

How to structure your writing task for academic task 1 – pie chart IELTS

To help with your [IELTS preparation](#) we will give you a step by step guide on how to structure your *pie charts description* to receive great results on your writing task 1 exam.

Step 1 – Prepare

- Look for the biggest and smallest sections of your pie charts - What do they represent? What is the percentage?
- Make a quick analysis – note down the times, dates and measurements.
- See the big picture, avoid getting lost in the details. After all this is a summarizing task.
- When you are confident you have selected the main features, carry on to step 2.

Step 2 – Organise your findings into two groups

When organising the information into two separate groups focus on these topics for your pie charts:

- Major trends
- Major groups
- Exceptions
- Group information
- Other similar ideas

Step 3 – Structure everything into this four paragraph model

Paragraph 1

Write one sentence explaining what the graphs show. You can paraphrase the title.

Example:

Pie Chart title: *Holiday destinations chosen by Welsh people 1955-2005.*

Your first sentence: *The pie chart shows the vacation preferences of Welsh people over a fifty year period starting in 1955 and finishing in 2005.*

Paragraph 2

Talk about the information that you have separated in step 2. Focus on the first group.

Paragraph 3

Talk about the information that you have separated in step 2. Focus on the second group.

Paragraph 4

Two sentences summarising your description. (What are the major overall trends, changes, etc.)

1. Tips for interpreting pie charts in IELTS

We will begin by giving you some general tips for interpreting a pie chart in your IELTS academic writing task.

These tips are good to keep in mind from the moment you take the first look at the pie charts given to you, to the moment you finish your writing task 1:

- If you cannot compare the information on your pie charts, don't panic. In such a case giving a summary of each picture is fine. Make comparisons where relevant. Take a look at our tutorial on how to compare pie charts [here](#).
- **Avoid giving personal opinions at all costs.** (E.g. If the graph shows rising prices and you know it's because of a war in Middle East, do not say anything. Your personal opinion must not be mentioned.)
- Always pay attention to the time frame of your pie charts and use the appropriate tense (past, present or future).
- Focus on getting all of the **appropriate** data from the pie charts/graphs into your writing.
- These are quick tips, if you are still struggling you should consider [enrolling in an online course](#) to prepare for IELTS.
- For pie chart interpretation examples and model essays, click [here](#).

2. Vocabulary for IELTS pie charts

Now that you have an understanding of how to structure your description of pie charts and graphs for IELTS writing task 1, let's talk about the language you should use.

Here are a few **examples** of good wording for the largest section of your pie charts:

It is clear that ___ represents the largest portion of ___, whereas ___ is undoubtedly the smallest.

Sales of ____ stood at __% in 1925, which is the majority of ____.

(If the percentage is around 60%) - Nearly a third...

(If the percentage is around 52%) - Over a half of all respondents...

Here are a few **examples** of good wording for the **smallest** section of your pie chart:

A small fraction...

Exactly 30% of students...

(If the percentage is around 25%) *Roughly a quarter of respondents*

...whereas sales for ____ were just 10%.

In 1955 approximately three quarters were ____, whereas in 1960 this had fallen to just under a fifth.

Written form	Percentage	Fraction
a half	50%	1/2
a third	33%	1/3
two thirds	66%	2/3
three quarters	75%	3/4
a quarter	25%	1/4

3. Which tense should you use?

These are the two basic rules you should follow:

Check the graph title, and the pie chart subtitles, look for dates!

– if the year is before the present year (i.e. 2020), use the past tense – if the year is after the present year (i.e 2025), use the future tense – if there is no year, use the present simple tense.

Check you don't accidentally switch the tense halfway through. Sometimes you will get charts and graphs that will require you to use more than one tense, but do this deliberately and with caution.

For a more in-depth tutorial about tenses check out this page: [126 IELTS academic task 1 – What tense?!](#)

4. Model answer for a pie chart

This pie chart shows the shares of total world food consumption held by each of seven different food types in 2014.

Meat is consumed the most, at 31.4 per cent. Fish has the second-highest consumption levels, at 27.9 per cent. Cereals consumption represents 11.7 per cent of the total. Fruits' share of consumption is 10.6 per cent, followed closely by vegetables at 10.5 per cent, and then bread at 5.5 per cent. The smallest food group in terms of world consumption is rice, at 2.4 per cent.

The graphs show that overall global consumption is widely dispersed among food types; no one type has a majority share. Animal-based foods (meat and fish) do make up the majority of consumption when added together. It is important to note, however, that based on the information in this pie chart no conclusions can be drawn about the dietary diversity of an individual person.

5. How to compare two pie charts

The language to compare two pie charts

Summarising two pie charts for an [IELTS academic task 1](#) needs careful preparation. Here, I am going to focus on deciding the language we need to do this because if we use the correct language, then we have a good chance to obtain a high band score.

Now we need to handle the language of percentages and proportions and, of course, the language we need will vary according to the topic and content of the pie charts. That is one reason why it is vital to study the title and any sub-headings of the charts.

Pie chart review

Take this example and decide what type of language we will need to describe it.

Naturally, we need in the first place **language to describe proportions**. Some keywords are:

- per cent (correctly spelt as two words)
- percentage
- proportion
- amount
- share

At the same time, we must be able to use **the language of comparison** – to say which country had the largest and smallest share etc. Some keywords here are:

- most/least
- largest/smallest
- more/less
- greater/smaller

Two pie charts: related topics, one-time frame (pie chart comparison)

Usually, task 1 will not be just one pie chart to describe but two or maybe more. This might involve two pie charts related in terms of “opposition” but static in the sense that both refer to the same time frame, normally a year. Look at the following which presents for the year 2018 the principal European Union trade partners in terms of food and drink: the first chart concerns export partners and the second, import.

In this case, what kind of language do we need?

Of course, we still need the same **language of proportion and pie chart comparison**.

The major difference is the need to **compare two pie charts, comparing** exports with imports, making the task more complex.

Two pie charts: one topic only at different times

[Source](#)

Now, look at these pie charts. There are of course similarities with the first set. We will always need language to describe proportions and to compare items.

This set refers to agricultural exports from the USA to Cuba in 2005 and then in 2014. In other words, we have just one topic shown over time.

Therefore, we need to use language describing change and trends.

This may be more complex because we have to handle all of the following:

- proportion language – to describe percentages
- comparison language – to describe the biggest and the smallest
- trend language – to describe what changes over time

Comparison overview

- **two pie charts on a different topic and the same time frame ⇒ language of proportion and comparison**
- **two pie charts on a related topic and in a different time frame ⇒ language of proportion and comparison and change**

Practical advice

- Do not start writing before giving yourself enough time to think. First decide the language you will need in your answer. Give yourself 5 minutes to look, think and plan.
- Study the charts carefully: the titles for example to check if they deal with the same or connected topics.
- Check the time frames very carefully in the charts and plan how time differences will affect your choice of verb tenses.

How to organise your paragraphs

Here we have focused on the language we need when we see 2 or more pie charts to compare. The other issue is organization, how to structure and sequence our answer. Here are a couple of ideas:

How many **paragraphs** do we need – one paragraph is never enough. In fact, we are encouraged to write in paragraphs. Decide on a **simple paragraph structure** – there's only 20 minutes for this. The best is the traditional "introduction", summary "body", structure with the main "body" part perhaps divided into two paragraphs.