



香港城市大學
City University
of Hong Kong

How to prepare for IELTS Writing



English Language Centre

How to prepare for IELTS - Writing

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Make sure you have a copy of the **How to prepare for IELTS - FAQs booklet** in addition to this booklet.

How to prepare for IELTS - Writing

Details of the Writing Test

Procedure of the test

The writing test is the **third test** you do on the test day. You have **60 minutes** for this test. There are **two tasks** or parts to do. You will be given a card with the two tasks – one task on each side of the card. You can make notes or write your plans on the card but it will not be seen by the examiner.

You will also be given an **answer booklet**. You have to **write** your essays in the **answer booklet**. Notes are not acceptable and essays under the word limit will be penalized.

The Tasks

Task 1

This task **tests** your ability to perform one or more of the following **functions** in English:

- describe and interpret graphic data
- describe the stages of a process or procedure
- describe an object or event or sequence of events
- explain how something works

The question

You are **given graphic or pictorial information** and you have to **write a description** of this information.

Bar charts, line graphs, pie charts and tables are most frequently given for this task. However, you could also be given an **object or series of pictures or diagrams or a flow chart** to describe.

If graphs are used there may be just one – usually a line graph or a bar chart. However, there **could also be more than one** of the same type of graph or a combination of graphs and charts. For example, you could get a bar chart and a pie chart together (*see Cambridge IELTS 1, p.31*) or a line graph and a table.

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Length & Timing

You have to write **at least 150 words**.

You are advised to spend **20 minutes** on this task.

Marking

Your performance in Task 1 will be **assessed on the criteria** below:

Task Achievement

Being able to follow the instructions properly.

Being able to write a clear, accurate and relevant description of the information.

Being able to focus on the important trends presented as graphic information.

Coherence and Cohesion

Being able to organize your writing using a suitable structure.

Using connective words to link sentences and paragraphs logically.

Lexical Resources

Being able to use a wide range of vocabulary naturally.

Being able to spell accurately and using the appropriate word formation.

Grammatical Range and Accuracy

Using the appropriate grammatical structures accurately

Using a variety of sentence structures.

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Task 1 – Bar and line graphs, pie charts & tables

Look at the two examples below.

Example 1

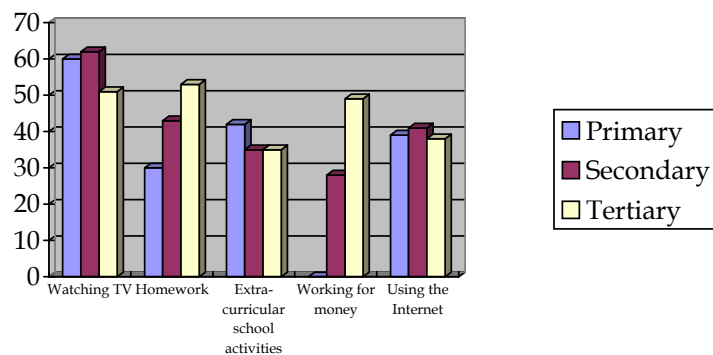
You should spend about 20 minutes on this task.

The chart below shows how primary, secondary and tertiary students in Britain spend their free time.

Summarise the information by selecting and reporting the main features, and make comparisons where relevant.

You should write at least 150 words.

How students in Britain spend their free time (5 or more hours a week).



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Example 2

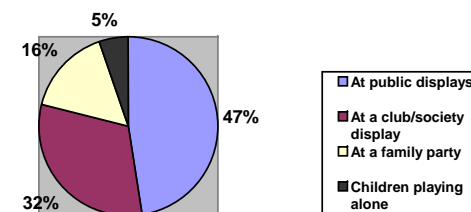
You should spend about 20 minutes on this task.

The pie charts below show incidences of firework injuries in Great Britain in 1984 and 1998.

