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## INTRODUCTION

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**Ben:** A brief introduction to pie charts. No, I'm going to say that again. Three, two, one: Getting started with describing pie charts. Hello there, IELTS students. In this tutorial, Daphne and me are going to help you get started with pie charts. We are going to look at the essentials and why going for a band 9 is probably a bad idea. We're going to cover two very important components regarding your language which you should probably include in your writing.

We're going to review some authentic native English speaker material and I'll also share this tip on how to find some decent material and how to prepare for your exam and then Daphne is going to give us a model-- well actually, we'll both give you a model for you to follow and we're also going to include some useful valuable information about grouping.

So, how are you doing, Daphne?

**Daphne:** I'm really well, Ben. Thank you very much. How are you, everybody? I hope all is well. I'm really glad we're going to be doing this podcast about pie charts today because I think sometimes we do podcasts on pie charts-- that's difficult to say-- assuming everyone knows what to do. And I think there are a lot of people who are coming into IELTS academic and thinking I have no idea how to do a pie chart. I don't do this. I've never done it before.

So, I think this will really help to do an intro and just a basic guide is really informative and hopefully you will find it useful.

**Ben:** Absolutely and I know of native English speakers that would struggle with this task. For example, a Scottish guy or an English guy wanting to emigrate to Australia, they might need to take the IELTS test and maybe they haven't written academically since university or since high school and then not only do they have to write in an academic fashion but they also have to learn this skill of basically describing a graphic be it a pie chart, a bar chart, a horizontal bar chart or line graph or flowchart, whatever.

So, it's not only a language skill that we're going to be developing here. It's an essential exam skill which even native English speakers have to learn because it's not as straightforward as it may first appear.

**Daphne:** That's so true. Until I was teaching IELTS, I hadn't done this-- good past perfect-- I hadn't done this for a really, really long time. School possibly, but I didn't like maths at school, so I probably wasn't even trying very hard then.

**Ben:** I think it's quite interesting that sometimes we just neglect subjects at school and then later in life we're like actually, I should have got behind this because it would have been really helpful. I've heard this a million times actually, so it's a lot about my high school time.

**Daphne:** Yes, it comes back to bite us, doesn't it?

**Ben:** Exactly, yes, exactly. Okay. So, basically I've already outlined what we'll be covering in this tutorial. So, the first part is-- well, in this first part, we're going to show you how you can describe it in simple terms. Now, the more advanced students might be rolling their eyes at this, but let me just say that we need to get the foundations solid and clear first because when I was correcting essays, I would see a lot of students aiming for band 9 and throwing in all these technical terms and fancy terms, which is good. I definitely appreciate and understand the

ambition and I admire the ambition. However, without a solid foundation, you can't even think about aiming for a band 9.

So, this is what we're going to do. We're going to roll it back and we're going to look at building a solid foundation. This is how we work with the online course as well. We really work on getting the basics first, giving feedback on that, and then we push and then we start aiming for the 7, 8, 9, but it's absolutely essential to get a solid foundation first. So, what would you say would be the two key elements for describing a pie chart, Daphne?

**Daphne:** Okay. The two things you need to be really confident about-- and it's nice there's only two. It's not too complicated-- is percentages. So, make sure you understand percentages and we're going to run through with you how to talk about percentages and the second thing is comparisons.

Comparisons are really important. This is a key skill in pie charts if you have one pie chart on its own or even more relevant if you have two pie charts or even more, which is quite common in IELTS Task 1 now.

**Ben:** Yes and in this tutorial, we're going to be looking at a pie chart about Scotland and its trade with the UK. And before we jump into this, I just want to mention that when you are looking for pie charts online, do not just go to Google and put pie chart description or anything like that.

That's what I did and it's what I've done in the past. And I spotted an absolute bucket load of horrendous pie charts and horrendous pie chart descriptions as well.

