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Ben: Writing task 2: Topic answers and recent questions. Hello, there. My name is Ben Worthington and in this tutorial, we are specifically going to look at some recent questions. We are going to break them down and I'll show you how to answer them and then I'll give you sample answer ideas.

We're not going to write the whole essay, but I'm going to break down the first step for you. We're going to look at some recent questions. Don't try and just memorize the recent questions or the recent answers that I'm going to give you now. The best way to do this is to really pay attention to the formula and the process used because if you learn the process, then the next time you see the IELTS task 2 question it becomes much easier and that's for any question.

So, let's have a look. First question: Nowadays, consumer goods have become the most important part of people's lives. Do the advantages of this outweigh the disadvantages? Now, as you know, I'm a big fan of breaking anything that's really big and difficult into smaller components and this is the exact same approach we're going to take with this task 2 question.



We're going to break it into smaller components. This means breaking it down into two paragraphs. So, paragraph one I'm going to talk about the advantages. Paragraph two I'm going to talk about the disadvantages. Using this formula, I'm going to be certain that my task 2 task response score will be high. I'm addressing the parts of the question asked of me.

So, part 1: advantages; advantages of consumer goods becoming the most important part of people's lives. It's a bit tricky. So, what I decided to do in this was I'd say it is completely understandable and that consumer goods can be the most important part of people's lives.

It's understandable because, for example, if you have a car then you need it for work, you need it for family and there's lots of advantages associated with having a car. You've got mobility. You've got freedom. You've got independence. You're not relying on public transport. Also, I guess you can apply for jobs in nearby locations which otherwise you wouldn't be able to. So, it's quite understandable that in some parts of the world a car has become a very important or critical part of people's lives. Now, that's the general idea of the paragraph.

Now, what I would do is drop it into the sentence guide framework and all I have to do then is transfer these ideas and basically put them into the formula and then the output is a strong coherent essay. It's really that simple. You just drop your ideas in, but I know for a lot of students, getting ideas is one of the biggest challenges, so later in this episode, in this tutorial, I'll talk about getting ideas in more details. So, we've got paragraph one: the advantages.



Paragraph two: the disadvantages. For disadvantages, some words came into my mind immediately, so I wrote them down and these words are very important because I'm like that's a good vocabulary term. I'm definitely going to have to use that. So, basically I wrote-- instead of just putting bullet points which is what I usually do, I wrote a whole sentence.

So, I said, "When you fawn over a new product, it has been said that the product owns you rather than you owning the product." So, there's like three or four very good elements or components to this sentence. The first one is fawn which means to like obsess or to pay a lot of attention to, but in an unhealthy manner. F-A-W-N. So, when you fawn...

This is very close to saying most important part of people's lives. It's just taking it to the next step, but the good thing is I don't have to say this clumsy sentence of most important part of people's lives. All I have to say is when you fawn over a new product.

Then I use the passive, "It has been said the product owns you..." So, we've got a passive sentence there. The product owns you rather than you owning the product. So, we've got a little bit-- we've got the comparison there as well, 'rather than...'

From there, I can build my essay, but I just really wanted to put that sentence in and I had to reverse it. I remembered a phrase which was something like the product owns you. Yes, that's it. Who owns who? This is the phrase. Who owns who when you buy an expensive car? Usually,



they say that the expensive car owns you because you are always stressing about it getting scratched, about it getting stolen, but obviously I couldn't write who owns who in the essay.

I had to rearrange that and put it into a passive sentence and say, it has been said the product owns you rather than you owning the product because we cannot have direct questions. We have to rearrange them if we want to use the same information that comes from a direct question or saying.

Now then, so the disadvantages are that sometimes a person can become obsessive and they worry about the product and then I thought of an example. I said, for example an expensive phone. With an expensive phone, you are constantly worried about the screen smashing. You stress about leaving it on the table, getting it wet or leaving it in the taxi and the worry associated with an expensive product item like a phone can be quite stressful.

So, in both of those cases I kind of like stated my position and I've also given an example and that's enough. That's enough for the formula. Then I just use the formula and boom, I've got a decent coherent paragraph. And then for the conclusion, some other useful writing elements popped into my mind while I was planning the conclusion.

We must bear in mind, this is really important, that I'm doing all my planning before I even start writing. I'm just jotting down my notes; any words, phrases that come to mind. Sometimes it's



whole sentences. Sometimes it's just words that I really think are very appropriate, so I write those down.