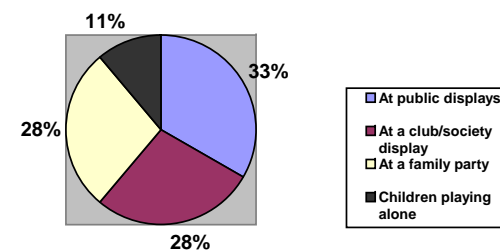
Summarise the information by selecting and reporting the main features, and make comparisons where relevant.

You should write at least 150 words.

Incidences of firework accidents in 1984.



Incidences of firework accidents in 1998.



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How to do Task 1 – Processes and flow charts

- Spend about **5 minutes studying** the flow chart or diagram and **preparing** your answer.
- Make sure you **understand what the important stages** of the flow chart or diagram are and that you know what order they all come in. **Find a place to begin** and work your way through or around the diagram or chart.
- You will **need to include all the stages** in your description.
- Make sure you are **aware of any stages** that happen at the **same time as other stages** or are alternatives.
- You will probably be using the **present simple passive and present simple** if you are describing a process.
- Use any **notes on the diagram** but put them into your **own words**.
- Think about **varying your vocabulary**. Use synonyms. If, for example, the diagram describes jobs – interchange 'jobs', 'occupations', 'types of employment/work' etc.
- Make sure you **organize your information clearly**. You will need an introduction and body for this report. A conclusion is not necessary.
 - ❖ Your introduction should **introduce the process or flow chart** and give an **overview** to summarize its overall function.
 - ❖ Your body will **describe the process or flow chart** in a logical order.
- For this report you will need to guide the reader with **sequence expressions** such as 'first of all', 'after that', 'at the same time', 'concurrently' etc. (See *Holmesglen website downloadable writing booklet p.39*).
- **Don't copy phrases** from the **instructions** as this will not be assessed. Use your own words.
- **Don't take more than 20 minutes** over this task.
- Try to **write neatly** and cross out errors with one line only.
- Leave a couple of minutes to **read through** what you have written.

Remember

- that you will receive a higher mark if your **use a range of structures and vocabulary**.
- **you are NOT being asked for your opinion** on the information, just to report it. An **opinion** would be considered '**irrelevant**' for this task.

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Task 1 - Objects/how something works

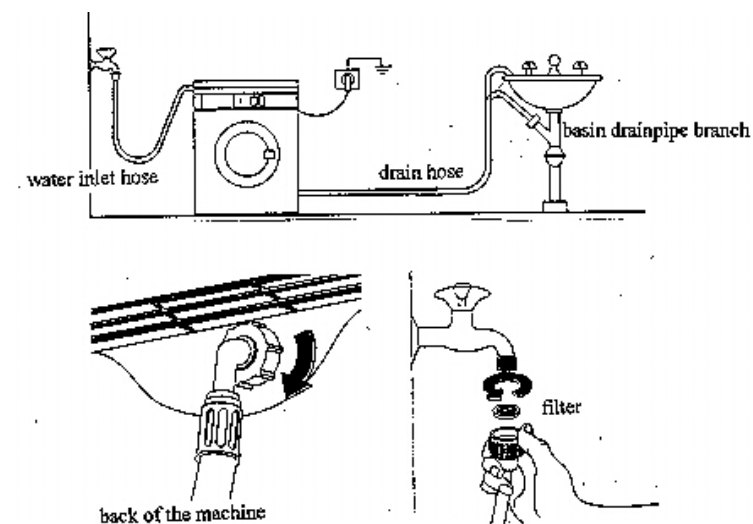
See the example below.

You should spend about 20 minutes on this task.

The diagrams below show how to plumb in a washing machine.

Summarize the information by describing the main features and explaining how a washing machine works.

You should write at least 150 words.



How to do Task 1 – Objects/how something works

- Spend about **5 minutes studying** the object and **preparing** your answer.
- Make sure you **understand how the object works**. Find the most logical place to begin a description of the object.