Do you know the worst one I found, Daphne, was this-- man, it was just a disgrace, but it was a pie chart describing the most popular pizza toppings and they were all pizza slices divided up-- it was a pie chart made to look like pizza slices and you know how you divide a pizza up usually with all equal sizes?

**Daphne:** Yes.

**Ben:** They had done that. So, there were like six slices, but next to each slice they put like 15% prefer mushrooms, 12% prefer pepperoni-- like for each segment of the pie chart. Even though each segment was exactly the same size, it was supposed to correspond to a different number, different preference for the toppings.

**Daphne:** That's really unhelpful and really confusing because for me-- something I've written down in my notes here is a pie chart is visual. Literally on percentages, the various parts of the pie will add up to 100%. That is a pie chart.

**Ben:** Exactly, yes.

**Daphne:** And it's visual even if you can't quite work out the numbers or you've got to like pay a bit more attention to the numbers. At first glance, you can clearly see the biggest segment and the smallest segment. It is very visual and I think we should take that as a good help in a way for people who quite like the visual learning.

**Ben:** Absolutely, absolutely and just one last thing. So, while you're searching for your pie chart-- I go into this in the new online course a little bit further and I relate it more to the writing, but it's also useful for the graphic description. So, what you do is you put .gov in your search. So, you might put pie chart description or pie chart spending or pie chart exports whatever .gov and you're more likely to find an official source.

So, you can avoid these terrible pie charts that I was finding when I was doing some research and another way is to put [piechart.ac.uk](http://piechart.ac.uk). So, this way, it's only going to bring back academic sources from England. So, it's more likely you're going to find native authentic material which is what you want to start with because it's like cooking. If you start off with terrible ingredients, you're going to end up with a terribly tasting end product and if you start off with a terrible pie chart, then you're going to end up with a terrible description as well.

**Daphne:** It's going to make it much harder.

**Ben:** Exactly, yes. So, there are two charts I just want to look at. The first one it's titled *Total International and Rest of the UK Exports from Scotland in 2015*. So, it's basically showing the exports from Scotland and who Scotland is trading with and immediately, you can see that over 50% and in this chart, it's only got the number. It's only got 50 basically. £49.8 billion £50 billion and then there are non-EU trade is 16.4 billion and then EU trade is 12.3 billion.

So, we haven't got percentages in here in this one, but I would guess that I can confidently say over 50% and I immediately recognize sort of like the main picture here which is one of the steps that we talk about later. And then for the other segments, I could possibly group them together because they're the two next smallest segments.

So, even though we haven't got the percentages here, it's good to develop the skill of guesstimating because I can see that one is 16.4 billion and I know that a quarter of a pie chart would be obviously 25%. So, I could say that probably 20% and the other one is probably around 15%.

**Daphne:** It's a really good point that, Ben, because I think that confuses people because obviously if you've got the percentage numbers, it's going to add up to 100 and the pie chart that we're talking about-- obviously, the pie chart adds up to 100, but the numbers you've got there are in billions of pounds. But from this shape, what we're saying is that from the shape and from

all the pie charts that we've looked at, that you've looked at, you can absolutely know that the largest segment or the largest proportion is well over 50% and you can confidently say that in your answer even if it's not written 60% or 65% or whatever it might be.

**Ben:** Exactly, yes, exactly and while I was searching and I was doing the .gov searches because I was getting fed up with all the garbage Google was throwing back at me, so I started doing the .gov searches I found native English speaker written authentic official government material-- well, pie chart and it was about manufacturing leads.

And I just want to go a little bit off piste just to describe-- I want to just share this example and why I thought it's essential to go for native English speaker material and because if we go to this link and I'll include it in the tutorial on [ieltspodcast.com](http://ieltspodcast.com), but when we go there and we read the description, we can extract so many useful phrases. So, I'll just quickly go through this.

It's basically a graph describing manufacturing leads as top sector for foreign direct investment in the United States. So, yes, a beautiful succinct title there.

**Daphne:** The kind of information you really need to know.

**Ben:** Exactly. I just woke up thinking about this this morning. I just woke up and sat up in my bed and I was like what are the manufacturing leads for the United States?



