

Common Mistakes at IELTS

1. Using the

- a. In the USA this situation is totally different. ✓
- b. In USA this situation is totally different. ✗

We use *the*

- with countries or places where the name refers to a group of islands or states: *the United States, the Middle East, the United Arab Emirates, the UK*
- with superlatives: *the best, the longest, the highest*
- with cardinal numbers: *the first, the second, the third*
- when there is only one in the world: *the environment, the internet, the sun*
- to refer to the only one in this particular area: *the government, the police, the river*
- in the phrase: *the same as*

2. Singular or Plural

- a. There are several problem with this idea. ✗
- b. There are several problems with this idea. ✓

If you use a plural noun, you must use a plural verb. The verb must 'agree' with the noun:

In my country there are very few cars that use leaded petrol. (plural verb + plural noun)
I like studying during the day but my friend prefers studying at night. (singular noun + singular verb)

We use a plural noun with:

- plural verbs: *are, were, have, do, play*, etc.: *There are a lot of books on the table.*
- numbers greater than one: *30 cars, 100 students*
- *many*: *It is annoying that so many buses drive past because they are full.*
- *the number of*: *The number of buses on our roads has increased each year.*

☆ Note that we use a plural noun but a singular verb after *the number of*.

3. Nouns without plural

- a. I don't have many time to complete my assignment. ✗
- b. I don't have much time to complete my assignment. ✓

Some nouns in English are 'uncountable'. This means they do not have a plural form. Some common uncountable nouns are: *advice, advertising, food, furniture, garbage, information, knowledge, money, shopping, time, traffic, travel*.

With uncountable nouns, you must use:

- the singular form: *food, information, money*
- a little / amount of / much / some: *How much money do you have?*
The amount of traffic on the roads is increasing each year.
- a singular verb: *There was already a little furniture in the flat.*

4. Present Simple

- a. Nowadays, our bodies becoming 'old' much later than 100 years ago. ✗
- b. Nowadays, our bodies become 'old' much later than 100 years ago. ✓

We use the present simple tense:

- to make general statements about our world: *The earth moves around the sun.*
- to show a pattern or general truth: *People work in order to meet their basic needs.*
- with adverbs of frequency: *always, usually, often, sometimes, never*: *People who are too lazy to walk often use their cars instead.*
- with expressions such as: *nowadays, these days, today* (with a general meaning): *Many students today do their research via computer rather than through books.*
- for verbs showing opinions or feelings, e.g. *believe, think, hope*: *I think that we should all do as much as we can to improve our environment.*

5. Large Numbers

- a. The government spent ten millions dollars on education last year. ✗
- b. The government spent ten million dollars on education last year. ✓

When we talk about a specific large number, we do not add *s* to the number:

200,000 = *two hundred thousand* (not *two hundred thousands*)

10,000,000 = *ten million* (not *ten millions*)

The noun that follows is always plural:

There must have been at least three thousand students at the protest.

We use the plural form of large numbers + *of* to give an approximate idea of how many:

There must have been thousands of students at the protest.

- a. The table shows number of people working in Britain in 1976. ✗
- b. The table shows the number of people working in Britain in 1976. ✓

We don't use *the*

- with a single country or place: *America, England, China*
- to talk about something in general. We use the plural if we are talking about something in general; we use *the* to identify one specific example. Compare: *People with reading difficulties often have problems with numbers.*
The number eight is considered lucky in some countries.

- a. Many charity organisations provide a great deal of help. ✓
- b. Many charity organisation provide a great deal of help. ✗

We use a singular noun with:

- singular verbs: *is, was, has, does, plays*, etc.: *There is only one bedroom in the flat.*
 - *a/an* or *one*: *a car, one student*
- ☆ Note that some nouns can look plural but are singular (*news, mathematics*) and some nouns have a different form in the plural (*children, men, women, people*).

- a. When I did a search on my computer, I could only find a few information. ✗
- b. When I did a search on my computer, I could only find a little information. ✓

If a noun is uncountable, you cannot use:

- a plural form: *advices, furnitures, garbages, informations, knowledges*
- *a/an*: *an advice, a garbage, a knowledge*
- *a few / many / number of*: *a few shopping, many traffic, the number of knowledge*
- a number: *three travels, four furniture*
- a plural verb: *There were a little furniture in the flat.*

☆ If you want to add a number to an uncountable noun, you can use *a piece of / some / a few pieces of*: *a piece of advice, three pieces of furniture, a few pieces of garbage*

- a. Children lost their freedom if they have too many responsibilities. ✗
- b. When I did a search on my computer, I could only find a little information. ✓

We form the present simple tense with the base form of the verb. We add *s* or *es* to form the 3rd person singular:

<i>I play</i>	<i>I watch</i>
<i>you play</i>	<i>you watch</i>
<i>he/she/it plays</i>	<i>he/she/it watches</i>
<i>we play</i>	<i>we watch</i>
<i>you play</i>	<i>you watch</i>
<i>they play</i>	<i>they watch</i>

- a. There were thousands of people at the football match. ✓
- b. There were thousand of people at the football match. ✗

We can use *a* instead of *one*. *One* is more formal:

If I won a million dollars, I would probably take a year off and travel around the world.
The president promised to increase the health budget by one million dollars.

☆ We usually use numerals for numbers that cannot be written in one or two words: *More than two million people attended last year*; but: *2,001,967 people attended last year.*

You should write fractions in words: *half a (million); a/one third of a (million); three quarters of a (million); one and a quarter (million); one and three quarter (million)*:
According to the chart, in 2004 over half a million Ukrainians went to the cinema.

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6. There is/are

- a. It is a lovely park near my house. **x**
b. There is a lovely park near my house. **✓**

We use *there* to say that something exists. We use *there is* with a singular subject and *there are* with a plural subject:

There is an oak tree in my garden. (not ~~*It is an oak tree*~~ or ~~*There have an oak tree*~~)
There are some great movies on at the cinema. (not ~~*They are some great movies*~~)

We use *there is* and *there are* to give new information. We use *it is* or *they are* to talk about something that has already been referred to. Compare:

There is a present for you on the table. (the first time the present has been mentioned)

Mary: *What is that you're carrying?*

John: *It's a present for my sister.* (it = what John is carrying)

7. Relative Pronoun

- a. You should do that what you think is right. **x**
b. You should do what you think is right. **✓**

Relative pronouns (*that*, *who*, etc.) are used to connect two separate clauses:
clause 1 relative pronoun clause 2

There are several factors / that / are important in achieving happiness.

When information is essential to the sentence and cannot be left out, we use:

- *that* to refer to things or people: *The chart that is on page 10 shows...*
- *who* to refer to people: *The number of women who were enrolled...*
- *what* to refer to the thing that or the things that: *The government should show us what must be done.* (= the thing(s) that must be done)

☆ Note that you should only use one relative pronoun (not ~~*The government must show us that what needs to be done.*~~).

8. And, But, Or

- a. It is important to change the way we think or behave. **x**
b. It is important to change the way we think and behave. **✓**

We use *and* to join two similar ideas:

Would you like some tea and biscuits? (= you can have both of them)

We use *but* to show contrast between two different ideas:

I have tea but I don't have any coffee, I'm afraid. (I have tea = positive, I don't have any coffee = negative)

We use *or* to give an alternative:

Would you like some tea or coffee? (= you will choose only one of them)

9. Auxiliary verbs

- a. Why they think this? **x**
b. Why do you think this? **✓**

Do is used with the infinitive to make negatives or questions:

I don't agree. (not ~~*I am not agree.*~~) *Do you agree?* (not ~~*Are you agree?*~~)

Do can be used with other question words: *Why do you agree?* (not ~~*Why you agree?*~~)

Be is used with *-ing* verb forms to make the continuous tenses:

I am studying English in Cambridge. (not ~~*I studying English*~~)

(*be* is also used with the past participle to make the passive –)

10. Modal Verbs

- a. If workers are sick, they must to stay home and rest. **x**
b. If workers are sick, they must stay home and rest. **✓**

The following modal auxiliary verbs are followed by the infinitive without *to*: *can*, *could*, *may*, *might*, *must*, *shall*, *should*, *will*, *would*:

When travelling, we should respect the customs of the countries we visit. (not ~~*should to respect*~~; ~~*should-respecting*~~)

Modal verbs form questions and negatives without using *do*:

Can I help you? (not: ~~*Do I can help you?*~~)

Will you meet me when I arrive? (not ~~*Do you will meet me?*~~)

You mustn't worry about me. (not ~~*You do not must worry about me.*~~)