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How to do Task 1 – Bar and line graphs, pie charts & tables

- Spend about **5 minutes reading** the graph(s) or chart(s) and **preparing** your answer.
- Make sure you **understand** what the **axis on the graph(s)** or the **percentages in the pie chart(s)** represent.
- Make sure you **follow the lines in a line graph** correctly and don't confuse the individual lines if more than one is present. (See *Cambridge IELTS 1, p.72 for example*).
- Remember there will usually be too much information for you to describe every detail, so you will need to **focus on the key information** or significant trends.
- If there are **two graphs or charts** look for ways to **compare the data**.
- **Think about** the **time period** represented and the tense(s) you should be using.
- Think about **varying your vocabulary** and avoiding repetition by using synonyms. If, for example, the graph refers to job types – interchange 'jobs', 'occupations', 'types of employment/work' etc.
- Make sure you **organize** your **information clearly**. You will need an introductory statement, body and conclusion.
 - ❖ Your introduction should **introduce the graph(s)** by stating what it represents and give an **overview** to describe what the overall trend is.
 - ❖ Your body will need to **describe the graph(s)** in detail.
 - ❖ Your conclusion should include a brief **summary** your report.
- **Don't copy phrases from** the **question** as this will not be assessed. Use your own words.
- **Don't include information** that is **not on the graph** or in the chart. This may be considered irrelevant and cause you to get a lower mark.
- **Don't take more than 20 minutes** over this task.
- Try to **write neatly** and cross out errors with one line only.
- Leave a couple of minutes to **read through** what you have written.

Remember

- that you will receive a higher mark if your **use a range of structures and vocabulary**.
- **you are NOT being asked for your opinion** on the information, just to report it. An **opinion** would be considered '**irrelevant**' for this task.

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Task 1 - Processes or flow charts

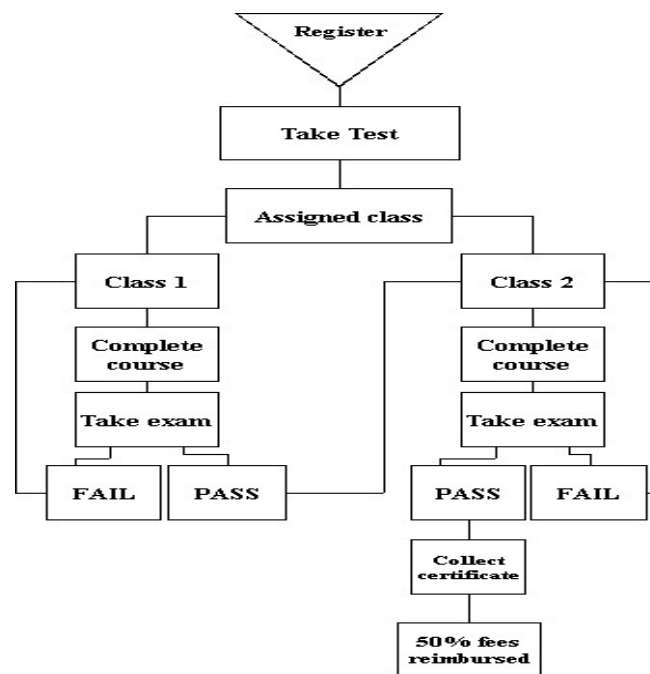
Look at the example below.

You should spend about 20 minutes on this task.

The following flowchart shows the process students at an English language school go through.

Summarise the information by selecting and reporting the main features, and make comparisons where relevant.

You should write at least 150 words.



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- If you don't know the precise word to describe part of the object, think of another way of saying it. You **are not expected to have technical knowledge**.
- **Concentrate** on significant features.
- You are not being asked for the reasons for the development of the object, **just a description** of it.
- Think about **varying your vocabulary** – using synonyms.
- Make sure you **organize your information clearly**. You will need an introduction and body. A conclusion is not necessary.
 - ❖ Begin with a **brief description of the structure and function** of the object.
 - ❖ Then describe **step-by-step how it works**.
- Remember for this report you will need to guide the reader with **sequence expressions** such as 'first of all', 'after that', 'at the same time', 'concurrently' etc. (See *Holmesglen website downloadable writing booklet p.39*).
- **Don't copy phrases** from the **instructions** as this will not be assessed. Use your own words.
- **Don't take more than 20 minutes** over this task.
- Try to **write neatly**. Cross out errors with one line only.
- Leave a couple of minutes to **read through** what you have written.