**Daphne:** Life-changing, yes.

**Ben:** But jokes aside, the description was very enjoyable to read. How geeky does that sound, but it was enjoyable to read and I'll just quickly go through it. So, the first paragraph: Within the manufacturing sector, the chemicals industry is the largest recipient of FDI reaching 702 billion in 2017 or 44% of all manufacturing FDI stock.

In that sentence, we've got within which is not a bad way to start. We've also got the manufacturing sector, so we're not exactly copy-pasting from the title. We're using synonyms and we've immediately recognized the biggest portion which was the largest recipient and it was described in quite an eloquent way. It's like the largest recipient; that's high-level language and then we did not just say with 702 billion. We said reaching 702 billion.

And then another nice touch was we said or 44% of all manufacturing. So, we gave both there and that gives the reader a very clear idea because 702 billion on its own doesn't mean anything, but 44% now I immediately know that this is almost half of the chart. So, it's definitely an important factor.

And then the next sentence, it goes diving even deeper, the pharmaceuticals and medicine sub sector makes up 74% of all chemicals industry. So, if you're listening, this might be a little bit confusing, but it was just basically going into that 44%, but what I liked was the diving even

deeper which just adds a little bit of character and style to what otherwise could very easily be a dry writing experience.

**Daphne:** It's a really good example. There's a lot of great language in there in very few words. You've got a lot of complex structures and you'd be picking up points all over the place.

**Ben:** Exactly, yes, exactly and it's just rich. It's a very rich description. So, this is why I was very keen to share this. When you're researching your work, go for rich writing. Do not go for any random junk at Google throws at you. Be really critical and as I said, in the online course, there's a module all about this because it's a bit like this saying in programming. Is it gabble or gibble garbage in garbage out or something like a giggle or gaggle? I can't remember, but garbage in garbage out and as we said before, you want to start with the high quality information.

So, just one last sentence that I want to share then we get back to our pie chart-- basically describing the basics of pie charts. This next sentence is after chemicals and other manufacturing, the transportation equipment industry is the next largest recipient of FDA. Yes, I like this other sentence because we've got the cohesion here. It's kind of mentioning what we just said before and it doesn't dive straight into it and we're showing data in a logical progression.

Obviously, this wasn't written for the examiner, but it was written in a very eloquent style which we want to imitate. So, we've got that linking to the previous part to improve the cohesion and

then we've got the next largest recipients. We've got the use of superlatives, which we're going to go into in more detail in a second.

So, I just really wanted to mention that and mention the quality of getting your sentences and getting your research right from the get-go.

**Daphne:** Yes, starting off in a really good way, yes.

**Ben:** Exactly, exactly. Okay. So, the next section, Daphne, are you going to talk about number and percentage at the variations that we can use?

**Daphne:** Yes. So, we need to [unintelligible 00:16:00.07] to be able to talk about these percentages and Ben has just given us some examples of really high-level sentences and what we were commenting on there was the range of language. So, we're not just repeating all the way through. So, instead of saying this percentage that percentage, which is very easy and you feel quite safe doing that, let's add some variety.

So, it's important to know how to write about numbers and percentages in lots of different ways and this will help give you a higher grade because you're showing more lexical range. So, the main ways include the proportion. You can say the largest proportion or the smallest proportion. You could talk about the amount; the amount of exports or the amount of exports from Scotland

or UK from Scotland amounts or amounts to or totals 49 billion or whatever. You could talk about a number and you could talk about fractions and you could talk about  $\frac{1}{2}$ ,  $\frac{1}{3}$ ,  $\frac{1}{4}$ ,  $\frac{2}{3}$ . So, that just gives you a variety of ways.

There are a few more that I like here. There's another; segment. The smallest segment or the smallest segments. Section is another one or simply part. So, that's [unintelligible 00:17:14.15] five-six words to save you from saying percentage all the way through.

