



**Female Voice:** You are now listening to the IELTS podcast. Learn from tutors and ex-examiners who are masters of IELTS preparation. Your host, Ben Worthington.

## INTRODUCTION

**Ben: IELTS Academic Task 1: marking and assessment.** Hi, there. My name is Ben Worthington and in this tutorial, **we are going to focus on [Academic task 1](#) and you will become more familiar with what's needed from you and how it is assessed. Also, we're going to look at structures for task 1.**

Now, as you probably know, there are two tasks in the IELTS academic writing test. You'll obviously need to complete both of them and you've got about **60 minutes**. In task 1, the instructions say you should **spend about 20 minutes on this task**. That's straightforward logical advice and then for **task 2, it says you should spend about 40 minutes on this task**. It says that because task 2 is worth 2/3 of your total score whereas task 1 is worth 1/3.



Just as a side note; most students and myself encourage this, but most students start with task 2 first. That's just logical. That's just-- if you make a mess of your task 2 and you haven't got any time to recover, then you stand a good chance of losing your 60% whereas if you make a mess of task 1, then you've already got 60% of the points sort of like scored to the best of your ability and in the bag, so to speak.

You've got it done and it's out of the way and you've got 20 minutes left now to focus on task 1. So, even if you do mess it up, it's not going to be as severe as running out of time if you would have messed up task 2. So, this is just another argument for taking the [computer-based](#) one because if you do have those horrible train crashes, then with the computer-based one, it's much easier, quicker, cleaner to recover.



## ACADEMIC TASK 1 INSTRUCTIONS

Let's have a look at the instructions. So, it'll say something like summarize the information by selecting and reporting the main features and make comparisons where relevant. I want to repeat that because it really is important. **Summarize the information. Summarize.** So, we're not going to go through and list every single data point. This is a common error that students make.

## HOW DO WE SUMMARIZE?

We've got to summarize and it tells us how. How do we summarize? Well, **we select and report the main features.** So, you need to **know how to choose the right information.** And then it also says make **comparisons** where relevant, but let's just go back. **Choosing the right information.**



In the [online course we have for academic task 1](#), we have a whole chapter about choosing the right information because choosing the right information is a deal-breaker.

It's the one that's going to make or break your task 1. It's also an area which a lot of students struggle with. We go into it in much more detail, but choosing the right information basically means following these instructions. So, we're going to report the main features and then we're going to make comparisons.

### REPORT MAIN FEATURES

So, how do we report the main features? Well, we use **superlatives**. We quickly identify the maximums and the minimums. From there, not only are we going to be using better high-scoring grammatical structures but we've got a ground as well to make comparisons and



using comparisons, we're going to be using **conjunctions** such as although and in comparison to. We're just going to be using much better structures.

Moving on. Questions involving maps, diagrams, and processes are possible, too, but they're slightly less common. Even so, in those cases, you can still use superlatives and obviously, you can still use comparisons. So, I'll just give you an example. The most complex process shown on the chart was the production of tea or the most simple or the least complex process-- the least complex chemical process was the production of ethanol. Imagining that we see some kind of process either showing tea production or chemical production of some sort with diagrams or maps, how do we show the maximums and the minimums?

So, we can state the most northerly point on the chart shows three palm trees or the least dense area of the map are the fields to the right of the housing estate. So, this is why in our academic task 1 course we really drill and we really emphasize the use of superlatives. They need to be mastered as do comparisons. If you get these two structures, if you nail these two



structures, not only are they going to help you in your speaking but they're going to help you in your task 2 as well.

They are just these advanced kinds of structures and this is why we need to learn them inside out, back to front, left to right, right to left. You just need to learn them to a level of automaticity so much so that they sound natural and automatic when you're speaking. Also, so that they sound natural when you are writing. Likewise with the [comparisons](#) because comparisons are extremely useful when you're doing your speaking and also when you are doing a task 2. So, just three very important points there.