Remember

- that you will receive a higher mark if your **use a range of structures and vocabulary**.
- **you are NOT being asked for your opinion** on the information, just to report it. An **opinion** would be considered '**irrelevant**' for this task.

How to prepare for Task 1

- Become **familiar with the graph types**. See *Focus on IELTS, p.33*.
- Do lots of **practice exercises** in **describing graphs**. See *Focus on IELTS, pp.17-18; Insight, pp.67-75 & p.115*.
- **Practise identifying key information** in graphs and charts. See *Focus on IELTS, p.101*.
- Practise working out what graph **axes represent**. See *Insight into IELTS, pp.70-72*.
- Become **familiar with** a variety of **ways** to:

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- ❖ **express percentages**
- ❖ **express numbers & statistical data**
- ❖ **express the key points** in a graph or describe trends
- ❖ describe increase and decrease
- ❖ make comparisons between data.

For example, 'words to describe the degree of change' – 'slight', 'dramatic', 'significant' & 'moderate'. See *Preparation & Practice: Writing p.107-115; Homesglen website downloadable Writing booklet pp.25-29; Focus on IELTS, p.18 & p.23, pp.33-35, p.39; Insight into IELTS, p.69 & 74; Helpful Hints for IELTS, p.58-59*.

- Look at the **language** used for:
 - ❖ **describing charts** (e.g. pie charts). See *Preparation & Practice: Writing p.119*.
 - ❖ **describing tables**. See *Focus on IELTS, pp.67-68*;
 - ❖ **describing a process**. See *Focus on IELTS, p.83-85*.
 - ❖ **describing how something works**. See *Focus on IELTS, p.131*.
 - ❖ **describing and comparing objects**. See *Focus on IELTS, p.166*.
 - ❖ **writing introductory sentences**. See *Preparation & Practice: Writing p.121*.
 - ❖ **making reference to graphs/figures**. See *Helpful Hints, p.56*.
- Make sure you **know how to use 'sequencing expressions'** when describing a process. See *Focus on IELTS, p.87*.
- **Think about the topics** that could be used for this task. For example, for graphs and tables, information on:
 - Births
 - Crime
 - Deaths
 - Education
 - Environment
 - Heath
 - Leisure
 - Old Age
 - Populations
 - Science & technology
 - Transport
 - Travel & tourism
 - Work

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Practice for Task 1

Books in the SAC

Graphs/tables/charts

Focus on IELTS: p.102, p.117, p.150, p.182

Insight into IELTS: p.116 & p.117

Preparation & Practice - Writing: p. 116, p.123, p.133, p.135

Helpful Hints for IELTS: p.104. p.138, p.150

Cambridge IELTS 1: p.31, p.72

Cambridge IELTS 2: p.27, p.51, p.73, p.95

Cambridge IELTS 3: p.27, p.51, p.73, p.97

Processes

Focus on IELTS: p.85

Insight into IELTS: p.77

Preparation & Practice – Writing: p.127, p.129

Cambridge IELTS 1: p.51

Objects

Focus on IELTS: p.166, p.214

Websites

Holmesglen: <http://international.holmesglen.vic.edu.au/IELTS01.htm>

Writing (downloadable booklet with sample questions with sample answers) – practice in describing: single-line graphs; double-line graphs; bar graphs; pie charts; tables; process diagrams

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Task 2

This task **tests** your **ability** to do one or more of the following:

- ❖ present and **justify opinions**
- ❖ **argue a case**
- ❖ **evaluate and challenge** ideas, evidence and argument

The Question

You are given a **discussion topic**. The question will either present you with an opinion or an argument. You have to discuss the question with **two or three main points** and **supporting detail** for each point.

Length & Timing

You have to **write at least 250 words**.

You are advised to spend **40 minutes** on this task.