- a. There have very good restaurants and shops on board this ship. **x**
b. There are very good restaurants and shops on board this ship. **✓**

We do not use the auxiliary verb *do* to form questions and negatives with *there is* and *there are*: *Are there any clean glasses in the cupboard?* *There isn't a map in the car.*

☆ *There* cannot be left out: *There is a pan of soup and there are some bowls in the kitchen.* (not ~~*There is a pan of soup and are some bowls in the kitchen.*~~)

- a. There are several factors that are important in achieving happiness. **✓**
b. There are several factors are important in achieving happiness. **x**

The relative pronoun can be left out if it refers to the object of a verb, but not if it refers to the subject of a verb. Compare:

The students that I teach all come from overseas countries. *students* is the object of the verb *teach*, so the relative pronoun *that* can be left out: *The students I teach all come from...*

The students who are studying EAP should see me today. *students* is the subject of the verb *are studying*, so the relative pronoun *who* cannot be left out (not ~~*The students are studying EAP should see me today.*~~)

- a. Vegetarians don't eat meat and they get their protein from other foods. **x**
b. Vegetarians don't eat meat but they get their protein from other foods. **✓**

☆ Note: to join two negative ideas, we use *or* if the subject and the verb are the same: *I don't have tea or coffee.* (not: ~~*I don't have tea and coffee.*~~)

After *if* / *whether*, we can use *or not* to suggest the alternative idea:

We decided to go whether it was raining or not. (= whether it rained or whether it didn't rain)

- a. I am not agree with this idea. **x**
b. I don't agree with this idea. **✓**

Have is used with the past participle of the verb to make the perfect tenses:

I have been here for three months. (not ~~*I am been here*~~ or ~~*I been here*~~)

The auxiliary verb must agree with the subject of the verb : *Does your mother drink tea?* (not ~~*Do your mother drink tea?*~~)

☆ We make questions and negatives without *do* if another auxiliary verb is used:

Are you studying here? (not ~~*Do you are studying here?*~~) (auxiliary verb *be*)

- a. In this way, children can learn from what they have done. **✓**
b. In this way, children can learning from what they have done. **x**

When we talk about obligation or necessity using *have* or *need*, we use *to* + infinitive: *I have to finish my assignment this weekend.*
I need to talk to you.

In questions and negatives, *have* *to* and *need* to behave like normal verbs and we use *do*:

Do you have to pay extra for breakfast? (not ~~*have you to pay*~~)

They said I don't need to bring my own sleeping bag. (not ~~*I needn't to bring*~~)

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11. -ing or to

- a. I just managed to avoid hitting the car in front of me. ✓
b. I just managed to avoid to hit the car in front of me. ✗

We use *to* + infinitive after the following verbs: *ask, afford, decide, deserve, help, hope, learn, offer, prepare, promise, refuse, seem, want, would like*:

Summer **seems to arrive** later and later these days.

Nowadays most people **would like to have** more money.

Learn how is also followed by *to* + infinitive:

I want to **learn how to drive** before I go to university.

- a. I want telling you a little about myself. ✗
b. I want to tell you a little about myself. ✓

After some verbs, we use *-ing*: *avoid, carry on, consider, deny, enjoy, finish, give up, imagine, involve, keep, like, mind, practise, recommend, resist, suggest*:

I really **enjoy watching** movies at the cinema. (not ~~enjoy to watch~~)

Look forward to is also followed by *-ing*:

I **look forward to hearing** your reply. (not ~~I look forward to hear your reply~~.)

We also use *-ing* after *spend money* and *spend time*:

We **spent a lot of money buying** CDs last month. We **spent \$200 buying** CDs last month.

She **spent a lot of time looking** for information on the internet. She **spent over three hours looking** for information on the internet.

☆ Note that *like* can be followed by *-ing* or *to* + infinitive.

12. Verbs after adj. & prep.

- a. Young children often feel shy to talk to adults. ✗
b. Young children often feel shy talking to adults. ✓

With *feel* + adjective we use the *-ing* form of the verb:

New students do not always **feel comfortable speaking** English to other people.

After *be* + adjective, *too* + adjective and adjective + *enough*, we use *to* + infinitive:

I was **happy to see** her when she arrived. (not ~~I was happy seeing her~~)

The lecture was **easy enough to understand**. (not ~~enough easy~~ or ~~easy understanding~~)

After all prepositions (*about, by, from, for, in, of, without, etc.*) we use the *-ing* form of the verb; we cannot use a clause (subject + verb):

They celebrated their anniversary **by organising** a big party.

Thank you **for helping** me so much with my studies.

He opened the door **without thinking** about what would happen next. (not ~~without he thought~~)

- a. It's easy to understand why. ✓
b. It's easy understanding why. ✗

☆ Note that *despite, in spite of* and *instead of* are considered to be prepositions:

He did not get the job **despite getting** excellent grades. (not ~~despite he got~~)

She went to the library **instead of going** straight home after school. (not ~~instead of she went~~)

If the following verb is negative, we use *not* + *-ing*: He got a job **despite not getting** good grades.

13. allow, advise, make, suggest

- a. My school does not allow us taking holidays during term. ✗
b. My school does not allow us to take holidays during term. ✓

Some verbs are followed by *-ing* if there is no object and by *to* + infinitive if there is a direct object – *advise, allow, forbid, permit*:

The teacher **allowed talking** as long as it was in English. (no direct object)

The teacher **allowed us to talk** as long as it was in English. (*us* is the direct object)

Make is followed by the infinitive without *to*:

My boss **made me wear** a horrible uniform. (not ~~made me to wear~~)

☆ Note that the direct object must come between the verb and the infinitive:

She **allowed her dog to sit** in the front of her car. (not ~~She allowed to sit her dog~~)

- a. Our teacher suggested me to buy a good dictionary. ✗
b. Our teacher suggested I buy a good dictionary. ✓

In the passive, these verbs are followed by *to* + infinitive: *be advised, be allowed, be forbidden, be made, be permitted*:

I **was advised to contact** my travel agent as soon as the plane landed.

Mary **was made to swallow** a large dose of medicine by the nurse.

Suggest can be followed by *-ing* without a direct object:

John **suggested going** to a movie.

If there is a direct object, you can use the infinitive without *to*, or a *that* clause:

John **suggested we go** to a movie. or: John **suggested that we go** to a movie.

14. Stop, Try, Forget & Remember

- a. People should stop spending their money on the latest fashions. ✓
b. People should stop to spend their money on the latest fashions ✗

Some verbs have a different meaning when they are followed by *-ing* or *to* + infinitive.

Stop + *-ing* = to stop an activity. *Stop* + *to* + infinitive = to stop a previously mentioned activity in order to do something else. Compare:

The boys **stopped playing**.

The boys were playing and they **stopped to watch** a large truck go past. (= they stopped playing in order to watch the truck)

Try + *-ing* = to attempt to solve a problem by doing something. *Try* + *to* + infinitive = to attempt and fail to do something. Compare:

I **tried turning** the tap but the water still poured out. (I managed to turn the tap)

I **tried to turn** the tap but it was too old and rusty. (I couldn't turn the tap)

- a. The government tried stopping this plan but was not successful. ✗
b. The government tried to stop this plan but was not successful. ✓

Forget / *remember* + *-ing* = thinking back to a special/significant time in the past.

Forget / *remember* + *to* + infinitive = thinking about something that must be done in the future. Compare:

I **remember seeing** a bull running down the High Street. (this happened in the past)

I **must remember to watch** the news tonight. (first I must remember, then I will do it)

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15. Prepositions

- a. My brother is good at sport but he is very bad at English. ✓
- b. My brother is good in sport but he is very bad in English. ✗

Some adjectives are always followed by a specific preposition.

At. We say you are *bad at*, *good at* or *surprised at* something:

I was surprised at the number of people who came.

About and with. We say you are *angry about* or *pleased about* something but *angry with* or *pleased with* a person:

I am pleased about your new job. I was really angry with John.

After *disappointed* we use *about* or *with*; after *worried* we only use *about*:

She was pretty disappointed with / about her exam results.

I am worried about John. They are worried about the test.

16. Prep. after verbs

- a. The company agreed for the pay rise. ✗
- b. The company agreed to the pay rise. ✓

Some verbs must be followed by a specific preposition. Sometimes more than one preposition is possible and sometimes there is a difference in meaning depending on which preposition is used:

Agree. We say you *agree with* a person or an idea:

I totally agree with the government's decision.

But if you give your consent to something, we use *agree to*:

Both sides in the war have agreed to the ceasefire.

Apologise. We say you *apologise to* someone but you *apologise for* something:

Mum made me go and apologise to our neighbours for breaking their window.

