

TEACHING THE ACADEMIC WRITING FOR ENGINEERING STUDENTS

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Abstract

This research paper is to highlight the methods of teaching the academic writing for the Engineering students. In this report, an overview of the types of the IELTS writing test and the procedures for teaching the academic writing with the activities are presented. It is hoped that this research paper is providing the students how to write a good answer for the academic writing in IELTS.

Keywords: Procedures, Academic Writing Task 1, Academic Writing Task 2, Activities

1. Introduction

In our country, Myanmar, English is taught as a mandatory subject in schools and universities. Moreover, in Engineering universities, English is taught with four skills: Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking.

For the Engineering students, English is taught with four skills. To be more effective in English, vocabulary and grammar are taught besides the four skills for them. Among these, more difficulties are faced in writing. Therefore, writing in English is very important for every student.

The purpose of this paper is to focus on the methods of teaching the academic writing in IELTS and to improve the writing ability for the Engineering students. As the academic writing is the most creative type of writing, it becomes the only one for learner's consciously mastering the creative, productive and expressive approach towards communicative performance in the target language.

Therefore, this research paper is prepared for the aim of improving the writing skill for the Engineering students by supplying with the procedures for teaching the academic writing.

2. Literature Review

IELTS, the International English Language Testing System, is designed to assess the language ability of people who want to study or work where English is the language of communication. IELTS is recognised and accepted by over 9,000 organisations worldwide, including universities, employers, professional bodies, immigration authorities and other government agencies.

IELTS Academic is for test takers wishing to study at undergraduate or postgraduate levels, and for those seeking professional registration while IELTS General Training is for test takers wishing to migrate to an English speaking country (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, UK) and for those wishing to train or study at below degree level.

There are four components in the IELTS test: Listening, Reading, Writing, and Speaking. Writing is the third part of the test. It has two options such as Academic Writing and General training Writing.

2.1 Academic Writing Test Format

There are two tasks in Academic Writing. In task 1, test takers are given a graph, table, chart or diagram and are asked to summarise and report the information in their own words. Sometimes, they may be asked to select and compare data, describe the stages of a process, how something works or describes an object or event. In Task 2, they are asked to write an essay in response to a point of view, argument or problem.

For the task 1 in the Academic Writing, test takers are assessed on their ability to organise, present and possibly compare data, to describe the stages of a process or procedure: to describe an object or event or sequence of events; to explain how something works. In task 2, depending on the task type, they are assessed on their ability to present a solution to a problem; to present and justify an opinion; to compare and contrast evidence, opinions and implications: to evaluate and challenge ideas, evidence or an argument.

Test takers are assessed on their performance on each task according to the IELTS Academic Writing test assessment criteria:

Task Achievement/Response means that the report writing shows the test takers have understood and covered the topic from all its sides, aspects, etc.

Coherence and Cohesion means how they well connected the paragraphs and sentences inside each paragraph. All of the paragraphs need to be logically connected.

Lexical Resource means vocabulary and different types of sentences: simple and complex. The words can be used with their synonyms.

Grammatical Range and Accuracy means spelling and grammar of sentence. The words should be spelled correctly; articles are not be forgotten. Punctuations is also important.

2.2 General Useful Advices of Academic Writing in IELTS

Test takers need to consider the following advices in academic writing for IELTS.

- (a) In writing test, there are no right or wrong answers or opinions. The examiners are assessing how well the test takers can use the English to report the information and express ideas.
- (b) The questions are analysed carefully to make sure the answer addresses all the points covered by the question.
- (c) The minimum word limit is noticed. If the test takers write less than 150 words for Task 1 and less than 250 for the Task 2, they will lose mark.
- (d) The test takers must be careful to use their own words because the examiner will not include words copied from the question in the word count.
- (e) The test takers must write both their answer in full, not in note form or in bullet points. Ideas in paragraphs must be arranged to show the examiner that they are able to organize main and supporting points.
- (f) Very long sentences are not needed to write to do well in the writing test. If the sentences are

too long, they will become less coherent and also make it harder for the test takers to control the grammar.

- (g) In Academic Writing Task 1, relevant information from data presented in a graph, table or diagram is selected and compared. In the introduction, the text from the question is not copied and the own words are used. The test takers shouldn't try to interpret or give reasons for the data; keep the response factual.
- (h) Task 2 of the Academic Writing test is an essay. Before writing is started, the essay structure is not forgotten to plan. An introduction, ideas to support the argument or opinion, real-life examples to illustrate the points, and a conclusion should be included based on the information they have provided.
- (i) Test takers have 40 minutes to write Task 2 essay. They make sure themselves to give up to five minutes to plan the answer before they start writing. Also five minutes is left at the end to review the answer and mistakes are checked.
- (j) Position or point of view is made as clear as possible in the essay for the Academic Task 2.
The last paragraph should be a conclusion that is consistent with the arguments that have been included in the essay.
- (k) The test takers will not be helped the memorizing a model answers for the writing test. The examiner will see that the answer does not match the topic of the essay.
- (l) The test takers take care to spell the words correctly. Standard American, Australian and British spellings are acceptable in IELTS.