Marking

Your performance in Task 2 will be **assessed on the criteria below:**

Task Response

Being able to present a clear position with a logical, well-supported argument.

Being able to support your argument with personal experience and reasons.

Being able to focus on the topic and not include anything irrelevant.

Coherence and Cohesion

Being able to write fluently enough to make your message clear to the reader.

Being able to write cohesive sentences and paragraphs.

Lexical Resource

Being able to use a wide range of vocabulary naturally.

Being able to spell accurately and using the appropriate word formation.

Grammatical Range and Accuracy

Using the appropriate grammatical structures accurately

Using a variety of sentence structures.

This task **carries more weight in marking than Task 1**. If, for example, you get a 5 in Task 1 and a 6 in this task, you will get a 6 overall.

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Task 2 Questions

Look at the example below.

You should spend about 40 minutes on this task.

Write about the following topic:

A great many countries around the world are losing their cultural identity because of the Internet.

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

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

You should write at least 250 words.

How to do Task 2

- **Study** the **question carefully**. The instructions will always start with the sentence 'Write about the following topic...' and include the sentence beginning 'Give reasons for your answer...'
- **Underline key points** in the question.
- Make sure you **read all parts of the question**, so you include everything required.
- Quickly **brainstorm the topic**. Think about your point of view. Think about any personal experience you can add.
- Write a **plan**. Decide which points are your main points or **topic sentences**.
- Decide what **supporting details** you have for each main point. You should have at least two main points.
- Make sure you **organise your points** logically.
- You will need an **introductory statement, body** and **conclusion**.

The structure for your essay will depend on the type of question. There are two types of argumentative structures. For example:

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Type 1 – Two-sided Argument

Some people think that children get a better education if they study away from home at a boarding school. Others believe it is better for them to stay with their families and attend day school.

Discuss both these points of view and give your opinion.

You could use the **argument structure - type 1**.

INTRODUCTION

- Opening – general statement introducing the topic.
- Background information.
- * Scope and thesis statement.

* REMEMBER

Your **scope** tells your reader the main points you will make. Your **thesis** statement tells the reader your opinion.

BODY PARAGRAPH 1 (Point of View 1)

- Topic sentence/main point
- Supporting sentence 1
- Supporting sentence 2
- Supporting sentence 3

BODY PARAGRAPH 2 (Point of View 2)

- Topic sentence/main point
- Supporting sentence 1
- Supporting sentence 2
- Supporting sentence 3

CONCLUSION

- Restatement of your opinion.
- Summary of your main points.

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Type 2 – One-sided Argument

Children are spending more time at their computers today than playing with their friends.

To what extent do you agree or disagree?

You could use the **argument structure - type 2**.

A – Agree

INTRODUCTION

- Opening – general statement introducing the topic.
- Background information.
- * Scope and thesis statement of **agreement**.

BODY PARAGRAPH 1 (Reason 1 & justification)

- Topic sentence/main point
- Supporting sentence 1
- Supporting sentence 2
- Supporting sentence 3

BODY PARAGRAPH 2 (Reason 2 & justification)

- Topic sentence/main point
- Supporting sentence 1
- Supporting sentence 2
- Supporting sentence 3

CONCLUSION

- Restatement of your opinion.
- Summary of your main points.

B – Disagree

INTRODUCTION

- Opening – general statement introducing the topic.
- Background information.
- * Scope and thesis statement of **disagreement**.

BODY PARAGRAPH 1 (Reason 1 & justification)

- Topic sentence/main point
- Supporting sentence 1
- Supporting sentence 2
- Supporting sentence 3

BODY PARAGRAPH 2 (Reason 2 & justification)

- Topic sentence/main point
- Supporting sentence 1
- Supporting sentence 2
- Supporting sentence 3

CONCLUSION

- Restatement of your opinion.
- Summary of your main points.

C – Neutral

INTRODUCTION

- Opening – general statement introducing the topic.
- Background information.
- * Scope and thesis statement of **neutrality**.