#### FOUR AREAS OF ASSESSMENT

There are four areas of assessment: [task achievement](#), [cohesion and coherence](#), [lexical resource](#), [grammatical range and accuracy](#). Also, as a side note, I strongly recommend you go to [ielts.org](#) and you get to grips with the marking system. Write it out if you have to, but you



really need to know what the examiners are looking for. Also, you can just see once you get to grips with it, once you write it out when you start training for academic task 1 or task 2, you'll be able to see like okay, that was a natural use of a collocation or that was a natural use of language and you can start getting into the mind of the examiner, which would definitely help you.

So, just going back as I said: task achievement, cohesion and coherence, lexical resource, grammatical range and accuracy; each one of those is 25%. Task achievement will assess how well you satisfy the requirements of the task. What are the requirements of the tasks? Well-- of the task, in this case.

As I said a few seconds ago, the requirements are summarize the information by selecting and reporting the main features and make comparisons where relevant. That is the requirement of the task. So, this is why it's really important to make sure you're choosing the right information and that you're describing it properly.



Now, just before we dive into the differences between achieving a band 6 and a band 7, let me just give you a little bit of advice from the course in how to choose or how to know which information to include. I'll give you two methods.

Number one is squint your eyes and blur the graph so you just see a rough outline. If you do this, you're going to escape from the details. What a beautiful phrase, Ben. You're going to escape from the details and you're just going to see an overview. You're going to see the maximum and the minimum and you can sort of like say okay, those are the points that I'm looking for.

Also ideally, you'll be able to see any pattern that's there. You might be able to see that the UK was leading France or you might be able to see that rainfall was higher in Scotland than it was in Wales. So, there's that technique. If you're doing the paper-based, you can hold it up and you can push it away from your eyes like from a fair distance and you'll get a similar effect.

Also, another way which we strongly encourage in the online course is to force yourself to use the superlatives and the comparisons and I'll say that again. Force yourself to use the



superlatives. Not only are you going to pick up points for using advanced grammatical structures and good lexical resource but you're also going to be fulfilling the task response of giving in an overview or summarizing.

When we're summarizing, we want to be noting the maximums, the minimums and superlatives will force you to do this. For example, the highest amount of wine production in the world came from France and the country with the smallest amount of wine production is clearly Wales, for example, all right?

Now then, let's move on to the key differences between achieving a 6 and a 7. As you know, we need to present a clear overview in order to be awarded a band 7. So, it's definitely worth time in learning how to present an overview and this goes back to what I was saying before; just squinting your eyes.

So, you need to find out what technique is best for you. Maybe it's just sort of like having a first glance at it. Maybe it's squinting your eyes. Maybe it's just going to-- I think it's called The Economist Data unit-- Economist Daily chart; that's it and there every single day, there is a chart



and it's described exactly like IELTS academic task 1. Sometimes it's about oil production. Sometimes it's about corn production. Sometimes it's about GDP of each country, but there have a look at those daily charts and read them.

Copy them out word for word pen and paper. In this case, I'm going to promote pen and paper because you get that extra element like a kinesthetic element of touching it and writing it down. You get more senses involved in the process, which is good for learning. It's not good for tests, but it's good for learning. In the test as you know, do the computer-based. Anyway, go to The Economist Daily chart, identify their overview sentences, steal their overview sentences and you'll be able to see good academic writing in the real world.

Right then, also, if you're going for a band 7, you need to be able to clearly present and highlight the key features, which is another reason why in our online course we are pushing, insisting, and even returning essays back when they send them in for correction.

When they send them in for feedback, sometimes we send them back and we say look, you haven't even included any superlatives. I'm not going to waste your time. Go back, rewrite it



and then I'll correct it. It might sound harsh, but this way, students learn and also, we don't waste an essay correction for them.

## WORD LIMIT

So, let's move on. As I mentioned before, it's important to know that **there's no upper word limit. However, you've only got 20 minutes. So, this is why it's important to go for quality rather than quantity.** So, as you know, 20 minutes that's a short amount of time. If you've got a structure to follow, it gets much easier.