For example, for my conclusion here, I've got although it is understandable, they are vital components of life. It must not be forgotten that our lives are so much more than consumer durables. So, the sentence is good because not only do we start with a contraction-- no, not a contraction, with a conjunction although, we've also got some slightly high level vocabulary with vital instead of important, so that shows the examiner my lexical resource skills because I'm not using the same words as from the question and then I've got a wonderful phrase as well. It must not be forgotten...

So, that's quite a tidy collocation and it's used accurately. And then we say it must not be forgotten that our lives are so much more than consumer durables and consumer durables is also quite a fancy term for just saying consumer goods. It's more of an economic term, but it's topic specific vocabulary.

Now, reviewing the sentence later because I wrote this yesterday, I can see one error and I'll just say the sentence again and maybe you can pick up on that error. So, I say although it is understandable they are vital components of life, it must not be forgotten that our lives are so much more than consumer durables.

The problem with this sentence is that it's-- and this is the first sentence of my conclusion, the problem is it's using just demonstrative pronouns and in my mind when I was planning this, it



was clear that it although it is understandable they are vital components in modern life. In my mind, it was crystal clear what they were referring to, but now when I'm coming back with a fresh pair of eyes, it's probably not going to be that clear.

We don't want this kind of ambiguity or this reader strain. So, we must be very-- we must be clearer about how we are going to write this sentence. So, maybe we could say although it is understandable, consumer durables are vital components of modern life, it must not be forgotten that our lives are so much more than these goods or these products or these objects.

And just by shifting consumer durables to the beginning of the sentence, it becomes much clearer because I have to wait till the last two words of the sentence-- Previously, I had to wait till the last two words of the sentence to discover what they meant. Although it is understandable, they are vital components of modern life, it must not be forgotten that our lives are so much more than consumer durables and this is not good writing style.

When you start writing at a high level, you can spot these small mistakes. The good thing is with this, if you are writing like this and you spot this, the good thing is it's not a correction. It's an improvement and we all-- personally I do anyway, but I much prefer to be improving people's essays rather than writing-- rather than correcting the essays.

Right then, let's move on to the second one. Some people say that protecting the environment is the government's responsibility. Others believe that every individual should be responsible for it. Discuss both views and give your own opinion. Now, just as a side note to very



increasingly common topics are the environment and consumerism. So, jump online and read about these two trends. They are interconnected, so that's a good thing. Read about these trends and when you are reading, circle the vocabulary that you want, circle the collocations that you find are handy and start to try to incorporate them into your writing.

Right then, as we've done before, we've split the question up and we assign ideas to each of the two components. Some people say that protecting the environment is a government responsibility. Others say individuals should do it. So, I just kind of simplified it. Discuss both views. Give your own opinion.

1) Yes, it's the government's responsibility. 2) Yes, it's the individual's responsibility also. I've made my dinner and I'm going to eat it, as they say. This is my plan. I'm not going to deviate from it now because I know from past experience if I change my plan, if I change my position, it starts becoming much more complicated. I'm just going to go with my ideas.

So, 1) yes, it's the government's responsibilities. I'm going to say what the government could do and just off the top of my head it could-- the government could increase taxes. The government could prohibit polluting industries. The government could ban toxic materials. The government could increase taxes on plastic bags. The government could subsidize solar panels. The government could enforce legislation that makes sure all buildings are built to be environmentally friendly.



So, I've got lots of different examples there and then lots of different ideas and then following the structure that I've mentioned before of going from general down to the specific, I'm going to give a country example. As you've heard me say before, little white lies are fine. They just have to be believable.

Yes, so I'm going to say something like for example, in the-- I could say in the early 1990s, the government in Austria or the Austrian government decided to subsidize the installation of solar panels across certain villages. These villages now produce 20% less CO₂ than neighboring villages or than similar villages in neighboring countries. Therefore, it is clear that when the government takes decisive action, the environmental issues can be reduced considerably.

Something like that. Later, I can sort out the details, but just off the top of my head. The main issue there is that I said the government is responsible and then I'm going to develop this argument. I could say it's not the government's responsibility and then develop that argument and that's also valid. The key is to make a sound, logical argument and this is why the planning is so important.

Let's move on to the plan for paragraph two. I'm going to say yes, it's an individual responsibility also and I'm going to follow exactly the same structure. I'm going to say individuals could start reusing plastic bags. They could start buying electric cars. They could stop using wood burners and gas burners. They could-- I don't know, boycott environmentally unfriendly products and they could start pressurizing companies to make greener products.



