 words.

Topic Area:	Health
Skill:	Present a solution to a problem
Main topic:	Dangers of smoking
Task requirements:	Name some of the negative effects of smoking. Suggest ways that governments could deal with the problem that people are not taking advice of the warnings about the dangers of smoking.

Topic Ideas

Effects of smoking	Suggestions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> increases the likelihood of developing a serious illness, eg lung cancer, bronchitis, heart disease places the lives of non-smokers at risk, especially children addictive can be dangerous i.e. cause a fire 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> authorise advertisements showing the effects of the various diseases caused by smoking prohibit smoking at work and in public places restrict and prohibit the sale of tobacco products conduct educational campaigns in schools teaching children about the dangers of smoking

Topic Vocabulary

target item	vocabulary choices
illness	chronic illness, stomach cancer, bladder cancer, hypertension, cardiovascular diseases
dangers	dangerous substance, cancer-causing, endanger, risk, harm, injure, damage
addictive	causes addition, nicotine, bad habit, dependence, controlled by
advertisements	visually explicit advertisements
prohibit	ban, prevent, legally prohibit, legally enforce, restrict, remove, limit
campaign	advertising campaign, conduct a campaign, tobacco prevention campaign

Sample Question 2

WRITING TASK 2

You should spend about 40 minutes on this task.

Write about the following topic.

Mass media is greatly contributing to the development of youth the world over because of its easy accessibility. Some say that the influence of media on the day-to-day lives of these adolescents is more harmful than advantageous.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?

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

Write at least 250 words.

Topic Area: Media

Skill: Evaluate and challenge an issue

Main topic: Influence of the media on adolescents is harmful

Task requirements: Decide to what extent you agree (fully, partially) or disagree (not at all) that the media's influence is harmful and state your where you stand on the issue. If you believe this to be true, then give reasons why you think there are benefits and state under what circumstances you think the media could be seen as harmful.

Topic ideas

Mass media harmful (agree)	Mass media advantageous (disagree)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> exposure to violent and unsuitable images can affect children's behaviour children are immature so cannot discern right from wrong interest in inappropriate products being advertised 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> many good educational programs the saying "the world is your oyster" is appropriate because the opportunities of learning from the different media about issues worldwide are limitless
Position: despite the harmful effects, adolescents could be supervised and guided to benefit from the advantages of mass media	

Topic vocabulary

target item	vocabulary choices
mass media	television and radio programs, internet and mobile telephone advertisements, commercials, advertisements, films, newspapers, magazines; important source of information
unsuitable	inappropriate materials
children	adolescents, youth, young people, immature, those under 18
harmful	negative effects, disadvantages, drawbacks, detrimental effect, damaging
benefits	advantageous, advantages, beneficial, good, positive
accessibility	gain access to, availability, possibility