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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 two

In both the Academic and the 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 at least 250 words and 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



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You need to include opinions, reasons, real examples and linking language, and you have to use paragraphs.

This week we are going to look at an essay dealing with crime and punishment.

### Task one: vocabulary and signposting language

Before you look at the model essay, look at some of the key language below. Can you match the vocabulary words to their definitions?

1. Inmate ____	A. a thief who enters a building with intent to steal
2. Murderer ____	B. a criminal who kills another human being with premeditation
3. Petty criminal ____	C. someone involved in minor crimes
4. Burglar ____	D. something that persuades people not to commit a crime
5. Shoplifter ____	E. in prison
6. Deterrent ____	F. a person who is confined in a prison
7. Behind bars ____	G. a thief who steals from a shop that is open

It is also important to remember to introduce paragraphs with signposting expressions. They help let the reader know where your argument is going. Below are some examples of signposting expressions:

- ▶ However
- ▶ In conclusion
- ▶ Another argument
- ▶ Some people believe
- ▶ Nowadays



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## WRITING TASK

Read the sample task below carefully. Before you read the model answer, highlight the keywords. Think about your own opinion, and what examples you can think of that support your ideas, either in Taiwan or elsewhere.

### Sample Task:

**The role of prisons should be to punish criminals who have committed serious crimes. Training courses and education offered to prisoners are a waste of taxpayers' money.**

**To what extent do you agree or disagree with these statements? Present your ideas and opinions with examples where necessary. You should write at least 250 words.**

### Task two: a model answer

The paragraphs in the model answer contain the information shown in the table below, but they are in the wrong order. Read each paragraph and then write the appropriate letter into the second column of the table. After you are finished, fill in the third column of the table with one of the signposting expressions from task one.

Paragraph content	Paragraph	Signposting expression
Background information		
Arguments against education		
Arguments in favour of helping some criminals		
Further arguments in favour, with examples of different countries		
Summary of main points		

A. \_\_\_\_\_, many people would disagree with the idea that prisons should play no educational role at all. It may be true that serious criminals, such as murderers, deserve little sympathy, but that does not mean that people who have committed less serious crimes should be given no help to re-enter society. By giving petty criminals such as burglars or shoplifters an alternative trade, education programmes can help to make society safer in the future, as these criminals will not be forced to re-offend to make a living.

B. \_\_\_\_\_, many countries offer training and educational courses which provide practical skills, such as plumbing or carpentry. While doing this has clear benefits for the prisoners who will have new skills when they leave prison, does spending money in this way really benefit society as a whole?

C. \_\_\_\_\_, I think that while it is clear prison does need to deter people from committing crime, in the long run, re-training programmes are better for society as a whole as they help criminals move away from a life of crime.

D. \_\_\_\_\_ that offering any kind of training to prisoners is an inappropriate use of public funds. They think that although training courses benefit the inmate, time spent in prison should be used by prisoners to think about the damage they have done to society. Furthermore, if prisons provide too many benefits, they may be seen as holiday camps and thus fail to deter people from committing crime.

E. \_\_\_\_\_ in favour of education is that using prison simply as a deterrent does not seem to work. It is well known, for example, that the US has by far the largest number of people behind bars in the world. However, the crime rate in the US remains much higher than many other countries, such as Sweden, where the focus is on helping people re-enter society.

### Task three: a weaker answer

Below is a weaker answer. Read it and think of five reasons why it would not get a good score.

The role of prisons should be to punish criminals who have committed serious crimes. Training courses and education offered to prisoners are a waste of taxpayers' money. To what extent I agree or disagree with this statement is to be discussed in this essay.

"Every coin has its two sides." So the wise man says. While there are incontrovertible truths proclaimed by one side on this issue, there are other counterarguments equally valid. To find the truth, we must explore each equally valid statement of belief.

Some people say training courses and education are a waste of money. They say it is useless. It just wastes money. Why should we pay tax just to waste the money? On the other hand, training courses and education can help people. People can learn many things. Education is the key. Teach the children and let them lead the way, isn't it?

Having looked at both sides, I reaffirm that this is a contentious issue worthy of more study. Neither side has the upper hand, but equally, neither can be discounted.

Problems with the weaker answer:

- ▶ The first paragraph copies the wording of the question, so it will not be counted.
- ▶ Paragraph two and the conclusion use a lot of memorised expressions that do not relate directly to the question.
- ▶ The writer has given no clear opinions, suggesting he or she doesn't understand the task.
- ▶ There are no real-life examples — the writer hasn't mentioned the situation in Taiwan or anywhere else.
- ▶ It is too short.

Paragraph content	Paragraph	Signposting expression
Summary of main points	C	
Examples of different countries	E	
Further arguments in favour, with examples of different countries	A	
Arguments in favour of helping some criminals	D	
Arguments against education	B	
Background information		

Answers:  
Task one  
1. F 2. B 3. C 4. A  
5. G 6. D 7. E  
Task two (completed table)