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IELTS Writing Task 1 Maps Lesson

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Introduction

This guide on IELTS Writing Task 1 maps questions will cover:

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- Different kinds of map question
- Structure
- Describing specific changes
- Describing general changes
- Describing locations
- Sample answer

You will also be able to learn some new vocabulary that will help you deal with any Task 1 maps question.

In the IELTS writing test you might be asked to describe a map in task 1. This type of question is becoming increasingly popular- in fact it was on the exam last weekend here in Vietnam- and in my opinion, the easiest one to score high marks in, if you're prepared.

Many students, books and teachers overlook this type of question and it is therefore a bit of a shock when one comes up. Therefore, if you are prepared you will probably do better than most of the other students.

Different Kinds of Map Question

There are three main types of map question:

1. Describe one map in the present day.
2. Describe two maps- one in the present and one in the future.

3. Describe two maps- one in the past and one in the present.

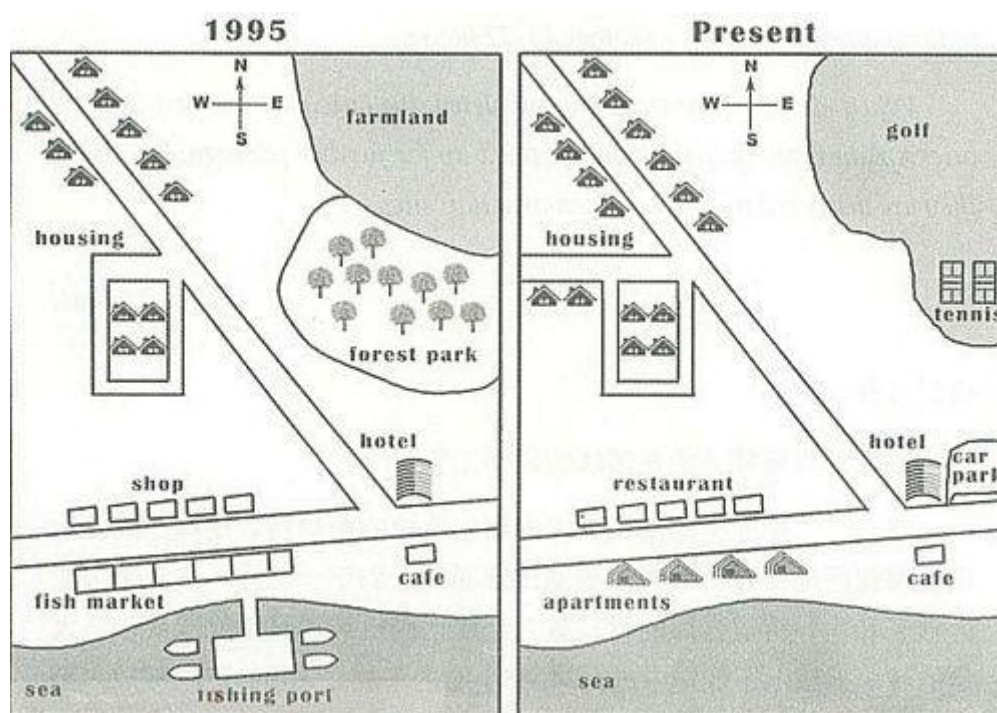
The first kind is very rare, as it only requires you to use the present simple and it is impossible for any comparisons to be made.

The second kind does come up occasionally and would require you to use present and future tenses. This kind of question is normally about the future development of a town or city. It requires the same vocabulary as the other two.

The third is the most common and will be the main focus of this post.

You will normally be shown two maps, as above and asked to select and report the main features, and make comparisons where relevant. You will obviously be using both present and past tenses to describe the maps and how the town has developed.

Also, as this is a man-made process we will use the passive.



Source: Cambridge English Practice Papers.

Structure

To describe two maps I advise my students to follow a four paragraph structure.

Paragraph 1- Paraphrase Sentence

Paraphrase question using synonyms.