**Ben:** Yes and even though we said we're going to look at the basics, I just want to share a little pro tip that I came across while I was correcting a lot of essays that if you start your sentence with talking about all fractions, it's good style and it's good practice to carry on throughout that sentence to keep it fractions rather than say almost  $\frac{1}{2}$  of exports came from England whereas 15.3% came from Scotland. Mixing it up like that just is not good style. So, try and keep it coherent. Try and keep it consistent throughout the sentence.

**Daphne:** You're right. You have to get a balance. That was really good advice, Ben, actually. You have to get a balance between trying to show off how clever you are and yes, examiner, I've got this to actually making sure it's readable because they're not very readable. It's quite technical anyway. The coherence is really, really important, so being consistent. If you start with fractions, carry on with fractions in that sentence. Absolutely.

**Ben:** Absolutely and just another point, I think a good summary or a good mindset when you're going into this exam when we're describing the graphic is we're going to be writing about numbers, but it's essential we're not just focusing on the numbers. We are interpreting what they mean.

**Daphne:** Yes, yes. Good point.

**Ben:** What is the story behind these numbers? 22 billion that's interesting on its own, but what does that mean? Is that the smallest segment? Is that the largest segment? What does it mean in relation to the rest of the numbers there? And this is really the exam skill that we talked about right at the beginning. What do the numbers mean? What's the story here? And if you can grasp this, this is basically the foundation. It's like the fundamental part. What's the story here?

**Daphne:** And I like that. For me, the word story is reassuring. For me, that's like a comfortable word story and also I like the phrase describing data. We normally use the word description when we're talking about maybe a process diagram that we can see that's really, really visual. We actually use the word description when we're writing a story back at school, but to describe data that's exactly what you're doing. You can see the picture.

And as Ben said before, if you imagine that the reader or the examiner can't see the picture, you've got to describe it to them. So, that's where the skill comes in. It's not just saying this

percentage that percentage. These numbers are all in a context and that's what you have to be able to paint that picture.

**Ben:** Absolutely, yes, absolutely and the second language element we're going to focus on is comparisons. Are we done with the language variations?

**Daphne:** I think one more thing to say here-- one more thing to say is just not worrying about giving the exact percentage details. So, if it's 48.5%, you don't need to say that. You can say almost 50%. For me, that shows more skill. Around 50% or approximately 50. You don't have to go into exactly the 48.57 whatever.

**Ben:** Absolutely.

**Daphne:** It's a smoother read, isn't it?

**Ben:** It's a smoother read and it doesn't suck your energy or your reading energy. I remember correcting essays Academic Task 1 and the student has in minuscule detail put down every number and to every decimal place and my eyes just glazed over and I was like why did I choose this career? It kills me. It kills me, Daphne.

**Daphne:** Sometimes it can just seem like a sea of numbers, can't it? It's almost just like way too much.

**Ben:** Exactly. My back starts getting weak and then all of a sudden, my head is on the keyboard and I'm crying. Imagine if you're an examiner and you're doing this and you see so many papers. This is why it's good-- this is why we need to introduce variety and we need to just definitely avoid listing every single data point there because we don't want to kill any more examiners basically.

**Daphne:** Absolutely not.

**Ben:** Okay. So, moving on to point no. 2: comparisons. All right. So, when we're going for comparisons, basically we want to be going for the similarities. We want to be going for the highest and the lowest. This is why as we said before a confident grasp, a confident understanding of your comparative language structure and your superlative language forms are absolutely essential.

Plus, it goes back to what we were saying before; using these language constructions is going to enrich your description. It's going to force you into writing an interesting story and it's going to force you away from listing these numbers because it's impossible to write a boring description or a low-scoring description if you're accurately including the comparative and superlative forms. And also, just one last thing. It's going to force us to share the overall idea, the overall story which is as we mentioned before essential.