BODY PARAGRAPH 1 (Reason for agreement & justification)

- Topic sentence/main point
- Supporting sentence 1
- Supporting sentence 2
- Supporting sentence 3

BODY PARAGRAPH 2 (Reason for disagreement & justification)

- Topic sentence/main point
- Supporting sentence 1
- Supporting sentence 2

CONCLUSION

- Restatement of your opinion.
- Summary of your main points.

* REMEMBER

Your **scope** tells your reader the main points you will make. Your **thesis** statement tells the reader your opinion.

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- Remember to **link ideas** within/between sentences and paragraphs.
- You will receive a higher mark if your **use a range of structures and vocabulary**.
- **Don't copy from the question** as this will not be assessed. Use your own words.
- **Don't take more than 40 minutes** over this task.
- Leave at least 5 minutes to **check through** what you have **written**.
- You will **lose marks** if your essay is **less than** the **required** number of **words**.

How to prepare for Task 2

- Look at as many **sample questions** as you can. **Practise underlining** the **key points and brainstorming** the topics, making plans for each one. Gradually reduce the time you allow yourself to do this, so you can do it in under 5 minutes. See all the practice books and web sites for sample questions. Lots of them have sample answers as well.
- Look at the **language** used:
 - ❖ for making paragraphs and sentences cohesive (linking your ideas within and between sentences and paragraphs). *For example, logical links that show addition (as well as, in addition) or contrast (whereas, on the other hand). See Focus on IELTS, p.21-22, Helpful Hints for IELTS, p.54*
 - ❖ for expressing views. *For example, 'I believe that ...' 'I would argue that ...' . See Insight into IELTS, p.88.*
 - ❖ for making contrasts and concessions. *For example, 'Despite the fact that ...' . See Insight into IELTS, p.88 & Focus on IELTS, p.100*
 - ❖ for refuting an argument. *For example, 'There is little evidence to support the ...' See Insight into IELTS, p.89*
 - ❖ for giving opposing arguments. *See Helpful Hints for IELTS, p.71.*
 - ❖ for providing support to your main points. *For example, 'In my experience ...' or 'A good example of this is ...' . See Insight into IELTS, p.92*
 - ❖ in conclusions. *For example, 'In conclusion ..' or 'On balance...'. See Focus on IELTS, p.120, Helpful Hints, p.71.*

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- **Think about the topics** that could be used for this task. *For example,*

Technology
Crime
Tourism
Transport
Education
Population
Media
Health
Society

- **Brainstorm the topics** for possible questions.
- **Write as many timed essays as possible.** Do the ones that have sample and model answers in the books in the SAC.

Practice for Task 2

Books in the SAC

Cambridge IELTS 1: p.32, p.52, p.73 (p.73 inc. model answer)
Cambridge IELTS 2: p.28, p.52, p.74, p.96 (all inc. model answers)
Cambridge IELTS 3: p.28, p.52, p.74, p.98 (all inc. model answers)
Helpful Hints for IELTS: p.104, p.125, p.138, p.150

Websites

Homesglen:

<http://international.holmesglen.vic.edu.au/IELTS01.htm>

Writing (downloadable booklet (p.41-450) with sample task and answer & strategies including using connectives).

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General tips for Writing

Before the exam

- Practise writing answers to the tasks in the time allowed, especially if you haven't written at speed by hand for a while.
- Keep up-to-date with current affairs.

During the exam

- Use a pen. It should be easier to write faster with a pen.
- Make sure you have a checklist in mind for editing your writing at the end. Make one up now with the errors you know you make. *For example,*

Have I

- ✓ written enough words?
- ✓ dealt with all parts of the question?
- ✓ added 's' to all the 3rd person singular verbs in the present simple?
- ✓ used the correct articles (a, an or the)?
- ✓ added 's' to all the countable nouns I have used in the plural?
- ✓ used the correct prepositions?
- ✓ used the correct tenses?
- ✓ used a variety of sentence structures?
- ✓ used a variety of vocabulary?
- ✓ used a variety of connective words?