17. Prep. of time and place

- a. I will start my course on June. ✗
- b. I will start my course in June. ✓

We use *in* with a year, month or part of the day, but *on* with a day or date:

I came to Australia in 1988. We landed on 1st October, in the afternoon.

We use *at* with a time and with the weekend and night:

Let's meet at the weekend. Are you free on Sunday at 8:00?

We use *for* to talk about a length of time:

I have lived in Australia for 18 years.

We use *in* with cities, countries and places to say where something is or happened:

I met my husband in London.

18. The Prep. of

- a. Our standard of living is much better than in the past. ✓
- b. Our standard for living is much better than in the past. ✗

The preposition *of* is used in some common expressions: *cost of living*, *letter of apology/complaint*, etc., *period of time*, *quality of life*, *standard of living*:

My father is always complaining about the high cost of living nowadays.

Of is also used after some nouns: *government*, *group*, *importance*, *lack*, *leader*, *type*:

People often underestimate the importance of friends and family.

Of is used to talk about quantities with some words: *amount*, *number*, *a lot*, *lots*, *plenty*:

The government is hoping to persuade a large number of people to walk to work.

19. passive

- a. My home is located in the western part of the city. ✓
- b. My home locates in the western part of the city. ✗

The passive is formed with the verb *to be* + the past participle of the verb:

Nowadays, a great deal of money is spent on advertising.

The verb *to be* should be changed into the correct tense:

Tense	Passive
present simple	is spent
present continuous	is being spent
simple past	was spent
past continuous	was being spent
present perfect	has been spent
past perfect	had been spent

- a. The percentage in women attending university is increasing. ✗
- b. The percentage of women attending university is increasing. ✓

Some nouns are always followed by a specific preposition.

In. We say *decrease in*, *drop in*, *fall in*, *increase in*, *rise in*:

There was an increase in attendance at this month's meeting.

Between. To contrast two things, we talk about the *difference between* them:

The main difference between the American and the Canadian accent is in the vowels.

Of. We say: *advantage of*, *disadvantage of*, *example of*, *number of*, *percentage of*, *use of*:

The number of people in my class who smoke is incredible.

- a. The man apologized for starting on my foot. ✓
- b. The man apologized to stand on my food. ✗

Find out, know, learn, teach, think. These verbs can all be followed by *about*:

Our teacher is trying to teach us about life in the olden days.

Think can be followed by *about* or *of* to talk about opinions or future plans:

What do you think about / of the new computer lab? (opinion)

I'm thinking about / of going back to university next year to finish my degree. (future plan)

Look. We use *look at* when we fix our eyes on something and *look for* when we mean searching for something:

Oh look at the sunset! Isn't it beautiful?

I've looked for my homework everywhere. Have you seen it?

- a. I am going in London next year. ✗
- b. I am going to London next year. ✓

We also use *in* with a book, newspaper, magazine, journal, film or TV programme to say where we read or saw something:

I read some interesting new research in this month's medical journal.

We use *at* with *school*, *college*, *university*, *work* and *home* and to refer to a building:

'Where is dad?' 'He's at work.'

Shall we meet at the cinema? (= meet outside the building)

We use *to* with a place to show destination:

'Where are you going?' 'I'm just going to the library to do some work.'

- a. Write a letter complaint to the manager. ✗
- b. Write a letter of complaint to the manager. ✓

Of is used in some prepositions: *in front of*, *instead of*:

I decided to take the bus instead of the train.

Also after *because* and *as a result* when they are followed by a noun or gerund:

My cousin couldn't swim with us because of his bad leg. (not ~~because his bad leg~~)

Our football team was demoted as a result of the weather being bad. (not ~~as a result of the weather was bad~~)

- a. These funds can be give to the poorer people to help them. ✗
- b. These funds can be given to the poorer people to help them. ✓

To make the negative, we put *not* between the verb *to be* and the past participle:

We were not told that the rules had changed.

The passive can also be used in the infinitive form:

Children need to be taught the correct way to behave in public.

After modal verbs, we use the passive infinitive without *to*:

Some adults believe that children should be seen and not heard.

You will be paid on the last Friday of each month.

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20. passive

- a. Many people have been died because of this disease. **x**
 b. Many people have died because of this disease. **✓**

With active verbs we usually use the following order: subject + verb + object. We use the passive when we want to put the object of the verb first: object + verb. Compare:
The teacher told the students to close their books. = active (subject + verb + object)
The students were told to close their books. = passive (object + verb)

We use the passive:

- when we want to make the object the focus of the sentence: *The books were sold for a small profit at the school.* (the focus is on the books, not the person selling them)
- Note that the verb (*were*) agrees with the object (*the books*).

21. Register

- a. This type of work attracts a greater % of men than women. **x**
 b. This type of work attracts a greater percentage of men than women. **✓**

'Register' means using the right word in the right context. For formal essay writing, you must use a formal register. This means you should not use informal language. You should not use:

- informal vocabulary: not *kids; ok; bucks; heaps*. You should use a more formal equivalent instead: *children; all right or acceptable; money; many or a great deal*.
- symbols on their own in place of words: not %, \$; &; @. You should write the words in full: *percent; money; and; at*. Note that % and \$ should only be used with numerals. For smaller amounts we write \$50 (not *50 dollars*) and 75% (not *75 percent*). The noun form of *percent* is *percentage*.

22. Adj. & Adv.

- a. The difference can be explained quite easy. **x**
 b. The difference can be explained quite easily. **✓**

Adjectives are used to describe a noun: *Today life is very complicated.* (*complicated* describes the noun *life*)

To describe a whole idea or situation, we can use *It is* + adjective + *that*-clause or *It is* + adjective + *to* + infinitive:

- It is essential that you bring back all of your books before the end of term.*
- It is important to begin studying several weeks before the exam.*

23. Noun or Adjective

- a. Tourism can be very benefit to poorer areas. **x**
 b. Tourism can be very beneficial to poorer areas. **✓**

Sometimes it is easy to confuse a noun with its adjective. Look at the following list of commonly confused nouns and adjectives:

Noun	Adjective	Noun	Adjective
<i>age</i>	<i>aged</i>	<i>noise</i>	<i>noisy</i>
<i>development</i>	<i>developed</i>	<i>responsibility</i>	<i>responsible</i>
<i>difference</i>	<i>different</i>	<i>significance</i>	<i>significant</i>
<i>education</i>	<i>educational</i>	<i>silence</i>	<i>silent</i>
<i>happiness</i>	<i>happy</i>	<i>sport</i>	<i>sports</i>
<i>health</i>	<i>healthy</i>	<i>truth</i>	<i>true</i>
<i>maturity</i>	<i>mature</i>	<i>value</i>	<i>valuable</i>
<i>nature</i>	<i>natural</i>	<i>youth</i>	<i>young</i>

24. Verb confusion 1

- a. I don't know where the library is. **✓**
 b. I don't understand where the library is. **x**

- Know* is used to show that you have memorised something or that you are certain of something: *I know all of the irregular verbs.* *Know* describes a state, not an activity (not *I am trying to know my irregular verbs.*) and we cannot use it in the continuous form (not *I am knowing my irregular verbs.*).
- Learn* describes an activity. We *learn* facts when we try to memorise them: *I am learning irregular verbs for the test.* We can also *learn* a skill: *I am learning to play the piano.* We cannot use *learn* by itself (not *I am learning for the test.*)

- a. This data took from 1982 and 1992. **x**
 b. This data was taken from 1982 and 1992. **✓**

- when the context tells us who carried out the action: *A law was introduced to help protect people in this situation.* (we know that the government did this)
- when it is not important who carried out the action: *In the factory, the shoes are cleaned and packed into boxes ready for sale.* (we do not need to know who does this)
- Note that we can include the 'subject' by adding *by* + the person/group: *A lot of waste materials could be recycled by large manufacturers.*

- a. Many old people believe that kids have too much freedom nowadays. **✓**
 b. Many old people believe that kids have too much freedom nowadays. **x**

- abbreviations: not *m; yrs; kgs; no*. You should write these words in full: *million; years; kilos/kilograms; number*.
- all capital letters: not *NOWADAYS PEOPLE THINK THAT...* You should use capital letters only when appropriate: *Nowadays people think that...*

Look at the following examples:

- Companies waste heaps of bucks on advertising.* → *waste a great deal of money on...*
- In 1986 the % rose to 67.5.* → *the percentage rose to...*
- Between the yrs 2001 and 2005, over 2m-people died.* → *the years... over 2 million...*

- a. It is clearly that people without money do not have as much freedom. **x**
 b. It is clear that people without money do not have as much freedom. **✓**

Adverbs can be used to describe a verb: *We must act quickly.* (*quickly* describes the verb *act*) or an adjective: *This chart is significantly different.* (not *significant different*) (*significantly* is an adverb describing the adjective *different*).