Paragraph 2- Overview

Make two general statements about the map. You should describe the maps generally and write about the most noticeable differences between the two maps. You could ask yourself the following questions to identify general changes. Is the map more or less residential? Is there more or less countryside? Are there more or less trees? Were the changes dramatic or negligible? Were there any major improvements in infrastructure? How have the buildings and leisure facilities changed?

Paragraph 3- Main Body 1

Three to four sentences about specific changes that have occurred.

Paragraph 4- Main Body 2

Further three to four sentences about specific changes that have occurred.

You can group information together in paragraph 3 and 4 by time or location, depending on the question asked.

Look at the sample answer below to see how I have used this structure.

How to Describe Specific Changes

The ability to describe change is crucial to answering these questions. The various buildings and features will normally be labelled for you. What you need to work on is how to write about how they have changed from the past up until the present day.

Tip: You may be asked to describe your hometown in the **speaking test**. The vocabulary and grammar in this post should come in very useful.

Below I will list various buildings and features and verbs we could describe their change.

Buildings– demolished, knocked-down, flattened, replaced, renovated, built, constructed, reconstructed, developed, extended, expanded, relocated, converted and modernized.

Examples:

The government **demolished** the industrial estate and **developed** a sports ground.

They **removed** the shops and **replaced** it with a skyscraper.

A port was **constructed** at the edge of the river.

The factory in the city centre was **demolished** and **relocated** to the north of the city.

The old warehouses were **replaced** with new hotels.

The factory was **converted** into apartments.

Trees and Forests- cleared, cut-down, chopped-down, removed, planted.

Examples:

The forest was **cut-down** and **replaced** with a shopping centre.

The trees were **cleared** to **make way** for houses.

Roads, bridges and railways lines- constructed, built, extended, expanded and removed.

The main road was **extended** and a new bridge **built** over the river.

Leisure facilities- opened, set up, developed.

Examples:

A skate park was **set up** next to the swimming pool.

A park was **developed** beside the forest.

How to Describe General Changes

As this is an IELTS writing task 1 question we must write an overview and this is where we talk generally about the main changes that have occurred between the two maps.

Below are some examples of general statements we could use to describe change in towns and cities.

1. Over the period, the area witnessed dramatic changes.
2. From 1995 to 2005, the city centre saw spectacular developments.

3. The village changed considerably over the time period.
4. During the 10 year period, the industrial area was totally transformed.
5. Over the past 20 years, the residential area was totally reconstructed.
6. Over the time period, the old docks were totally redeveloped.
7. Between 1995 and 2005, the old houses were rebuilt.
8. The central business district was completely modernised during the time period.

Pick two or three of the most noticeable differences in the map and write a general statement for each. This will be your overview paragraph.

The more specific changes should be included in your main body paragraphs.

How to Describe Locations

You will also be expected to describe where things are maps and describe where changes have occurred.

You can use 'to the left' and 'to the right', but a better way is to use 'north', 'south', 'east' and 'west'. I normally advise my students to draw the symbols on the question paper if they are not already there.

Examples:

The forest **to the south of the** river was cut down.

A golf course was constructed **to the north of the** airport.

The houses **in the south-west of the** town were demolished.

The green fields **to the north-west of the** city were redeveloped as a park.

The airport **in the centre of the** city was relocated **to the** north-east of the river.

The school **to the south-east** was knocked down and a new one built **to the east of the** forest.

Finally, you will also be expected to use **prepositions of place**, e.g. at/in/on/by/beside/to/off/from, to describe where things are.

Examples:

Dramatic changes took place **in** the city centre.

To the south of the town, there is a golf course surrounded **by** trees.

A new school was built next **to** the swimming pool.

The old road running **from** north to south was replaced by a new motorway.