Just something like that and then for example, Nestle is one of the most boycotted companies in the world and one of the most recent reasons for this is because they use a lot of plastic bottles for the water products, something like that. I'd rephrase it because that is a bit clumsy, but the thing is I'm going to give a real world example just like I did before and then that paragraph is done.

Let's just check. Some people say that protecting the environment is the government's responsibility. Yes, I agree. Paragraph one. Others believe the individuals should be responsible for it. Yes, I agree. Paragraph two. Discuss both views. I did do. I've assigned a paragraph to each one. And then give your own opinion. Where can I put that? I'm going to put it in my conclusion. That's where I'm going to put it. Just to keep my other two paragraphs clean and say yes, I totally agree with this one. Yes, I totally agree with this one. Then I'll make you wait for my opinion.

Okay, my opinion. It is such a mess, such a disastrous state, such a shame so much so that all parties need to step up and take responsibility for the state of affairs we have landed ourselves in. This kind of suffers from the same issue as before. That I'm talking a lot at the beginning of the sentence, but you've got no idea what I'm talking about. It's such a mess, such a disastrous state, such a shame. What? What is so bad and who needs to step up?

All right, I'm going to rephrase this and I'll say, the environmental situation of planet earth at the moment is such a mess. It's such a disastrous state and it's such a shame so much so that all



parties need to step up and take responsibility. So, what I've got there is a little bit of a pattern. It's like a higher level writing technique. It is such a state. It is such a shame so much so...

So, you've got a little bit of repetition, but it's done in a more-- well, you know I'm-- I think it's called alliteration, but when politicians they repeat the same phrases over and over again, it's just to make it easier to listen to and easier to understand. There is a rhythm there as well.

That's what I tried to do at the end but after reviewing it, I kind of realized that the reader probably doesn't have that much idea about what I'm talking about, so I'd have to say like I said before. Planet earth currently is such a mess. Such a disastrous state, such a shame... and just probably rephrase it, but I wanted to display my opinion and that is that we are in a sad state of affairs with the earth and both-- everybody needs to take action; companies, individuals, and the government.

And then two collocations there that are very appropriate. State of affairs. That just means like the state of what's happening. Are we in a good state or bad state of what's happening? Then-- but state of affairs is a small collocation that's very appropriate and also we have landed ourselves in. That's just a phrase to say the situation we are in, but it just sounds a little bit more eloquent. A little bit more elegant as well.

So, that's that and as you can see, I've totally addressed task response and I've been using some good vocabulary throughout and I've got clear direct paragraphs. Why do I have clear direct



paragraphs? Because I've planned this thoroughly and I double and triple checked my paragraph ideas with the question and that's why they are on topic.

Now then, continuing with this trend of consumerism and it's no surprise that this is another recent question, let's move on to the next question and the next question is some people are fond of buying new gadgets phones, or laptops. Is this a good or bad thing? Discuss your opinion. Now, I can write here it's an entirely bad thing or it's an entirely good thing. And I think what I did is I just decided to do both sides. I can easily write that it's a bad thing for both paragraphs, but I just wanted to see both sides.

So, paragraph one I'm going to say it's a good thing. New technology, it drives innovation, there's technological development, there's job creation. Those are my ideas that I would put into beautiful sentences and then I'll use my linkers as well. Something like, I don't know, consumerism of technological products undoubtedly is a positive development. It drives new technology and innovation. It undoubtedly-- I think I used undoubtedly. It definitely creates new jobs and opportunities in modern economies.

Furthermore, and then I'll add some more points and then I can give an example and this example once again is just something that I have invented. I don't know if it is the truth and I don't mind. The issue-- the point is that it is credible. That it's believable.

So, what I'm going to say for my example is that new investment in technology is only possible because people buy new goods and this helps the economy. For example, Sony has recently



invested in a new chip-- microchip plant in Korea for the PlayStation 5. I don't even know if we are on the PlayStation 5 yet. I don't know. I've got no idea. Maybe the PlayStation 4 is the newest or the PlayStation 10 is the newest. I doubt the examiner is going to know or I doubt the examiner is going to pick you up on that either. So, what I'm saying is that-- but it's believable.

Sony, the big electronics giant, it's got manufacturing plants all over the world and I'm just showing you that when people buy new products, it enables new investments and it creates jobs and it's beneficial for the country, for the people, for technology, for consumers. Everybody wins. So, that's my argument for paragraph one.

Also, as I've said a million times before, it doesn't matter if I totally believe in this. All I want to do is communicate an effective argument or effectively community a logically sound argument. And that's what I've done with that one. Paragraph two, it's a bad thing and it's a bad thing because it encourages consumerism. It encourages toxic waste. There's also the case of planned obsolescence.

