



Welcome to IELTS, your ticket to study and work overseas!

In response to the growing popularity of IELTS the Taipei Times, in conjunction with the British Council, brings our readers an IELTS preparation page which will run every Saturday on p14 of the Taipei Times. Each week will focus on a different area of the test. IELTS, the International English Language Testing System, is an upper-intermediate test of English communication. It can be used for university entry and emigration around the English-speaking world and beyond. It measures your ability to communicate across the four language skills — reading, writing, listening and speaking — through authentic challenging tasks. With over 700,000 people taking IELTS annually, it is one of the fastest growing English tests in the world, trusted and accepted by over 4,000 organisations and faculties worldwide, and is a great alternative to TOEFL.

## Writing Task 2 — The discussion essay

In both the Academic and General Training versions of the exam, the second part of the written paper is a discussion essay. You are given an opinion, a point of view or a problem, and you have to present and justify your opinion in an organised essay. You have to write 250 words, and you should spend no longer than 40 minutes on the task. The topic could relate to anything that a normal adult could be expected to discuss, for example:

- ▶ the environment**
- ▶ education**
- ▶ crime**
- ▶ poverty**
- ▶ healthcare**
- ▶ the Internet**

Let's look at an example of the type of task.

'As English is now the world language and an essential skill in business, English language instruction should begin in kindergarten.'

**To what extent do you agree or disagree?**

Present your ideas and opinions with examples where necessary. You should write 250 words.

### Dealing with the task

#### Step 1: Question Analysis



First, let's analyse the question. Think about the keywords and clarify what they mean.

- ▶ World language** — Is English the world language? If so, what gives it this status? How is it used globally? Are there any alternative global languages?
- ▶ Essential** — Does everyone really need to speak English? Are there jobs where it is not necessary? Can all prominent people in society speak it well?
- ▶ Kindergarten** — Is this the best time to start? What are the advantages and disadvantages of starting to learn English this early?

#### Step 2: Brainstorming

Now, decide whether you are for the opinion (you agree that English should be taught in kindergarten) or against the opinion (you disagree) and make notes of your ideas. Often it is a good idea to explore both sides of the argument. Also, try and think of real-life examples that prove your point.

Read through the following notes. Are they for or against the idea?

1. Other languages have more users than English, eg, Hindu, Mandarin.
2. English is regarded as the international business language.
3. Many multinationals use English as their corporate language.
4. Other languages are also used in business.
5. Foreign executives in China are being required to learn Chinese.
6. English is used in higher education, even in non-English speaking countries.
7. Learning English in kindergarten could help students become bilingual.
8. Languages represent culture and should be preserved.
9. Young children haven't fully mastered their first language and will be very confused.
10. Young children are very receptive to new languages.

Answers: For 2, 3, 6, 7, 10 Against: 1, 4, 5, 8, 9

#### Step 3: Planning

Now that you have some ideas you can plan the layout of your essay. Think about what you want the main point of each paragraph to be. With this type of question a very straightforward paragraph plan is as follows. Useful language is in *italics*.

##### 1: Introduction

Explain the background of the issue

*In recent years; Nowadays; Over the past twenty years ...*

##### 2: For

Arguments in favour of introducing English tuition in kindergarten (one or two paragraphs)

*Some people think; They say; It's true that ...*

##### 3: Against

Arguments against doing this (one or two paragraphs)

*On the other hand; Other people would argue; One example of this is ...*

##### 4: Conclusion

Your own personal opinion based on all the arguments

*Overall; Having looked at both sides; In conclusion ...*

CREDIT: HARRY HAYNES, THE BRITISH COUNCIL, TAIPEI

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- We organise collaborative events and exchanges in education, arts, science, and English language teaching.
- We support learners and teachers of English in Taiwan.
- We provide English language courses.
- We offer access to UK examinations — including IELTS.

## WRITING TASK 2

### Step 4: Writing

The following essay is a response to the task, but the paragraphs are mixed-up. Can you put them in the correct order? (Note the opening phrases used to link the ideas together.)