**Daphne:** Yes, I absolutely agree with you, Ben. I think the most important thing is the comparative. Listing will not get you a high score. So, immediately-- as we've said before when we talked about what to do, how to plan for these Task 1s, when you look at the picture, immediately look at the highest proportion and the lowest proportion and that's going to give you a couple of sentences without even trying to do anything else.

**Ben:** Exactly, exactly and just to go into a little bit more detail what Daphne said, listing all the data points won't get you points. However, sometimes a tiny little list of three or four can be good especially if you're grouping the information. But if we're listing every single point there, it's just going to be a monotonous headache for the examiner.

Maybe if you do list, at least group them together. So, maybe you're going to list the three smallest together or maybe you're going to list the three that were under 20% or the three with similar ones. So, just be careful and when you are preparing, as we said before, to make sure that you are totally understanding this information, go find some authentic native English-speaking material and you'll probably see a lot of what we are saying here. You'll probably see it out in the wild.

So, just as Daphne said a few seconds ago about starting with the largest, that's exactly what happened with the real-world example I shared right at the beginning when I said within the



manufacturing sector, the chemicals industry is the largest recipient of FDI reaching... So, this is exactly what we're talking about. Even with the government reports, they started off-- this one we used for an example started off with the largest section. So, that's insanely valuable advice there what Daphne just mentioned.

**Daphne:** And it's kind of logical as well. I've got a nice pie chart in front of me actually which I searched up this morning. This is from the Office of National Statistics. These are the main reasons for migration to and from the UK in 2007. Actually, it would be quite interesting to look up one for 2019 and see if it has changed, but we'll post this for you so you can have a look at it.

On this chart, there are two pie charts together and on one of them is immigration, one of them is emigration, and on both of them, there are two large segments which account for just over 50% and then there are smaller ones and my sentences could be something like that. So, looking at immigration, the largest proportions or the largest segments of the pie chart relate to immigration for formal study or a definite job and these two sections or these two parts amount to over 50% of the total.

Looking at emigration, the main reasons for emigration are looking for work or again a definite job and these count for around or just actually just under 50% of reasons for emigration. So, I've kind of in a couple of sentences, I've covered over 50% of both pie charts.

**Ben:** Excellent, yes and just to clarify for the listeners, immigration from a UK perspective because it's similar to what we were talking about when we-- imports and exports, but if we are based in the UK, then immigration is the flow of people coming into the UK and then emigration is the flow of people leaving the UK. So, we can say E for emigration exiting and then I for in; coming into the UK for immigration. I'll admit it wasn't exactly clear, but then from the charts I could see that if it's formal study at 26% immigration, then it has to be people coming into the UK.

**Daphne:** Yes, exactly and people leaving because they are looking for work. Exactly.

**Ben:** Got you. I'm surprised it doesn't say on the chart for emigration food. So, they're going abroad... and then immigration, coming into the UK for a full English breakfast.

**Daphne:** Oh, absolutely. Maybe that could be other. 11% is other, Ben. That could be in there.

**Ben:** Immigration: people are coming to the UK for the food and I guess emigration in other might be-- it could be food as well. They are leaving. They are fed up with UK food. It could be the weather.

**Daphne:** It could be the weather. Yes, exactly.

**Ben:** Okay. So, what structure would you advise for these pie charts? We just have to mention this briefly because we are approaching the end.

**Daphne:** So, we've looked at percentages. We've looked at how to use the numbers. We've looked at the comparisons and if you have those [unintelligible 00:27:48.28], have a look at a pie chart and then you can see what to compare. So, the structure should be logical and coherent. That's something we've been talking about and how you do it will depend slightly on the data, but you want your first sentence to be your paraphrase of what you can see.

These pie charts show or this pie chart shows... Mine is the main reason for migration, so I can say the principal reasons or principal explanations for people choosing to leave or move to the UK or something. So, I can paraphrase that and then I need to have my overall sentence which is just going to give an overview where I'm going to talk about the largest percentages and the smallest percentages. That's just like an introduction and then I'm going to get into my two paragraphs of detail.

