

IELTS Writing Task 1

Describe data more precisely

Ready-to-use sentence formations for charts, tables and graphs.

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- 01** Comparing figures
 - 02** Trends over time
 - 03** Proportions, rankings and overviews

THE BIG IDEA

Same data. More precise words.

In Task 1 the data is already given. You cannot add new information, so what separates a stronger response from an average one is how accurately and precisely you describe it. Precise description supports Task Achievement (the right features, with accurate figures), Lexical Resource (exact vocabulary) and Grammatical Range (varied structures).

COMMON	MORE PRECISE
The figure of India was higher than that for China.	India recorded a considerably higher figure than China, at 60 compared with 40 .

What changed?

A specific verb	"was" became "recorded". Other options: stood at, reached, accounted for.
A degree word	"higher" became "considerably higher", showing how big the gap is.
The exact figures	"at 60 compared with 40" proves your claim with data.
A cleaner comparison	"than China" instead of the clumsy "than that for China".

THE FORMULA

Subject + precise verb + degree word + comparison + exact figures (with units)

Precision means accuracy, not decoration. Choose the degree word that truly matches the data. "Dramatically" for a 2-point change is a mistake, not an upgrade. Use the sentence formations in this guide as a base and always check them against the figures.

SECTION 01

Comparing figures

For bar charts, tables and any task where you compare categories at one point in time. Replace the red items with your own data.

SENTENCE FORMATION	EXAMPLE
[A] recorded a considerably higher figure than [B], at [X] compared with [Y].	India recorded a considerably higher figure than China, at 60 compared with 40.
[A] exceeded [B] by [N] percentage points, at [X] against [Y].	India exceeded China by 20 percentage points, at 60% against 40%.
[A] stood at [X], which was twice as high as the figure for [B], at [Y].	Brazil stood at 50, which was twice as high as the figure for Peru, at 25.
While [A] accounted for [X], [B] made up only [Y].	While Brazil accounted for 50%, Peru made up only 25%.
[A] was marginally higher than [B], at [X] against [Y].	India was marginally higher than China, at 52% against 50%.
[A] and [B] were virtually identical, at [X] and [Y] respectively.	India and China were virtually identical, at 52% and 51% respectively.
[A] was the highest, at [X], whereas [B] was the lowest, at [Y].	India was the highest, at 60%, whereas Japan was the lowest, at 12%.
[A] was far lower than [B], with just [X] compared with [Y].	Japan was far lower than India, with just 12% compared with 60%.

PERCENT VS PERCENTAGE POINTS

If India is 60% and China is 40%, India is **20 percentage points** higher. In relative terms it is **50% higher** (20 is half of 40). Use "percentage points" when you subtract one percentage from another.

SECTION 01 | CONTINUED

Choose the right strength

A rough guide. Match the word to how big the difference really looks on the chart.

SIZE OF DIFFERENCE	WORDS YOU CAN USE
Tiny difference	marginally, slightly, barely, virtually identical, almost the same
Small to moderate	somewhat, moderately, noticeably, modestly
Large	considerably, significantly, substantially, markedly
Very large	far higher, by far the highest, dramatically (for changes), several times as high

Approximation words

approximately	roughly	around
nearly	almost	just under
just over	slightly more than	exactly

Fractions you can use instead of percentages

FIGURE	WORDING
10%	one in ten, a tenth
20%	one in five, a fifth
25%	a quarter, one in four
33%	a third, one in three
50%	half, one in two
75%	three quarters
51% to 55%	just over half
45% to 49%	just under half, nearly half

REMEMBER

Always include units (% , million, tonnes, USD) and keep the same units the chart uses.

SECTION 02

Trends over time

For line graphs, and bar charts or tables that show several years.

SENTENCE FORMATION	EXAMPLE
[A] rose from [X] in [year] to [Y] in [year].	Sales rose from 20,000 in 2010 to 50,000 in 2015.
[A] climbed steadily, reaching [Y] by [year].	Enrolment climbed steadily, reaching 8,000 by 2018.
[A] peaked at [Y] in [year], before falling sharply to [Z] in [year].	Prices peaked at \$9 in 2012, before falling sharply to \$5 in 2016.
[A] remained stable at around [X] throughout the period.	Usage remained stable at around 30% throughout the period.
[A] fluctuated between [X] and [Y].	Demand fluctuated between 40 and 55 units.
[A] more than doubled, from [X] to [Y].	Online sales more than doubled, from 15% to 35%.
[A] overtook [B] in [year], becoming the [leading category].	Rail overtook road in 2010, becoming the leading mode, at 40%.
There was a [sharp] rise in [A], from [X] to [Y].	There was a sharp rise in temperatures, from 12 to 19 degrees.
[A] bottomed out at [X] in [year].	Output bottomed out at 3 million tonnes in 2009.

Verbs and adverbs

Going up	rise, increase, climb, grow; surge, soar (for very big rises)
Going down	fall, decline, decrease, drop; dip (small); plummet (very big, very fast)
No change	remain stable, stay constant, level off, plateau
Slow or small	steadily, gradually, slightly, modestly
Fast or large	sharply, rapidly, dramatically, significantly

Tenses: use the past simple for past years. For future years, use "is projected to", "is expected to" or "will". Do not mix them without reason.

SECTION 03

Proportions and rankings

For pie charts, tables and bar charts showing shares of a total.