**▶ A:** It's true that English is very important in international business, and many multinational companies use English as their corporate language. It is also very important in terms of educational opportunities, with many universities now teaching courses in English even in non-English speaking countries, not to mention the information and entertainment available from global media such as Hollywood movies and the Internet. Many people feel that teaching children English from a young age gives them the opportunity to become bilingual, which may provide them with many advantages in the future. Pre-school children are also obviously very receptive to new language.

**▶ B:** However, the real issue is whether children of kindergarten age are mentally ready to start learning a foreign language. It stands to reason that a child who has not mastered his or her mother tongue will be very confused by exposure to a second unrelated form of communication.

**▶ C:** Having looked at both sides of this issue, it seems clear that, although English is very important, educators need to think carefully about the child's overall development when deciding when to introduce English into the curriculum. Doing this too early could result in children being proficient in neither language, and there are also issues of cultural identity that need to be considered.

**▶ D:** Nowadays, many people regard English as the main world language, and it is certainly true that it is a very important tool for communication between people from different countries. Because of this, many kindergartens now offer English language instruction to children as young as three, but is this really the best age to start learning a foreign language?

**▶ E:** On the other hand, some people might argue that it is a mistake for children's education to focus exclusively on English, particularly as there are other languages, such as Chinese, Hindi and Spanish, that are spoken by more people. In an increasingly multipolar world other languages clearly have a role to play, for example this week it has been reported that all new foreign executives in China will be required to pass a Chinese proficiency exam. Others would also argue that language represents culture, and that by putting too much emphasis on one language we risk diluting other languages and cultures.



The British Council, Taipei.

PHOTO: CATHERINE THOMAS, TAIPEI TIMES

Now, follow the same procedure and try and do this task:

'Crime in cities is out of control. The government needs to build more prison facilities and fill them with criminals.'

**To what extent do you agree or disagree?**

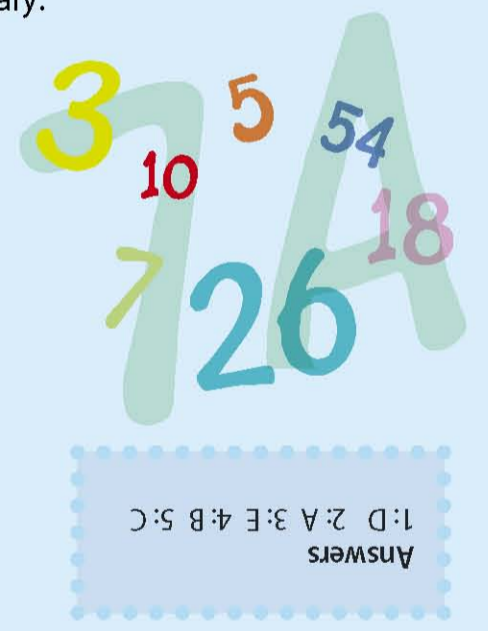
Present your ideas and opinions with examples where necessary. You should write 250 words.

**Remember:**

- ▶ 1. Analyse the question and underline the keywords.
- ▶ 2. Brainstorm ideas looking at the issue from both sides.
- ▶ 3. Make a paragraph plan.
- ▶ 4. Write the essay.

**Your essay must include:**

- ▶ Opinions with reasons.
- ▶ Real examples to prove your point.
- ▶ Linking expressions to help the reader understand where the essay is going.
- ▶ Paragraphs.



Answers  
1: D 2: A 3: E 4: B 5: C

## FaQS

**Q: Do I have to use British English spellings?**

**A:** No. As in the other parts of the IELTS test, either British or American English is fine, although it is recommended that you try and be consistent when writing.

**Q: Do I have to look at both sides of the issue in the question?**

**A:** Not at all. If you feel very strongly one way or the other, you can use each paragraph to explain a reason why you feel this way. The above paragraph plan is only a suggestion to help you get started.

**Q: Do I have to write a conclusion?**

**A:** It's best to summarise the key points you have raised and perhaps give your personal opinion in a conclusion.

**Q: What if the topic is not related to my major? Do I have to study the subjects that might come up in the test?**

**A:** The topics are things which affect society as a whole, so everyone should know something about them and you don't need to be an expert, but it would be a good idea to read English newspaper and magazine articles on general topics to build up your vocabulary.