Now, if you can squeeze this phrase into your essay about consumerism and if you can write about it effectively you are definitely onto a winner because this is a major issue about consumerism. Planned obsolescence is when a product is designed to break after a year, after two years, or whatever.

When the whole industrialization and consumerism economy sort of like took over from the industrial economy, products were made to last for a long time, but then companies realized



it's more profitable to make the product break after two years or make it useless after two years so consumers have to buy another one. And this is why if you buy a cheap product it's probably going to only last maybe a year, six months or something like that. They are just designed to break.

Anyway, we're going off topic and this is why it's kind of dangerous as well. So, all I'm going to do is just mention planned obsolescence and assume that the examiner knows about this. They probably do. So they will be like wow! This student knows about this topic and then I'm going to give an example but bearing in mind I'm not going to explain planned obsolescence because as you just heard, it takes too much time and we're going off topic.

Remember the question. Some people are fond of buying new gadgets, phones, or laptops. Is this a good thing or a bad thing? It's a bad thing because it produces waste and it encourages planned obsolescence and it's a terrible strain on the economy and then I'll give some more reasons and then I'll develop one of those reasons with an example. In this case, I have to write out the whole sentence just to make sure that I wasn't going off topic.

So, here is my example. Research showed searches for the phrase slow iPhone picked a few weeks before the launch of iPhone models. This is an extremely worrying development because people might be manipulated into buying new gadgets and finding an exaggerated happiness in the new product.



So, what I did there is I really linked it to the question. People are fond which means they enjoy buying new gadgets, phones or laptops, but what's really happening in some cases, is that they are being manipulated because they are being made frustrated and sad by their phone going slow and coincidentally it usually happens just before new product launches.

So, you could argue that people are being manipulated into buying new gadgets and finding an exaggerated happiness in the new products. That's probably an overly complex argument, but you could even just talk about the environment getting damaged and destroyed because of people's fondness of buying new products.

I properly went overly complex there, but I could pull it off because like English is my language. I wasn't in test conditions and I just wanted to-- the idea that popped into my mind was planned obsolescence and I wanted to demonstrate that. I wanted to develop that argument.

In your exam, I would go for something a little bit easier to describe, but I just did want to mention planned obsolescence because it's a very, very useful topic to know about with regards to the environment because you can talk about global-- not global warming, but you can talk about environmental change. You can use it in consumerism. It's quite a useful concept to be aware of.

Conclusion. There are pros and cons and I think in the past it was fantastic. However, nowadays with the environment in such a dire state, consumerism needs to be upgraded somehow. Job done. I've said it's good and it's bad and it was a fantastic development in the past because



people were getting new products, lives were made easier and better, but now the environment is in such a bad state, it needs to be rethought. It needs to be upgraded. This current trend of consumerism needs to evolve.

Right then, that's everything from me today. What I recommend you doing is finding recent questions and doing exactly what we've been doing today. This is just one component of the exam-- sorry, one component of the essay writing processes. Breaking down the questions, assigning ideas to paragraphs and then once you've got that and this is an important step, such an important step that in the online course, what we do is we say look, I want you to write out ideas for all of these questions and we usually have recent questions that students have seen in the exam and you generate ideas for those. We check them and then we give you the greenlight and then after that we give you the formula to drop your ideas into so you can write easy-- so you can easily write strong coherent high scoring paragraphs.

Then once you've done that-- strong coherent essays, sorry, then once you've done that and you've got the formula under control we give you sentence structures you can use-- high scoring sentence structures that obviously drop into the formula, into the framework and then all of a sudden you are writing powerful essays that are on task response-- will get you full points for task response, that are coherent, that are clear.



Hopefully you are using the task response-- Hopefully you are using the sentence structures we give you as well so you are on to a winner. Also, you're getting feedback so it's quite fast improvement.

Right then, that's everything from me today. Thank you very much for listening. If you enjoyed this tutorial please give us five stars on iTunes, on Spotify whatever you are listening on. We'll be very grateful for that. Come and visit us at ieltspodcast.com. Leave your email and we'll send you lots of tutorials, lots of help and lots of special offers for the IELTS course, for essay corrections and everything like that.

Yes, just remember that IELTS is not impossible. You will get there. You just need to take action on a daily basis ideally and keep moving. Keep moving. Get feedback. Keep improving. Get feedback. Keep improving. That's the best way to IELTS. That's everything from me. Have a fantastic day and keep moving.

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