SENTENCE FORMATION	EXAMPLE
[A] accounted for [X%] of [the total], making it the largest category.	Coal accounted for 45% of electricity, making it the largest source.
The largest share, at [X%], was held by [A], followed by [B] at [Y%].	The largest share, at 45%, was held by coal, followed by gas at 30%.
[A] made up just over half of [total], while [B] constituted [fraction].	Rent made up just over half of spending, while food constituted a quarter.
Together, [A] and [B] represented nearly [fraction] of [total].	Together, rent and food represented nearly three quarters of spending.
Only [X%] of [people] chose [A], the lowest figure of all.	Only 5% of respondents chose cycling, the lowest figure of all.
[A] ranked second, at [X%], some [N] percentage points behind [B].	Gas ranked second, at 30%, some 15 percentage points behind coal.

Overview sentences

Every Task 1 response needs an overview: two or three sentences on the main trends or biggest comparisons. Keep it general, usually without detailed numbers, and give no opinions.

SENTENCE FORMATION	EXAMPLE
Overall, it is clear that [A] [main trend], whereas [B] [contrasting trend].	Overall, it is clear that coal declined, whereas renewables expanded.
The most striking feature is that [A] was [far higher / lower] than [B].	The most striking feature is that rent was far higher than any other category.
In general, [A] was consistently [higher] than [B] throughout the period.	In general, imports were consistently higher than exports throughout the period.
While [A] showed an upward trend, [B] moved in the opposite direction.	While tablet use showed an upward trend, laptop use moved in the opposite direction.

UPGRADE YOUR SENTENCES

From common to precise

COMMON	MORE PRECISE
The number of A was more than B.	A significantly exceeded B, at 45 million compared with 30 million.
Sales went up a lot.	Sales rose sharply from 20,000 in 2010 to 50,000 in 2015.
Prices went down.	Prices declined steadily, falling from \$5 to \$3 between 2000 and 2010.
A and B were the same.	A and B were virtually identical, at around 25% each.
Cars are the most popular.	Cars were by far the most popular option, accounting for 55% of all journeys.
Very few people chose trains.	Only 5% of commuters chose trains, the lowest figure of all.
Women were more than men.	Women outnumbered men by 8 percentage points, at 54% against 46%.

Look for the pattern. Each upgrade adds an exact figure, a precise verb, and a degree word or comparison. Make that your checklist for every sentence you write.

PUTTING IT TOGETHER

Sample answer

Sample data (invented for practice). Percentage of electricity generated by source in one country.

Source	2010	2020
Coal	45%	25%
Gas	30%	35%
Renewables	15%	35%
Nuclear	10%	5%

About 154 words. The bold phrases show the precision upgrades.

INTRODUCTION

The table compares the proportion of electricity produced from four sources in one country in 2010 and 2020.

OVERVIEW

Overall, coal went from being the dominant source to a much smaller one, whereas renewables saw the most significant growth and drew level with gas as the leading source by 2020.

DETAIL 1

In 2010, coal was clearly the largest source, **accounting for 45%** of electricity, which was **15 percentage points higher than** gas, **at 30%**. Renewables and nuclear contributed considerably less, **at 15% and 10% respectively**. Together, coal and gas supplied three quarters of the total.

DETAIL 2

By 2020, however, coal's share **fell sharply to 25%**, a drop of 20 percentage points. Renewables, in contrast, **more than doubled, from 15% to 35%**, matching gas, which **edged up from 30% to 35%**. Nuclear power **halved, falling from 10% to 5%**, making it the smallest contributor. As a result, coal and gas together provided only 60% of electricity in 2020.

PRACTICE

Upgrade these sentences

Use the sample data on the previous page. Cover the right column, write your own version first, then compare.

BASIC SENTENCE	PRECISE VERSION (MODEL)
Coal was higher than gas in 2010.	In 2010, coal accounted for 45% of electricity, 15 percentage points higher than gas, at 30%.
Renewables went up a lot.	Renewables more than doubled, rising from 15% to 35% between 2010 and 2020.
Nuclear went down.	Nuclear power halved, falling from 10% to 5%.
Gas and renewables were the same in 2020.	Gas and renewables were level in 2020, each providing 35% of electricity.
Coal went down.	Coal's share fell sharply from 45% to 25%, a drop of 20 percentage points.

NEXT STEP

Take any chart from your IELTS practice material, write a 150-word report in 20 minutes, then underline every sentence that has an exact figure, a precise verb and a degree word.

AVOID THESE

Common Task 1 mistakes

MISTAKE	HOW TO FIX IT
Describing every number	Select and group the key features. Do not list all the data.
No overview	Write two or three sentences on the main trends or comparisons.
Giving reasons or opinions	Task 1 asks you to describe the data, not explain why it happened.
Wrong tense	Past years need the past tense. Check the dates on the chart.
Mixing up percent and percentage points	Use percentage points when you subtract one percentage from another.
Repeating "higher than" in every sentence	Vary it: exceeded, outnumbered, was well above, stood far ahead of.
Missing units	Add %, million, tonnes or USD, exactly as shown on the chart.
Overusing strong words	Do not call a small change "dramatic". Match the word to the data.
Writing fewer than 150 words	Task 1 needs at least 150 words. Aim for around 170 to 190 in about 20 minutes.

These sentence formations are a starting point. Always adapt them to the chart in front of you, and never force a phrase that does not match the data.