**Ben:** Excellent and just as a side note, don't add information like Daphne and myself we're doing. We were just doing that joking around about the food and hypothesizing why they might be coming into the UK and why they might be leaving the UK. So, don't do that even if you know the real reasons. For example, this might be your subject area of expertise. It doesn't

matter. It doesn't matter if you know the reasons or if you know the science behind it or the historical facts. It doesn't matter. Only describe what you see in front of you. Don't add information.

**Daphne:** I'm really glad you said that, Ben, because there are so many responses [unintelligible 00:29:22.06] from students. They'd go oh, this was because ... or it can be said ... That's not your job. Your job is to compare. If you are a sentence short, then try and get a really clever sentence in there to end with. You could group-- again, we're talking about grouping-- group the information together so it can clearly be seen that the percentage of people emigrating for formal study was five times smaller than those people immigrating for that reason. Just one more sentence comparing the data together and that will just help get you enough words on your word count if you're struggling.

**Ben:** Absolutely. Excellent point there. Excellent point and then the final step would be, as Daphne was mentioning, just to review your work. You can easily pick up some extra points just by looking for those common mistakes that you may have made in previous work. And how do you know if you've made-- how do you know where to look? Well, ideally, you would get feedback on your work that shows okay, Maria. Sometimes you make mistakes with the

superlative form. So, you really should be keeping an eye out for the superlative form when you're reviewing your work and this way, you can zoom in--

This is an essential exam skill because time is of the essence, but if you know your weak spots, you can zoom in, look for those, and then start correcting them and you can easily pick up an extra 10%, but how do you know those errors? Because ideally, you'll have a professional expert looking at your work and giving you the feedback. This is the fastest way to improve and this is exactly why we include it in our online courses, both for the speaking and for the writing. We do this because we are a results-orientated organization. We want students to get results. This is why we offer the guarantee of jump to band 7 or it's free.

Too many online schools and especially language academies will not promise anything because they've got no confidence in their work and they don't employ professionals like we do. Isn't that right, Daphne?

**Daphne:** Absolutely. It's very true and actually getting feedback is so valuable because otherwise you just keep on making the same mistakes. Most of the mistakes especially on the Task 1 like this we've been talking about are very easy to unravel and once you know what to do, like we were talking about finding overall trends, grouping information, getting your comparatives in there. Actually, it simplifies it and then you can move forward confidently.

**Ben:** Absolutely, absolutely. So, that's everything from us today. And if you are still in lockdown, remember there is a light at the end of the tunnel. A lot of students going through our course are still preparing and also getting extra essay corrections because they've decided to go for the IELTS Indicator Test. So, if you are in a situation where your test center closed, have a look at the IELTS Indicator because this could be a way for you to continue moving forward.

**Daphne:** Yes. The IELTS Indicator is great. Find out all about it. It could be your answer.

**Ben:** Exactly and also I have a feeling that maybe this could become the mainstream test because in my honest opinion, it's kind of pushed the British Council to modernize and this could be the way going forward because I know a lot of students have to jump on a train or even a flight to go from the rural village to the city center to do this test and in times of corona, it's not looking-- it wasn't practical to start with, but if you're going to travel to this test center and be exposed, it's just-- I think it could be a wake-up call for British Council.

**Daphne:** Yes, it's cheaper. It's cheaper as well and as you say, Ben, to have to travel, to have to stay in a hotel; it's a big expensive exam. If you can do it from home and do the speaking over video call, what's not to like? It's fantastic.

**Ben:** Exactly, exactly. Okay. Well, good luck with your IELTS exam preparation and if you want somebody to evaluate either your speaking or your writing, then get in touch and if you



want to move fast and carry on improving, then have a look at the online course. And also remember if you get the IELTS podcast app available in the App Store by searching for Ben Worthington IELTS, you'll be able to get these podcasts, get updates, get special offers, and get the transcripts which are definitely useful. So, good luck and all the best.

**Daphne:** Thanks, everyone.

[Music]

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