We use adverbs such as *unfortunately* to show how we feel about something:

Unfortunately, he's not well. (*unfortunately* shows I feel this is a bad thing)

☆ Some adverbs are irregular, e.g. *fast, hard, well*: *He ran as fast as he could.* (not *fastly*)

- a. In my job, you need the confidence to address large groups of people. **✓**
 b. In my job, you need the confident to address large groups of people. **x**

☆ Note that *invaluable* means very valuable!

☆ *Men* and *women* can only be used as nouns: *More men than women work here.*

Male and *female* are used as adjectives: *The number of female employees is increasing each year.* (not *women employees*)

You should refer to either *men* and *women* or *male* and *female*. Do not use the two different terms together: ~~*Male employees far outnumber the women.*~~

- a. Last number I studied with you on you're the course. **✓**
 b. Last number I learned with you on you're the course. **x**

- Study* is usually used to talk about a whole subject area rather than individual skills or facts: *My daughter is studying economics at university* (not *I am studying how to play the piano.*). We can use *study* by itself: *I am studying for the test on Friday.* Note that we can say *learn about* but not *study about*: *We're learning about World War I this term.* (not *we're studying about*).
- Take* can be used in a similar way to *study* to refer to a subject area: *I am taking a course in marketing.* It is also used to refer to the individual subjects within a course: *I have to take at least 3 marketing subjects to get the diploma.*
- Enrol* is used to say that you are listed in the official records for a course. *I have just enrolled in an art course.*

Common Mistakes at IELTS

25. Verb Confusion 2

- a. In 2002, the figure increased from 30% to 25%. **x**
b. In 2002, the figure decrease from 30% to 25%. **✓**

Describing charts

Graphs and charts can *show* facts:

The two graphs show the number of people employed by the company in 1980 and 1990.

We use *indicate* when we want to draw a conclusion about the figures in the charts:

These figures indicate that the company is growing in size each year.

We use *illustrate* to refer to evidence or proof of something:

These figures illustrate the need for better management of our resources.

We do not use *demonstrate*, *display* or *tell* to describe a chart. Compare the following:

The salesman demonstrated the machine for us. (= show how something works)

Look at the figures displayed on the screen. (= show on a screen)

The girls' work was displayed for all to see. (= make sure it can be easily seen)

Did I tell you about my accident? (= give a verbal or written account of a story)

26. Verb confusion 3

- a. We are buying more and more money on cars each year. **x**
b. We are spending more and more money on cars each year. **✓**

Money: *buy* or *spend*?

We use *buy* to say what we bought or where we bought it: *I bought a new jumper last week. 'Where did you buy it?'* (= which shop did you buy it from)

We use *spend* to talk about money: *I spent over \$250 on mobile phone calls last month.*

When we use *spend* by itself, the idea of money is understood in the sentence:

We are spending more on petrol than ever before. (= we are spending more money on petrol)

We are buying more petrol than ever before. (= the focus is on the petrol)

27. Noun Confusion 1

- a. Those who do manual work often earn less money. **✓**
b. Those who do manual work often earn less wages. **x**

• A *salary* is the total amount that a professional person is paid each year: *The marketing job offers opportunities to travel and an attractive salary.*

• A *wage* is the amount of money earned each week/month for casual or manual work: *Tim got a painting job with a wage of \$400 per week.*

• We use *money* in a more general sense: *Nowadays people need to earn a lot more money to be able to buy a house.* (not *earn a lot more wages*)

• *Job* refers to the type of work you do: *My job is to manage the staff.* or a particular task: *At home, my job is to do the ironing.*

28. Noun Confusion 2

- a. Advertising on TV is the best way of increasing your business. **✓**
b. Advertisement on TV is the best way of increasing your business. **x**

• *Advertise* is the verb and *advertisement* (it can be shortened to *advert*) is the noun. We can also use *commercial* to refer to TV advertisements: *I saw a really funny advertisement / commercial on TV last night.* We use *advertising* to refer to the industry: *My sister works in advertising.*

• We use *journey* or *trip* to talk about getting from A to B: *The journey / trip to Australia was really long.*

29. Apostrophe

- a. I am sorry but I wont be able to come to your party on Saturday. **x**
b. I am sorry but I won't be able to come to your party on Saturday. **✓**

We use apostrophes

• to shorten words and show that some letters have been left out:
cannot → *can't*; *could not* → *couldn't*; *do not* → *don't*; *he will* → *he'll*;
will not → *won't*; *she would* → *she'd*.

These contractions are mostly used in spoken or informal language:

I can't find Peter anywhere – he isn't in the staffroom or in his office.

• after people or animals to show possession: *Mary's hat, the cat's food dish*

- a. The flow chart displays the quantity of electricity consumed each year. **x**
b. The flow chart shows the quantity of electricity consumed each year. **✓**

Describing figures

If figures go up, we use *increase* or *rise*: *Temperatures rose in May.*

If the figures go down, we use *decrease* or *fall*: *The number of bats fell in 2004.*

If the figures stay the same, we use *remain steady* or *show little/no change*: *The figures show little change since 2001.*

- a. We need to stop this problem as soon as possible. **x**
b. We need to solve this problem as soon as possible. **✓**

Problems: *avoid*, *fix*, *prevent*, *repair*, *resolve*, *solve*

We *fix* or *repair* something that is broken: *I took my watch to the jewellers to get it fixed.*

We *solve* problems: *We must try to solve the unemployment problem.*

We *resolve* difficult situations and issues: *What can we do to resolve this situation?*

We *prevent* problems so they do not happen (*prevent from* + *-ing*; *prevent* + noun / *-ing*):

We need to do all we can to prevent this from happening. (= to stop this happening)

- a. People without computer skills find it difficult to get a job nowadays. **✓**
b. People without computer knowledge find it difficult to get a job nowadays. **x**

• *Work* can be a noun or a verb and is used in a general sense: (uncountable noun) *It took a lot of work but I finished the project.* (verb) *My dad works in a bank.*

Workplace is the place where you work: *It is better to train in the workplace rather than at a college.*

• *Knowledge* refers to facts you have studied over time, and *skills* refer to practical ability. Compare: *His knowledge of history is amazing. I have good typing skills.*

• We use *employment* and *unemployment* to talk about general work trends: *Unemployment figures fell this week.* *Employee* = a worker, *employer* = a boss.

- a. How was your travel to Canada? **x**
b. How was your trip to Canada? **✓**

• *Travel* is a verb and an uncountable noun which refers to taking journeys in general: *We travelled for hours before we saw any sign of life. Air travel is very cheap these days.*

• *Trip* can also refer to a holiday or an excursion: *I needed a break so I decided to take a trip to the coast.* (not *I decided to take a travel*)

• We usually use *youth* to refer to a stage of life: *I did a lot of travelling in my youth.* It is rarely used to talk about people; instead, we use *young person* or *young people*.

- a. Children's toys are much more sophisticated now than in the past. **✓**
b. Childrens toys are much more sophisticated now than in the past. **x**

We do not use an apostrophe

• with possessive pronouns, such as *its*, *ours*, *theirs*, *yours*:

The caterpillar stays in its cocoon until metamorphosis is complete. (not *it's cocoon*)

• when we add *s* to a singular noun to make it plural, even if we are using a commonly abbreviated word: *CDs, TVs* (not: *CD's, TV's*)

• to show possession with things. Instead, we use *of the*: *the leg of the chair* (not *the-chair's leg*)

Common Mistakes at IELTS

30. Spelling Errors

- a. It is believed that there should be more women in government. ✓
b. It is believed that there should be more women in goverment. ✗

Some words are spelled incorrectly because they are similar to another word:

- *to* or *too*? I want to go **to** the park. I wanted a new computer but ended up with a printer **too**. (= as well)
- *there* or *their*? Your book is **there**, on the table. Students must buy **their** books before the start of term.
- *though* or *through*? Several students chose Russian **though** they had never studied a language before. The tour guide led the group **through** some areas of ancient rainforest.