3. Suggested Activities for Teaching the Academic Writing

In accordance with the needs of the Engineering students, writing tasks and activities needs to be prepared not only for making correct grammatical structures but also for communicating functions in their subject matter. In addition, the students need to improve their writing in sentence level as well as paragraph level: writing composition, and writing their technical reports and papers, Therefore, in this paper, some activities are provided for the students with opportunities to develop the academic writing.

Selected activities are intended for only pair work and group work also individual which will encourage the students to share ideas and help each other. Moreover, the activities are composed of a picture or series of pictures which provide the students the basic material for their composition but also stimulate their imaginative power.

So, these suggested activities are expected to be useful for teaching the academic writing of Engineering students.

- 3.1 Sample Activity 1 : Interpreting Information from the Diagrams
- Aim :To practise the language need to describe percent of the data
- Target Audience : Students
- Relevance to IELTS : Academic Writing Task 1
- Organisation :Pairs, groups
- Procedure : Give the students time to read the information and study the graph, and then let them compare answers and ideas.
- After checking their answers, ask what they think the graphs represent. Then read the paragraphs again, highlighting each key expressions. Read through the expressions in the box, checking understanding as necessary before the students do the task. And then, monitor the students' work and, after checking, focus on the organisation of the text, looking at how different components of the graph are linked. It is noted that since decisions about tenses are relevant in most writing tasks, it is important that the students can name at least the main tense. If they are at all hazy in this area, refer them to the reference list of tenses.

Writing Task 1

You should spend about 20 minutes on this task.

The graph shows the unemployment rates in the US and Japan between March 1993 and March 1999. Write a report for a university lecturer describing the information shown below.

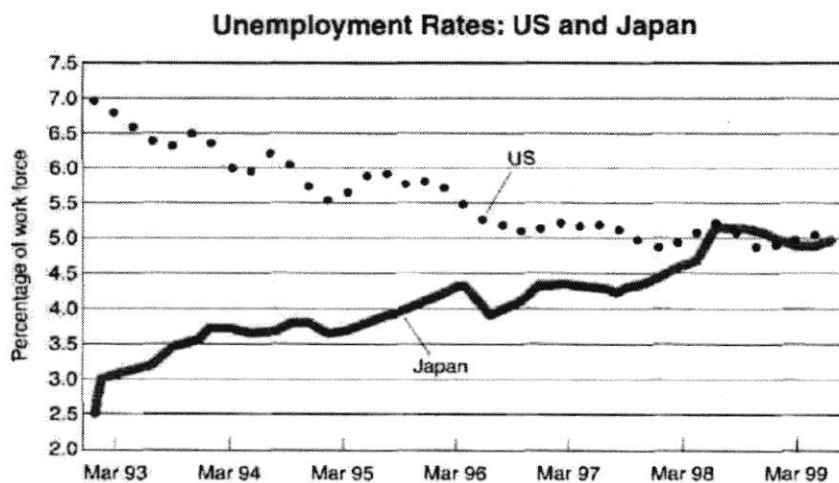


Figure 3.1 Unemployment Rate between March 1993 and March 1999

3.2 Sample Activity 2 : Describing Tables

Aim : To practise the language needed to describe the numbers

Target audience : Students

Relevance to IELTS : Academic Writing Task 1

Organisation : Pairs, groups

Procedure : Ask the students to describe statistics in table and other diagram, and this section practises a number of key expressions.

Have the students study the table and the example sentences before working exercise. Before the students do exercise, point out those qualifying expressions are equally useful in describing graphs and other diagrams where it is difficult to be precise about a figure. Give the students a few minutes to study the table, and then ask questions to check their reading of the table:

What do the figures in the table represent?

Which area will be the most projected expenditure?

Which area will be the general trend over the period?

Which area is an exception to this trend?

Give the students time to complete the text and compare answers.

There are three practice tasks which can be tackled in class or set for homework as time allows. One is further gap-fill task of the kind above; another is an exercise focusing on cohesion and third is an exam-practice task with detailed task approach.

Writing Task 1

You should spend about 20 minutes on this task.

The table below gives information about the problems faced by children in two primary schools in 2005 and 2015. Summarise the information by selecting and reporting the main features, and make comparisons where relevant.