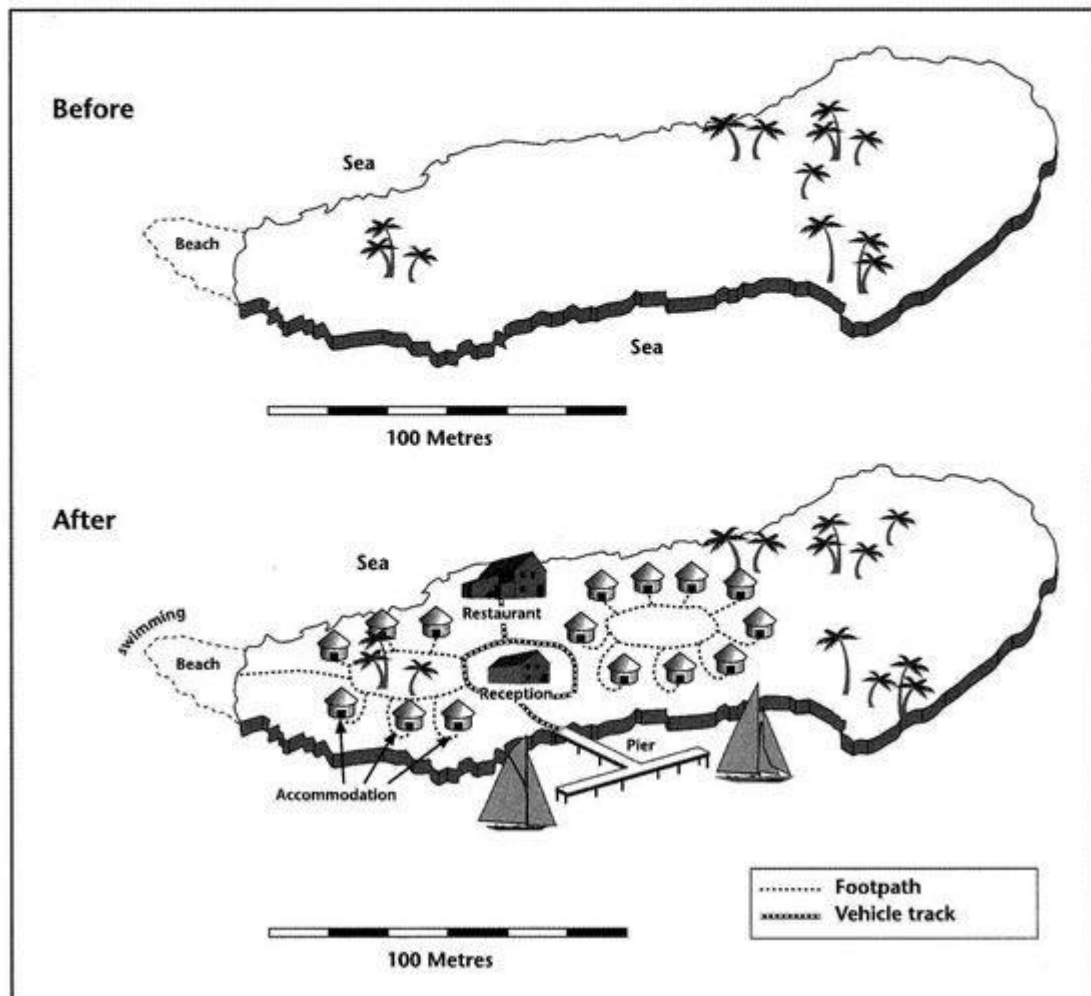
A marina was built **on** the banks of the river.

Sample Answer

The two maps below show an island, before and after the construction of some tourist facilities.

Summarise the information by selecting and reporting the main features, and make comparisons where relevant.

Write at least 150 words.



Source: Cambridge English Practice Papers.

Both maps display an island, before and after it was developed for tourism.

The island is approximately 250 metres long, has palm trees dotted around it, is surrounded by ocean and has a beach to the west. Over the period, the island was completely transformed with the addition of a hotel and a pier; however, the eastern part of the island appears to have been left undeveloped.

The most noticeable additions are the hotel rooms. 6 buildings, surrounding some trees, have been built in the west of the island and 9 buildings have been constructed in the centre of the island. Between the two accommodation areas, a reception building and a restaurant have been developed.

A pier has also been built on the south coast of the island, allowing yachts access to the resort. Apart from the trees, the beach remains the only natural feature to remain relatively untouched; however, it does appear that it is now used for swimming.

(160 words)