Sometimes there is confusion over British and American spellings:

e.g. *programme* = British *program* = American

31. the - General

- a. People are worried about the bad effects of mobiles on brain. ✗
b. People are worried about the bad effects of mobiles on the brain. ✓

We use *the* before nouns which describe a general type of thing rather than a specific example of that thing:

*These are problems for students living away from **the** family.*
*We don't know the effects of such chemicals on **the** body.*
*The role of **the** student at university level varies greatly from country to country.*
*Most of our business is carried out over **the** telephone.*

The is also used before abstract nouns which describe a situation, a quality, a process or a change. These words are often followed by *of something*:

*There is a problem with **the** availability of clean water in some villages.*
***The** distribution of income is uneven in most countries.*

32. a/an

- a. The company has captured a significant share of the market. ✓
b. The company has captured significant share of the market. ✗

Don't forget to include *a/an* before an adjective + singular noun combination:

*He clearly has **a** good understanding of the issues.*
*Many students have **a** part-time job while studying.*

Notice the position of adverbs (*very*, *really*, *quite*, etc.) in these phrases:

*We have **a** very high percentage of women working in senior government posts.*
*There was **a** really good atmosphere.*
*In my view, this is **quite** a strong argument.*

33. Capital letters

- a. She explained that Thai food often requires a lot of ingredients. ✓
b. She explained that thai food often requires a lot of ingredients. ✗

Capital letters are always used for nouns in the following groups:

- countries: *Germany, the United States, Britain, the Czech Republic*, etc.
- towns, cities, states and regions: *Tokyo, Paris, Texas, New South Wales*, etc.
- nationalities, ethnic groups and religions – referring to people, languages or things from a country, region or culture:
*Can you speak **Chinese**?* *You can hear he's **South African** from his accent.*
***a** Buddhist temple* *I'd like to learn more about **Asian** culture.*
- months and days of the week: *October, 9th April, Tuesday, Sunday*, etc.

34. when/ if/ whether

- a. People would stop using their cars when public transport was better. ✗
b. People would stop using their cars if public transport was better. ✓

We use *when* to talk about an event or situation that we believe will happen:

*I plan to go travelling **when** I finish my studies.* (I expect to finish.)
*Give me a call **when** you arrive at the airport.* (We expect the person to arrive.)

We use *if* to talk about a hypothetical possibility, especially in conditional sentences:

*I **would** only go home **if** it was a real emergency.*
*Give me a call **if** there are any problems.* (Problems are only a possibility.)

We also use *if* in certain polite requests:

*I **would** appreciate it **if** / **would** be grateful **if** you could call me back.*
***Would** you mind **if** I asked you a few questions about the accident?*

- a. It is the responsibility of every country to protect the environment. ✓
b. It is the responsibility of every contry to protect the environment. ✗

☆ Use either British or American spellings, but do not mix the two different styles:
(UK) *It's my **favourite** colour.* or: (US) *It's my **favorite** color.* (not ~~*It's my favourite color.*~~)

The following words are also often spelled incorrectly. Pay particular attention to those with double letters: *accommodation, advertisement, always, benefit, beginning, business, commercial, country, different, environment, government, nowadays, occurred, passenger, restaurant, teacher, which*

- a. We need to look at factors such as the availability of health care. ✓
b. We need to look at factors such as availability of health care. ✗

*On the whole, **the** standard of living is better in urban areas.*

*Many residents complained about **the** frequency of bus services.*

*This advance was brought about by **the** development of antibiotics.*

*He made a number of recommendations for **the** improvement of staff training.*

☆ We use *the* development/improvement, etc. of something to describe a general process of change, but *developments/improvements, etc. in something* to describe specific changes:

*We try to keep up-to-date with new **developments in** information technology.*

- a. I think they are also right to certain extent. ✗
b. I think they are also right to a certain extent. ✓

Some common noun phrases to be careful with:

- *to a certain extent/degree:* *I agree with you **to a certain** degree.*
- *a wide range/variety:* *We have **a** wide range of books to choose from.*
- *a(n) large/small/equal number/amount:* ***an** equal number of men and women*
- *a high/large/small/greater proportion/percentage:* ***a** small proportion of patients*
- *a long time:* *I haven't seen her for **a** long time.*

- a. Sixty percent of students enrolled at the university are male. ✓
b. Sixty percent of students enrolled at the University are male. ✗

☆ Capital letters are not used for the seasons: *spring, summer, autumn, winter*

- names of organisations and institutions: *the United Nations, the National Museum*
Where a word like *museum, university, station* or *hospital* is part of the name of an institution, it has a capital letter: *Harvard University, Karachi Station, Rome Airport*
However, when these words are not part of a name, they do not have a capital letter:

*They built a new 100-bed **hospital** in the provincial capital.*

*He first joined **the** company in 2003.*

☆ Also remember: *the Earth* (but not ~~*the World*~~), *the Third World/a Third World country, AIDS, CD/DVD* (plural *CDs/DVDs*).

- a. We discussed if universities should charge tuition fees. ✗
b. We discussed whether universities should charge tuition fees. ✓

We use *whether* where we are considering two possibilities:

*I don't know **whether** to have the beef or the lamb.*

*Many students have to get part-time jobs **whether** or not they want to.*

We use *whether* after certain verbs (and nouns) which involve considering two options:

*They had a meeting to **discuss** **whether** they should take further action.*

*The current **debate** is **whether** immigrants should adopt local customs.*

Common Mistakes at IELTS

35. Discourse markers

- a. In conclusion, the population is expanding at an understanding rate. ✓
b. In conclusion the population is expanding at an understanding rate. ✗

Discourse markers are words or phrases which show how ideas in a text link together. They are often separated from the rest of the text by commas.

We usually use a comma after a phrase or an adverb which introduces a sentence:

In addition, many disabled people suffer discrimination at work.
On the other hand, the unemployment rate has fallen.
Finally, local councils need to consider the cost of recycling schemes.
Unfortunately, there were no more tickets available.
Similarly, animals kept outdoors are also vulnerable to infection.

- a. I like junk food because its easier than preparing fresh dishes. ✗
b. I like junk food because it's easier than preparing fresh dishes. ✓

We use an apostrophe in contractions – where a letter or letters have been missed out. Contractions are mostly used in informal writing or to represent spoken language.

Pronoun or noun + *be, have, will* or *would*:

That's (= that is) *a very good point.*
Anna's (= Anna has) *got two sisters, hasn't she?*
We'll (= we will) *send the goods by first class post.*
I'd (= I had) *already gone through passport control, so I couldn't go back.*
I'd (= I would) *like to change the booking.*
It's (= it is) *quite difficult to find.*
☆ *The system has its advantages.* (its = belonging to it)
Who's (= who has) *been invited to the party?*
☆ *Whose bag is this?* (whose = belonging to who)

36. Using Apostrophes

- a. We have become very dependant on computers. ✗
b. We have become very dependent on computers. ✓

Nouns which are commonly misspelt include:

accommodation, benefit, country, environment, government, percentage, proportion

In British English, the noun **programme** has two main meanings:

a training programme = a series of sessions; *a TV programme* = a TV broadcast
But: *a computer program* = computer software

Words containing the *ie* or *ei* vowel combination often cause problems. British children learn a rhyme to help them remember: "I before E except after C."

achieve/achievement, believe/belief, hygiene/hygienic, retrieve/retrieval
But: *receive/receipt, deceive/deceit, ceiling*

37. Spelling mistakes

- a. More than 20% of the work force is unemployed. ✗
b. More than 20% of the workforce is unemployed. ✓

Compounds which are written as one word include:

- countryside, hairstyle, lifespan, lifestyle, website, wildlife, workforce, workplace*
- misuse, outbreak, outcome, outside, overall, overcome*
- anybody, everyone, everything, someone, sometimes*
- furthermore, moreover, nowadays, throughout, whereas*

Compounds which are written with a hyphen include:

- make-up, well-being*
- twenty-four, thirty-five, etc.*

38. Spelling

- a. Many university students have a part-time job. ✓
b. Many university students have a part time job. ✗

There are many compound adjectives in English which are usually hyphenated:

- good-looking, good-natured, well-known, well-educated, well-paid, well-equipped*
- badly-behaved, bad-tempered, ill-equipped, hard-working, easy-going*
- short-lived, short-tempered, short-term, long-term, long-lasting*
- fully-qualified, full-scale, full-size, full-time, part-time, time-consuming, time-saving*

Many phrases describing the age, size or length of something are formed in the same way. When they are used before a noun, they are hyphenated:

a six-year-old boy *He is six years old.*
a three-month training course *The course lasts three months.*
a two-bedroom flat *a flat with two bedrooms*

39. Adjective Forms

- a. If we look for example, at sport in schools. ✗
b. If we look, for example, at sport in schools. ✓

We also use commas around certain words and phrases in the middle of a sentence:

This problem can't, however, be solved quite so simply.
There are more jobs in the city, but, of course, the cost of living is higher.
Which option you choose depends, to a certain extent, on your budget.
Water is particularly scarce in arid regions, for example/for instance, in Africa.
People who live in cold countries, such as/like Norway, have to spend more on heating.