Table 3.1 Educational problems in two primary schools in 2005 and 2015

Percentage of children with different educational problems in two primary schools

Problem Areas	2005		2015	
	School A	School B	School A	School B
Reading ability	22	8	23	9
Handwriting	28	7	28	7
Spelling	30	5	25	10
Listening skills	35	11	20	12
Verbal expression of ideas	35	14	21	15
Concentration in lessons	40	15	18	15
Following instructions	42	6	18	12

- 3.3 Sample Activity 3 : Describing a process
- Aim : To give practice in writing a description of a process
- Target Audience : Students
- Relevance to IELTS : Academic Writing Task 1
- Organisation : Individuals, Pairs
- Procedure : Ask the students to study the diagram and suggest a suitable starting point for the description, and then to attempt to describe it simply in their own words. Clarify vocabulary and revise the use and formation of the passive, if necessary.

With weaker students it may help to illustrate the kind of choices of verb form they need to make, i.e. singular/plural? active / passive? Allow time for the students to study the diagram and ask any questions:

- Is there an introduction to the diagram?
- Is there an overview?
- Can you underline the key features?
- Can you underline the supporting information?
- Are the paragraph breaks in the right place?
- Can you identify the linkers and reference words?
- Can you identify the topic vocabulary?
- Is the answer the right length?

Remind them to try and put the notes on the diagram into their own words where possible. They should write their answer as a single paragraph of about 8 to 100 words, linking sentences appropriately and making stages with suitable sequence expression. With weaker students, it may be helpful to run through the description orally first. Discuss whether there needs to be more than one paragraph (one is

acceptable, but two may be clear), and remind them of the importance of good linking with appropriate sequence expressions.

Writing Task 1

You should spend about 20 minutes on this task.

The picture below shows the recycling process of wasted glass bottles. Summarise the information by selecting and reporting the main features, and make comparisons where relevant.

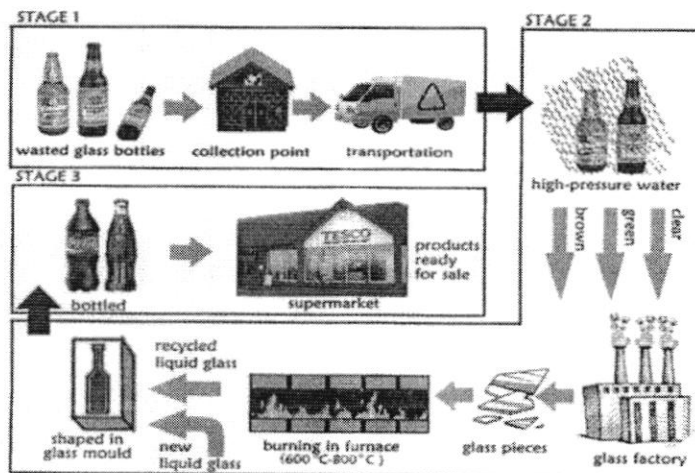


Figure 3.2 Recycling process of wasted glass bottles

3.4 Sample Activity 4

Aim	: Explaining Reasons in Cause and Effect Arguments : To elicit ideas from the students and to be able to guess suggestion which are relevant to the given topic
Target Audience	: Students
Relevance to IELTS	: Academic Writing Task 2
Organisation	: Individuals, Pairs, Groups
Procedure	: Introduce the idea of the number of overweight children in developed countries is increasing.

Some people think this is due to problems such as the growing number of fast food outlets. Other believe that parents are to blame for not looking after their children's health.

Ask the students to suggest reasons why the number of overweight children in developed countries is increasing. Elicit a few ideas and, as the students try to express them, guided them various ways of explaining reasons and results. In developed countries, children are overweight. As a result, some people are surrounded by shops selling unhealthy, fatty foods at low prices.

As a consequence, children are given chips and chocolate rather than nourishing food.

Consequently, parents are allowing their children to sit in front of the TV or computers and play video games without taking any physical exercise. So, many of children in developed countries are overweight. Give the students the list of suggestion as to why children are overweight, and ask them to discuss in pair or group. Ask them to decide which are the most important reasons to which are valid, which are invalid, or irreverent.

They may also want to provide some additional information.

Hold a feedback session and write up the primary and secondary point on the board to give the students the shape of their argument.

Writing Test 2

You should spend about 40 minutes on this task.

Write about the following topic.

The number of overweight children in developed countries is increasing. Some people think this is due to problems such as the growing number of fast food outlets. Others believe that parents are to blame for not looking after their children's health. To what extent do you agree with their views. Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge or experience.

4. Conclusion

This research paper is intended to improve the academic writing of the Engineering students. Writing is an essential part of language learning at every-level because it supports learning in multiple ways. Moreover, the writing skill is needed not only for the academic studies but also for communication skill. In order to develop the academic writing of the Engineering students, the recommended procedures are presented with the sample activities. Therefore, this report can help them how to write the graphic presentation and essay writing in Academic for IELTS.

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