This goes back to what I've said in previous tutorials about muscle memory; about it becoming automatic. This is what we drill into the students for task 2. That first you do this, then you do this, then you do this. I think it's like six, no five steps and boom! You just drop your ideas into the essay. Anyway, I'm going off-topic.



So, the second area of assessment is **cohesion and coherence** and here the examiners are trained to evaluate how well you've organized the information. For band 7, you need to be organizing the information logically with a clear progression throughout your essay. Now, here there are a little bit of different points of view for how you structure task 1.

**I know that Ellen, part of our team, she recommends that students do paragraph 1 introduction, paragraph 2 you give an overview, paragraphs 3 and 4 you go into the details.** She recommends this method because **if you run out of time**, then at least you've got the overview in the bag. At least you've got it done. So, if time management is an issue for you, it's probably good you follow Ellen's advice.

**Personally, I prefer to teach that the overview is included at the end and I prefer the overview because a kind of-- in my opinion, it gives a more coherent essay.** We've got the introduction and we've got the details and we've got an overview. It seems more logical to me. At the end of the day though, it's your choice. It's your decision. You've got to take the responsibility. Test which one you prefer.



## TIME MANAGEMENT

If time management is an issue, obviously Ellen's is going to be more suitable for you. If it's not an issue, then you might prefer mine. It's totally your choice. It's your responsibility. If I was totally correct, then there would be no need for Ellen. If Ellen was totally correct, there would be no need for me. So, it's your responsibility to choose.

One other thing; also in the [Academic Task 1 Course](#), we don't just say paragraph 1 is an introduction, paragraph 2 the details. We give you the sentence structures and I will just divulge. Ben your vocabulary is so good. Sorry about that. It's just that I enjoy using that word divulge. So, let me just divulge some information for you about how we teach Academic Task 1.

So, we insist as you've probably heard me say a few minutes ago, we insist on superlatives, superlative structures. We insist on comparisons and we insist on fancy sentences. Fancy sentences will be something like wine production in France was three times larger than that of



Spain. Also, we insist on using whereas and while because these are comparisons which is, as we've said before, part of the task requirement is to make comparisons where appropriate.

Not only are you going to be-- if we insist that you use whereas and while correctly, you will be fulfilling the task requirement because you're making comparisons. Likewise, if we insist on superlatives, you are going to be getting nearer to giving an overview and it'll also solve part of the problem of choosing the information. So, this is why our task 1 system is so robust and this is why it gets results because we insist on certain grammatical structures.

Now, just as a side note; an important side note. Those two structures that I just highlighted to you; superlatives and comparisons, it's definitely worth your time learning these inside out, back to front, left to right, right to left, north to south, south to north. You've got to learn these, master them to a level of automaticity for two reasons.

Number one, if you learn them to a level of automaticity so it's just automatic, it's natural, it's going to make it much easier to use them and it's going to free up mental resources so you can



select the right information, so you can manage your time, so you can check for mistakes, so you can check for opportunities to upgrade your essay. So, that's reason number one.

Reason number two why you should learn those two structures because they're incredibly useful for academic task 2 or general training task 2 because it's superlatives, will help you with your grammatical range and accuracy. It's the comparative structures such as while, whereas or in comparison to and although. Those conjunctions for making comparisons will also be useful for task 2 writing both also boosting your grammatical range and accuracy.

Furthermore, the icing on the cake is that once you learn these to such a thorough level, you can start using them in your speaking. You can start making the examiner sit up in her seat or his seat, start listening because you are going to be using some higher-level structures. For example, what kind of food do you like?

Well, when I was younger I used to eat a lot of Italian food whereas nowadays, I prefer Asian food. You see? It's just so simple to use these comparisons and it just helps you so much and it



makes your writing or you speaking so much more interesting and as I've said a million times, we're going to be picking up points for grammatical range and accuracy.