☆ Where an adverb describes an adjective, commas are not needed:

This was matched by a similarly dramatic increase in May.
However careful you are, accidents can always happen.

- a. Please don't take a taxi – I'll come and pick you up. ✓
b. Please dont take a taxi – I'll come and pick you up. ✗

Auxiliary or modal verb + *not*:

The results haven't (= have not) been announced yet.
I don't know the answer. or I do not know the answer. (not I do not know the answer.)
They can't be copied. or They cannot be copied. (not They can not be copied.)

Also: *Let's* (= let us) *take another example.*

- a. You need to have a clear idea of what you want to achieve. ✓
b. You need to have a clear idea of what you want to acheive. ✗

In British English, *practice* is the spelling of the noun and *practise* is the verb form:

Now they can put into practice what they have learnt.
It'll be a good opportunity to practise speaking English.

The adjectives *dependent* and *independent* are spelt with *-ent* at the end:

The degree of influence is dependent on a number of factors.
Dependant is a noun referring to a person who depends on someone else financially:
The company provides private healthcare for workers and their dependants.

- a. There are alot of artists living in this district. ✗
b. There are a lot of artists living in this district. ✓

Phrases which are written as separate words include:

- Young people often spend a lot of money on clothes.*
- In fact, levels of pollution have decreased in the past five years.*
- She still smokes, even though she knows it's bad for her health.*

☆ *Maybe his plane has been delayed.* (= an adverb meaning *perhaps*)

I suspect the main reason for the change may be financial. (= a verb phrase)

- a. These jobs cannot be done by unexperienced young people. ✗
b. These jobs cannot be done by inexperienced young people. ✓

Adjectives are also formed using prefixes, especially to describe opposites:

dis- *dissatisfied, disorganised* **over-** *overcrowded, overpriced*
in- *inexpensive, inexperienced, inappropriate* **post-** *post-school, postgraduate*
im- *immoral, immature, impolite* **pre-** *pre-school, prearranged*
non- *nonexistent, non-smoking* **un-** *unaware, unsuitable, unemployed*

☆ Some of these adjectives are spelt with a hyphen and some as one word; check a dictionary for the correct spelling.

Common Mistakes at IELTS

40. Prep. With nouns

- a. Many newspaper articles are also available on the internet now. ✓
b. Many newspaper articles are also available through the internet now. ✗

We use the preposition *on* to talk about information or pictures we access or see using a computer or other screen, such as a television:

*You can easily check the train times **on the internet**.*
*More information is available **on the university website**.*
*You can download music and store it **on your computer**.*
*We see such scenes every night **on the TV news**.*

We often use the preposition *for* with the noun *reason*:

*a reason for something: No one explained the **reason for the delay**.*
*a reason for doing something: There are many **reasons for** choosing a small car.*
*for a reason: He was forced to leave early **for family reasons**.*

41. Prep. After verbs

- a. Companies in the US spend more money on research. ✓
b. Companies in the US spend more money for research. ✗

There are a number of common verb + object + preposition combinations in English. You can check the patterns used with a particular verb in a good learner's dictionary:

- *spend + time/money + on something*
*The average person **spends** £100 a month **on transport**.*
Also: **Expenditure on/Spending on** education has risen.
- *invest + money + in something*
*It's up to local government to **invest money in** improved leisure facilities.*
Also: *The protesters want more state **investment in** agriculture.*

42. Prep. for trends

- a. There has been an increase in the number of people aged over eighty. ✓
b. There has been an increase of the number of people aged over eighty. ✗

We use a noun describing a specific trend or change + *in* + a word or phrase describing the thing which has changed:

- *a(n) cut/decline/decrease/drop/fall/increase/reduction/rise, etc. in something*
*The chart shows **a decline in** the bird population.*
*There have been dramatic **cuts in** the level of spending on the elderly.*
- *a(n) change/growth/improvement/trend/variation, etc. in something*
*There have been significant **improvements in** health care.*
*We have seen massive **changes in** people's lifestyles.*

43. Prep. for statistics

- a. The chart shows that only 18% men work less than 15 hours a week. ✗
b. The chart shows that only 18% of men work less than 15 hours a week. ✓

There are several key prepositions which are used when describing statistics:

- *X% of something*
*Only 28% **of** customers said that they were satisfied with the service.*
- *between X and Y*
*The rate rose dramatically **between** July 2005 **and** February 2006.*
- *the figure/percentage/total, etc. for a group or category*
*Looking at the figures **for** winter and summer ...*
*If we compare the percentages **for** skilled and unskilled workers ...*
*The average income **for** government employees is ...*

44. Nouns for statistics

- a. Only four percentages of prisoners are women. ✗
b. Only four percent of prisoners are women. ✓

We use *percent* or the symbol % after a number:

*Sales fell by **two percent / 2%** last year.*
Percentage is the general noun to describe part of a total, expressed as parts of 100:
*The chart shows **the percentage of** households with more than one car.*
Proportion is also used to describe part of a total:
*Which country has **the highest proportion of** people living in poverty?*
Rate describes how often or how fast something happens, and some other measures:
***The rate of** growth is slower in developing countries.*
Also: *the unemployment/crime rate, the birth/death rate, the exchange/interest rate*

- a. There are three main reasons of this change. ✗
b. There are three main reasons for this change. ✓

Due to is also used to introduce a reason for something. *Due to* already contains the idea of a reason, so we do not use *due to + a reason*:

*The flight was delayed **due to** technical problems.*
or *The flight was delayed **for** technical reasons.*
not *The flight was delayed **due to** technical reasons.*

- a. We have to provide doctors with the resources they need to do their job. ✓
b. We have to provide doctors the resources they need to do their job. ✗

- *provide + something + for someone*
*The project will **provide** employment **for** young artists and performers.*
Also: *There has been progress in **the provision of** facilities **for** the disabled.*
- *provide + someone + with something*
*We aim to **provide** the children **with** an opportunity to experience a different culture.*
- *help + someone + (out) + with something*
*She visits twice a week to **help** her grandmother out **with** the housework.*
Also: *Some students need extra **help with** reading and writing.*

- a. Between 1990 and 2000, there was a drop 15%. ✗
b. Between 1990 and 2000, there was a drop of 15%. ✓

We use a noun describing a change or the result of a change + *of* + a number showing the size of the change:

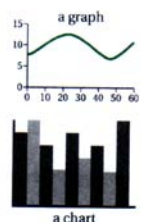
- *a(n) decrease/drop/fall/increase/reduction/rise, etc. of + number*
*The statistics show **a reduction of** 20% **in** energy costs as a result of the measures.*
*The radio station experienced **a fall of** 36,000 listeners to a total audience of 2.1 million.*
- *a high/low/maximum/peak/total, etc. of + number*
*Demand reached **a peak of** 45,000 in early March.*

- a. If we look at the figures for people between 20 and 30 years old,.... ✓
b. If we look at the figures for people between 20 to 30 years old,.... ✗

- *at a level/rate*
*Inflation has remained **at** roughly the same **level** over a number of years.*
*They can obtain loans **at** cheaper **rates**.*
- *be highest / come top / rank second, etc. with X*
*Football scored **highest with** 68% of the vote.*
*Paris is **second** in the table **with** 76 million passengers per year.*

- a. The pie chart illustrates how electricity is used. ✓
b. The pie graph illustrates how electricity is used. ✗

A *graph* has two lines (the *vertical axis* and the *horizontal axis*) marked with numbers, and a line or curve showing a trend.
A *chart* shows statistics in a visual form, often as coloured lines or columns (a *bar chart*) or as sections of a circle (a *pie chart*).
A *table* shows something, usually numbers, organised within a box in *rows* (going across ↔) and *columns* (going down ↓).
A *diagram* is a general word for something represented in a visual form – for example, showing how something works, the stages of a process, etc.



Common Mistakes at IELTS

45. Verbs for statistics

- a. The birth rate has reduced over the past ten years. **x**
b. The birth rate has dropped over the past ten years. **✓**

Common verbs used to describe graphs, charts and diagrams include:

The chart/graph **shows** levels of post-school education in four countries.

The diagram **illustrates/represents** the structure of the political system.

The chart/graph **compares** average working hours in the UK and the US.

We **can see** from the chart/graph **that** the number of visitors peaks in August.

Common verbs used to describe figures and statistics include:

The statistics/figures **suggest that** people in rural areas are healthier.

