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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.

IELTS Writing Task 2: Generating Ideas

- ▶ 250 words
- ▶ 40 minutes
- ▶ Must include: ideas, opinions, evidence and examples

For task two you have to write an essay giving your opinions on a topic of general interest, eg, education, environmental issues, crime or globalisation.

Before you start writing your answer, you need to

- ▶ Read the question carefully, underlining key words
- ▶ Brainstorm ideas
- ▶ Select the best ideas and organise them into a paragraph plan

Building Paragraphs

Each paragraph should have a main idea. This idea can be stated in the topic sentence. This sentence tells the reader what information to expect from the paragraph. This is followed by supporting sentences which explain or give examples to support the main idea. The paragraph may also introduce a qualifying statement which introduces a different perspective on the issue.

To review try the practical exercise on the opposite side of the page.



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Linking Language

To do well on the IELTS, you also have to show you can use linking language, for example:

- Addition:** and, also
- Contrast:** but, however
- Purpose/Cause:** so, because

It is also important to avoid repeating the same language again and again, so you need to use referencing, for example: he, she, it, this or they.

You also need to introduce examples: for example, such as

These are the sentences from the practical exercise written out as a full paragraph. Notice the *italicised* language which helps the information hang together.

The general public can also play an important part in protecting the environment. *For example*, they can recycle a lot of their household waste. This helps to reduce the amount of energy and resources used in creating new products and packaging, *while* also reducing the amount of rubbish dumped in landfills. *However*, activities such as this require heavy government investment in waste handling facilities.

Remember – each paragraph has to have a main idea!

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WRITING TASK 2

- ▶ 'Giving employees annual leave is an unnecessary expense for employers and should be kept to a minimum.' To what extent do you agree or disagree?

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

- ▶ Look at the following two sample answers. Which has more clearly organised paragraphs?

Model Answer:

Sample Answer 1

Employers keeping holidays to a minimum is a contentious issue in today's modern society. Many people say it is an unnecessary expense for employers. I intend to explore both sides in my essay.

I often take annual leave with my friends. We like to go camping, or travelling around Taiwan. We like to spend our money to do this. This is a good time to relax. We can do many things like water sports.

Kenting is my favourite place. My employer may think it is expensive to let me go there. He should look at the long term benefits. We have to get someone to work instead of me. But workers need to relax. Workers who can't relax will feel stressed. Stress can make people feel sick and hate their job. Annual leave in France is 35 days. In my country, annual leave is much shorter. If workers don't have enough time off they will leave the company. That would make a lot more trouble for the employer. And how about my family? I need to have more time to see them. But there are some disadvantages. If you have a long holiday, you might forget your work. It's important to work hard when you get back. That is the key point. Work hard and play hard. It's a win-win situation, isn't it?

Sample Answer 2

For most workers today, annual leave is one of the highlights of their year. It is a time when they can travel, relax, catch up with friends and relatives and have a life away from work. But does this time off actually benefit their employer?

There are some obvious drawbacks to giving workers long breaks. For example, people may find it difficult to get back into their daily routine having spent a long time away. It can also be difficult for companies to organise temporary cover for people who are on holiday. But these expenses have to be weighed against advantages to organisations.

One advantage lies in staff motivation. If people have a goal in mind that they are working towards, for example, two weeks on a tropical island, it will be seen as a reward that they are working towards, and this will motivate them to work more diligently. This will also help reduce stress and depression among workers.

Employers should also consider the long term costs of not providing leave and organising cover. Although in the short term it can be quite expensive to allow staff to take time off, by not doing so an organisation may become overly-reliant on certain members of staff who may one day leave. Also, reducing costs will inevitably lead to a high staff turnover as people quit their jobs simply to have a decent break.

In conclusion, it seems clear that there are good financial reasons that companies should take into account the welfare of their staff and give them adequate time off. Despite the short term costs involved, it is vital to an organisation's success in the long term.

Word Count: 278

Answer 2 is better because:

- ▶ It has clear paragraphing
- ▶ Each paragraph has a main idea, which is given in the first sentence
- ▶ Each main idea has several supporting points
- ▶ It uses linking language to link the ideas together

Answer 1 contains a lot of ideas, but they are not organised or linked in a way that the reader can understand.

Practical exercise 1

The following sentences are from a paragraph in an essay about protecting the environment, but they are in the wrong order. Identify and put them in the following order.

- Topic sentence:** ____ A. Recycling helps to reduce the amount of energy and resources used in creating new products and packaging.
- Example:** ____ B. Recycling also reduces the amount of rubbish dumped in landfills.
- Supporting Statement 1:** ____ C. The general public can play an important part in protecting the environment.
- Supporting Statement 2:** ____ D. The general public can recycle a lot of their household waste.
- Qualifying statement:** ____ E. Activities like recycling require heavy government investment in waste handling facilities.

Answers: Paragraph Topic Sentence: C Example D SS1: A SS2: B SS3: E