## FINAL POINTS

One final point before we finish is it's definitely important to use these structures in academic task 1 in a natural fashion. This is why it's important to learn them inside out, back to front. Not only are you going to be using them for other areas of your test but you're also going to be using them-- if you learn them to such a high level, they start becoming natural, which will help you with your lexical resource score, not just in task 1 but in task 2 and in your speaking exam.

Final point, when you're learning your vocabulary, when you're focusing on your [vocabulary](#), don't just learn them in isolation. Try to learn them in context and with the relevant collocations around them. I don't have time to go into an example right now, but if you go to



the IELTS [vocabulary page](#), there we've got an introduction, which links to lots of other different resources you can use.

So, we go into detail about learning them in context, we go into detail about how to learn them in a thorough manner, how to memorize and just sort of like habits and rituals and systems you can put in place to achieve your goals.

Final point-- let's see. I think the final thing that I want to say is I'm just going to mention the computer-based test again because with the computer-based test you've got the opportunity to go back through your essay, not only correct it which is what basic tutors tell you to do. Go back and correct it. Pick up some more points. No.

**Smart tutors** at [ieltspodcast.com](http://ieltspodcast.com)-- now, this is true though. A decent teacher will tell you to go back and upgrade it. Look for opportunities to upgrade it and pick up even more points. So, not only are you doing your error correction but you're also improving your work.

That leads me to the next point, which is if you're keen on [improving](#), if improving your work is good for you, the fastest way possible, the fastest way is to get [feedback](#). The tutor can look at



your essay and can tell you this is wrong, that's not natural, that's a train crash, that's beautiful, that's amazing, but you need to work on your use of articles.

Our tutors can do this and they love doing this and this is why we've got native English speakers and [ex-IELTS examiners correcting your work because, not only can they give you the feedback](#) and give you information regarding natural use of language but they can also give you insights into what the examiner will be thinking, which I think is invaluable.

And then if you combine that with a thorough solid program, a system for basically manufacturing, for outputting, for producing your task 2 and your task 1 essays-- I'm not talking about paragraph one introduction, paragraph two... No. I'm talking about detailed systems, detailed requirements that, not only do we teach but we insist you use because they are known to get the high scores. They are known to deliver what the examiner wants.

Sorry, if I got a bit excited there, but I do get passionate about this. I do enjoy getting results. I'm results driven. Anyway, that's enough from me. Just one last thing regarding feedback; if you think [feedback](#) is something that you need, then send us an [email](#). Tell us what you're



struggling with and we can give you a special offer regarding feedback, but you need to send us an email. You can get our email address once you [sign up](#) at [ieltspodcast.com](http://ieltspodcast.com).

Second thing: if you know anybody who's struggling, tell them to get in contact as well. Send them our link. Share our resources. You can help them, too. You're not alone in this. You've got us and we can help you and your friends.

Final thing: have a look at the IELTS podcast Ben Worthington App. ([Android app](#); [iOS app](#))

There you've got the full transcripts, which will help you to improve your own vocabulary especially when we do the essay commentary tasks because you can be reading through, you can hear the correct pronunciation, you can associate the sounds to the words, and it's definitely better than just passively sitting there on [YouTube](#), for example. At least there's a little bit more activity involved, which will-- as you've heard me say earlier, which would definitely help you learn faster. The more resources that are involved, the more senses that are involved.



Okay. So, that is everything from me today. Let's keep on improving. Let's keep on moving. Keep your head up high and just one last thing that I want to re-emphasize is that goals are important, but having systems in place; daily habits, daily systems that you're following will get you there faster. That's why we insist on systems in the [online course](#).

That's everything. So, just one last thing. **Keep moving. Keep your head up high. You will get there. You will only fail if you give up and that's a very positive note.** You understand. All right, take care. All the best.

[Music]

**Female Voice:** Thanks for listening to [ieltspodcast.com](http://ieltspodcast.com)