The figure will increase further, **reaching** 6 million in 2020. (not **touching 6 million**)

46. Number & Amount

- a. The internet is becoming accessible to a growing amount of people. **x**
b. The internet is becoming accessible to a growing number of people. **✓**

We use *number of* before a plural countable noun:

The chart shows the **number of** hours/passengers/people/schools/times, etc.

We use *amount of* before an uncountable noun:

If we look at the **amount of** energy/food/information/money/time/waste, etc. ...

We use *the + number of/amount of* to talk generally about a quantity:

The number of passengers carried each year has risen gradually.

We need to reduce **the amount of** water we waste.

47. Comparisons

- a. The rate of union membership rose to 26% comparing to 25% last year. **x**
b. The rate of union membership rose to 26% compared to 25% last year. **✓**

There are a number of common words and phrases that we use to make comparisons:

- *compare* something (to/with something)

The graph **compares** the crime rates in Japan and the US.

It's impossible to **compare** modern films **with** those made maybe 20 years ago.

Many have **compared** her voice to Aretha Franklin's. (= they have said it is similar)

- *compared to/with* something

Women's income rose by 31% **compared to** only 13% for men. (not **comparing to**)

- *in comparison (to/with)* something

US workers get very little holiday **in comparison with** their European counterparts.

After two weeks in a tent, the simple little hotel seemed luxurious **in comparison**.

- (*draw/make*) a comparison between two things

48. Contrast

- a. Iran spent 1% of GDP on defense. The US. in contrast, spent 3%. **✓**
b. Iran spent 1% of GDP on defense. On the contrary, the US. spent 3%. **x**

We use *in contrast* to introduce a fact or idea which is very different from what has already been mentioned. Notice the position of the phrase in the sentence:

Questionnaires produce only limited responses. Interviews, **in contrast**, are time-consuming, but allow for fuller replies.

In Britain only 9% of over sixties live with their families, **in contrast to** 29% in Japan.

We can also say that there is a *contrast between* two things which are very different:

There is a stark **contrast between** the affluent suburbs **and** the nearby slum areas.

49. (Un)Countable

- a. International aid is very important after natural disasters. **✓**
b. International aids are very important after natural disasters. **x**

Many common nouns in English are uncountable – they do not have a plural form and they are followed by a singular verb form. These include: *aid, behaviour, clothing,*

employment, equipment, furniture, help, information, pollution, software, transport:

A lot of information is available on the internet.

Nouns ending *-ing* to describe an activity are also uncountable: *advertising, farming,*

shopping, swimming, training, etc.:

This type of **farming** causes damage to the environment.

- a. The graph shows a rise in the number of accidents involving cyclists. **✓**
b. The graph shows a rise in the number of accidents involving cyclists. **x**

Demand **rose** by 48% in just 2 years. (not **raised by 48%**)

Time spent with the family **dropped** from 21% to just 6%. (not **reduced from 21%**)

☆ Verbs such as *rise, drop, decline* and *fall* describe a change which happens.

A person or organisation can *raise* or *reduce* something:

The Bank of England has **raised** interest rates.

The Government has introduced measures to **reduce** traffic in the capital.

- a. The table shows the number of people who visited the gallery each day. **✓**
b. The table shows the amount of people who visited the gallery each day. **x**

We often use *a/an* before an adjective + *number of/amount of*:

They spend **a significant amount of** money on travel. (not **an important amount of**)

This is the best way to reach **a large number of** people. (not **a big number of**)

But: **the average/greatest/largest/maximum/same/total number/amount of** something

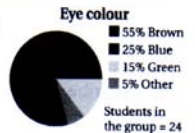
Number and *amount* are used to describe the actual quantities

of things or people. *Percentage, proportion, rate*, etc. are used

to describe measurements as part of a total:

The **percentage of** students with blue eyes is 25%.

The **number of** students with blue eyes is 6.



- a. The figure is now three times higher as compare to 1965. **x**
b. The figure is now three times higher than in 1965. **✓**

There is no comparison between my life here **and** the way of life in my home village.

It is impossible to **draw a direct comparison between** the two conflicts.

- something is *bigger/higher/lower/more important*, etc. **than** something else

Prague has **more** churches **than** any other European city.

- something is *double/half*, etc. **that of** something else

Britain's population density is **double that of** China. (not **compared to**)

- a. Japan, on the other hand, experienced a slight drop over the same period. **✓**
b. Japan, on the other side, experienced a slight drop over the same period. **x**

We use *on the contrary*, especially in speech, to introduce the opposite of what has just been said or to express an opposite opinion:

'Have visitor numbers dropped since the attack?' 'On the contrary, they've risen slightly.'

We use the phrase *on the other hand* to introduce an opposite viewpoint:

Parents need to warn their child about things to avoid, but, **on the other hand**, they must not make the child over-anxious.

- a. Every country has its own customs and behaviors. **x**
b. Every country has its own customs and behavior. **✓**

Some words have countable [C] and uncountable [U] forms used in different contexts:

He has **no work experience**. (U: knowledge and skills you gain by doing something)

Going into hospital is often **a stressful experience**. (C: a particular event or situation)

How much time do you spend commuting? (U: hours, minutes, etc.)

How many times do you go each week? (C: occasions)

The waiters all wear **local dress**. (U: clothes for a particular context)

She had two bridesmaids in **pink dresses**. (C: a piece of women's clothing)

We often go walking in **the country**. (singular: the countryside)

He's visited a number of **countries**. (C: a nation)

Common Mistakes at IELTS

50. Singular & Plural

- a. Health and education are top priorities for the new government. ✓
b. Health and education is top priority for the new government. ✗

We use a singular verb form (*is, has, makes, needs*, etc.):

- after a singular noun
Each team has eleven players.
Everybody needs a minimum amount of sleep per night.
- after an uncountable noun
Research shows that people with pets are less likely to suffer from stress.
- after the *number/percentage/proportion*, etc. of
The proportion of people living alone has increased.

We use a plural verb form (*are, have, make, need*, etc.):

- after a plural noun
Most people recycle less than 30% of their waste.
Computers have become a normal part of everyday life.

- a. The number of students going on to higher education has increased. ✓
b. The number of students going on to higher education have increased. ✗

- after two or more singular or uncountable nouns considered together
Japan and the US have similar rates of literacy.

☆ Remember that where you use more than one verb in a sentence with the same subject, they must all be in the same form:
The project provides a place for children to play safely and keeps them out of trouble.

51. it, they, them

- a. There have been changes in the food we eat & the way we cook them. ✗
b. There have been changes in the food we eat & the way we cook it. ✓

It refers back to a singular or uncountable noun we have mentioned before:
I've lost my umbrella, have you seen it anywhere?
Emergency aid can help in the short term, but it isn't the answer in the long term.
Each school has its own computer support officer.

They refers back to a plural noun when the pronoun is the subject of a verb:
Such events cost a lot of money, but they can also create jobs for local people.
Don't take these painkillers when driving as they may cause drowsiness.

- a. Such films are not suitable for children because they contain violence. ✓
b. Such films are not suitable for children because it contains violence. ✗

Them refers back to a plural noun when the pronoun is the object of a verb:
Medical facilities have to be located where people can make best use of them.

We use *their* before something which belongs to a plural noun:

We help developing countries to manage their natural resources carefully.
☆ We usually only use *he/him* and *she/her* to refer to people and not to things:
My car's quite old, but it's still fairly reliable. (not she's)

52. being and having

- a. There are some students being more willing to study than others. ✗
b. There are some students who are more willing to study than others. ✓

The verbs *be* and *have* are not usually used in continuous forms (*being* and *having*) when they are a main verb with their basic meaning – *be* = to exist, *have* = to possess:
These people are among the most disadvantaged in society. (not are being)
They have a loving family to look after them. (not are having)

They are sometimes used as a main verb with a different meaning in a continuous form to emphasise a temporary state or action:
She's having a shower at the moment – can she call you back? (= showering)
We're having a great time here in New York. (= enjoying our visit)
My boss is being awkward about giving me time off. (= behaving in an awkward way)

- a. In the West we are used to having clean water which comes out of the top. ✓
b. In the West we are used to have clean water which comes out of the top. ✗

☆ *Being* + adjective is only used with adjectives which describe an attitude or behaviour (*honest, patient*, etc.), not those describing feelings (*happy, sad*, etc.).

Continuous forms can also be used after certain words and phrases, including:
be used to, enjoy, like, look forward to, be advantages to, be worth, a reason for, rather than, without
I'm not used to being away from my family. (= not accustomed to it)
There are advantages to having a flat in the city centre.

53. join/attend, give/provide

- a. Some people can't afford to join private language courses. ✗
b. Some people can't afford to attend private language courses. ✓

We use *join* to talk about becoming a member of something, such as a club:
I try to stay healthy, so I've joined a gym.

We use *attend* to talk about going regularly to a class, course, school or university:
We had the chance to attend a presentation skills workshop. (not join)

We also *attend* an organised event, such as a conference, meeting or church service:
The Prime Minister attended a memorial service for the victims.

We usually use *go to* instead of *attend* in more informal writing and speech:
Are you going to this afternoon's lecture? (not attending)

- a. The university library provides free internet access for students. ✓
b. The university library gives free internet access for students. ✗

We use *provide* to talk about making something available for people to use. We use it especially about services supplied by the government, a company or other organisation:
One of the roles of the state is to provide a basic education.

We need to provide better facilities for visitors.
The tourist office provides visitors with helpful information.

Give is usually used in more informal contexts or when one person physically gives something to someone else:

The Red Cross gave the most malnourished children high-energy drinks.

Common Mistakes at IELTS

54. Verb collocations

- a. They have made a lot of progress in improving working conditions. ✓
b. They have achieved a lot of progress in improving working conditions. ✗

There are many common verb + noun combinations (*collocations*) in English:
make progress: I think the team have made progress this season.
make an impression: It is important to make a good first impression.
make a difference: We believe we can make a difference to children's lives.
make someone/something happy/comfortable/effective, etc.: The system can be improved to make it more effective.
have an effect: This incident will have a negative effect on tourism.

55. habits, customs & practices

- a. As a tourist you should show respect for local behaviour. ✗
b. As a tourist you should show respect for local customs. ✓

A *habit* is something a person does regularly in a particular way as part of their everyday life, often without thinking about it:
After a while, separating rubbish for recycling just becomes a habit.
People's eating habits have changed. Families no longer eat meals together.
A *custom* is something people in a particular country or of a particular religious or ethnic group do because it has been part of their culture or way of life for many years:
He studied Maori culture and customs.
The custom of decorating eggs goes back hundreds of years.

56. effect, influence & impact

- a. Changes to the exam format could have a serious influence on them. ✗
b. Changes to the exam format could have a serious effect on them. ✓

An *influence* is something which causes people to think or behave in a different way:
We need to learn more about the influence of violent computer games on young people.
Our experiences have a huge influence on our personality.
An *effect* is what happens to someone or something as a result of something else:
Research has shown the harmful effects of stress on the mother and unborn baby.
The new resort has had a beneficial effect on local businesses. (not ~~effect+to~~)
☆ Remember, *effect* is a noun. The verb form is *affect*.
Homes on the west coast were most seriously affected by the hurricane.

57. time words

- a. The effects will only be seen over a long duration ✗
b. The effects will only be seen over period of time ✓

We use *hours* to talk about the time during a day or week when something usually happens, especially the time when someone works or when something is open:
working hours office hours opening hours
Most nannies work long hours for low pay. (= they work many hours a day)
We use *period* or *period of time* to talk about a particular length of time:
Sales rose by 20% over a six-month period/over a period of six months.
Sportsmen can earn a lot of money, but only for a relatively short period of time.
We use *duration* in formal writing to talk about how long something lasts:
Make sure that your visa is valid for the duration of your stay.

- a. Poor diet in childhood can have a long-term effect on health. ✓
b. Poor diet in childhood can leave a long-term effect on health. ✗

have time: Retired people have more time to spend on their hobbies.
have a(n) advantage/benefit: Tea is believed to have health benefits.
give a(n) reason/explanation: He didn't give any explanation.
give someone a(n) chance/opportunity: Give her a chance to explain first.
deal with a problem/situation: There are several problems we need to deal with.
commit a crime: She proved that he didn't commit the crime.

- a. They encourage the practice of teachers reading aloud to young children. ✓
b. They encourage the habit of teachers reading about to young children. ✗

A *practice* is a method of doing something which is usually used, especially in a particular country, industry, etc. In this sense, *practice* is a countable noun.:
The report condemned the practice of keeping prisoners in chains.
Modern agricultural practices are to blame for the decline in wild flowers.
Someone's *behaviour* is the way they behave generally or on a particular occasion.
Behaviour is usually an uncountable noun and has no plural form:
The appalling behaviour of a minority of fans ruined the event for everyone.

- a. It is difficult to assess the impact of the disaster on tourism. ✓
b. It is difficult to assess the extent of the disaster on tourism. ✗

An *impact* is a powerful effect of something, especially something new, on a person or situation:
We need to look at the environmental impact of the new dam.
Recent advances have had a massive impact on the personal computer industry.
The word *consequences* is also used to talk about the results, often bad, of an action:
Children need to be taught about the consequences of doing wrong.
He believes that the 24–7 society has negative consequences for family life.

- a. Managers are expected to work for long time. ✗
b. Managers are expected to work long hours. ✓

The *timing* of something is when it happens within the context of other events:
He said the timing of the announcement is not related to next week's board meeting.
Time is also used in a number of common expressions:
How do people spend their spare time/free time/leisure time?
We spent most of the time on the beach. (not ~~most of the times~~)
We haven't seen each other for a long time. (not ~~for long time~~)

Common Mistakes at IELTS

58. appearance & communication

- a. Public art can have a considerable effect on the outlook of the public spaces. **x**
- b. Public art can have a considerable effect on the appearance of public spaces. **v**

The *appearance* of something is the way it looks and a person's *appearance* is the way they look (their face, body, hair, etc.) and the way they dress:

Artificial ingredients are sometimes added to enhance the taste or appearance of food.
Many young women spend a lot of time on their appearance. (not ~~their appearances~~)

A person's *looks* refers to how attractive they are – their face, etc. but not their clothes:
She had gone grey and lost her looks. (= she was not as attractive as before)

A person's *outlook* is the way they think about their life and the future:
The accident completely changed her outlook on life. She enjoys each day at a time.

- a. We need better communications between parents and teachers. **x**
- b. We need better communication between parents and teachers. **v**

Communication is an uncountable noun and refers to the act of talking to people:

The job requires excellent communication skills.

Email is now our main means of communication. (not ~~mean of communication~~)

Communications (plural) refers to all the methods of sending information, for example by telephone, email, post, etc.:

They produce mobile phones and other communications equipment.

59. noun & adj. : male or men

- a. There are more opportunities for females within the police service. **x**
- b. There are more opportunities for women within the police service. **v**

Male and *female* can be used as nouns, but they are only used in very formal or technical writing, or when talking about animals rather than people:

The male tree frog sings to attract a female.

In most spoken and written contexts, we use the nouns *man/men* or *woman/women*:

Nursing and teaching degrees still attract more women than men.
The life expectancy for an average man in Switzerland is 77 years.

Male and *female* are used as adjectives in written and spoken English:

We have a roughly equal number of male and female students.
All the candidates on the shortlist were male.

- a. The chart below shows the number of hours worked by men and women employees. **x**
- b. The chart below shows the number of hours worked by male and female employees. **v**

In informal conversation, people sometimes use *woman* or *lady* before another noun instead of *female*. Some people do not like *lady* used in this way:

a woman/lady doctor *a woman/lady golfer* *a woman driver*
She was the first woman president of Ireland.

60. noun and adj.: Britain, British or Briton

- a. The most popular country for Britons to visit in 1999 was France. **v**
- b. The most popular country for British to visit in 1999 was France. **x**

To talk about things which belong to or come from a place, we use an adjective:

a French word *Thai food* *Most of the students are Asian.*

UK and *US* (not *USA*) are sometimes used as adjectives before a noun, especially referring to a company, a system or an organisation:

the UK government *UK companies* *British food* (not usually ~~UK food~~)
the US legal system *the US government* (not ~~the USA government~~)

The noun to refer to a person from a place is usually the same word as the adjective:
an American, an Australian, a German, a Thai, an Asian, a European

- a. The company is based in the Thai capital Bangkok. **v**
- b. The company is based in the Thailand capital Bangkok. **x**

Some nationalities have a different word to refer to a person from that country:

an Englishman/Englishwoman, a Frenchman/Frenchwoman, a Dutchman/Dutchwoman, a Dane (Denmark), a Filipino (the Philippines), a Finn (Finland), a New Zealander, a Pole (Poland), a Spaniard (Spain), a Swede (Sweden), a Turk (Turkey)

Briton is often used to refer to a person from Britain in writing and news reports, but in conversation we usually talk about *a British person/man/woman*.

☆ *There are some common informal words for nationalities, such as Brit, Aussie and Kiwi.* These are not appropriate in more formal writing.