IELTS

WRITING
Task 1 and Task 2

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Contents

TASK 1

**Some advice to help you avoid common mistakes in IELTS writing task 1:**

1. Don't copy the question for your introduction. You should *paraphrase* the question (i.e. rewrite it using some different words).

2. Don't forget to separate your paragraphs clearly.

3. Don't forget to write a good summary/overview of the information. A quick one-sentence conclusion is not good enough. I prefer to put the overview straight after the introduction, and I try to write 2 sentences describing the information in general. You won't get a high score if you don't write a good overview.

4. Don't describe items separately (e.g. 2 lines on a graph). You should always try to *compare* things if it is possible to do so. Instead of describing 2 lines separately, compare the 2 lines at key points.

5. Don't try to describe every number on a chart or graph (unless there are only a few numbers). A key skill in task 1 is being able to *select* the key information and describe or compare it well. I usually mention around 6 or 7 numbers in my main paragraphs.

6. Don't spend longer than 20 minutes on task 1. Practise spending 5 minutes on each of your 4 paragraphs. Stop yourself after 20 minutes; remember that task 2 is worth more marks.

The overview / summary is a very important part of your task 1 report. Many people have no trouble describing specific details, but they find it difficult to describe the *general features* of a graph, chart or diagram. So here are my tips on how to write a good overview:

1. Always try to write two sentences. This forces you to describe *two* main or general features of the graph, chart or diagram.

2. Don't put any numbers in your overview. Save specific numbers for the 'details' paragraphs.

3. If the graph or chart shows a time period (e.g. years), look for the overall change from the beginning to the end of the period (e.g. from the first year to the last year).

4. Look for overall trends, and ignore individual figures that don't fit the trend. For example, if a graph shows a rising trend overall, you can ignore a specific year when the figures decreased - save that year for your 'details' paragraphs.

5. If no time period is shown, you can't look for trends. Instead, look for *differences and similarities* between items.

6. Don't look for individual 'highest' or 'lowest' figures such as a 'peak' on a line graph. Instead, describe the highest and lowest items overall (e.g. which line on the graph was the highest for the *whole* or most of the period?).

7. Start your overview with a simple phrase that clearly shows the examiner that this is your summary paragraph e.g. It is clear that... , It is noticeable that... , Overall we can see that...

8. If there are two *different* charts, write one overview sentence about each chart.

9. If there are more than two charts, they must be connected in some way, so look for two main features overall.

10. If the task is to describe a diagram or map that compares things, you can mention the main differences and maybe the number of differences and / or similarities between the two diagrams.

11. If the task is to describe a process diagram, you can mention the total number of stages in the process and say where or how the process begins and ends.

The first chart below gives information about the money spent by British parents on their children's sports between 2008 and 2014. The second chart shows the number of children who participated in three sports in Britain over the same time period.

Average monthly spend on children's sports
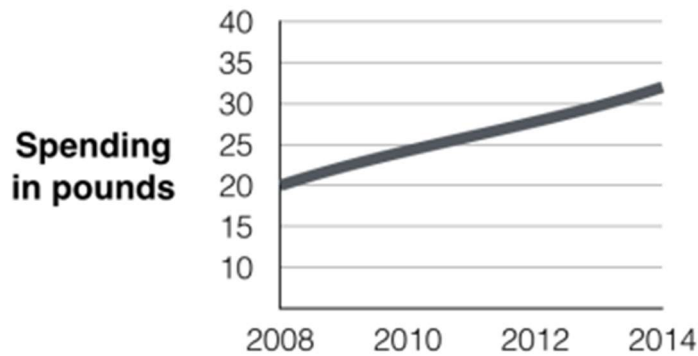
Participation in three different sports
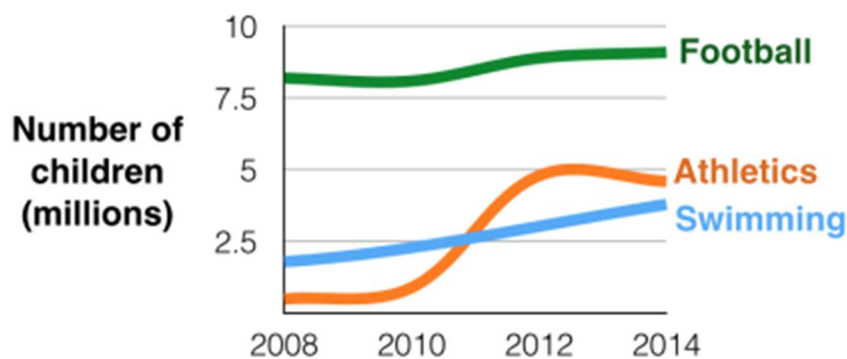
Here's my full answer:

The line graphs show the average monthly amount that parents in Britain spent on their children's sporting activities and the number of British children who took part in three different sports from 2008 to 2014.

It is clear that parents spent more money each year on their children's participation in sports over the six-year period. In terms of the number of children taking part, football was significantly more popular than athletics and swimming.

In 2008, British parents spent an average of around £20 per month on their children's sporting activities. Parents' spending on children's sports increased gradually over the following six years, and by 2014 the average monthly amount had risen to just over £30.

Looking at participation numbers, in 2008 approximately 8 million British children played football, while only 2 million children were enrolled in swimming clubs and less than 1 million practised athletics. The figures

for football participation remained relatively stable over the following 6 years. By contrast, participation in swimming almost doubled, to nearly 4 million children, and there was a near fivefold increase in the number of children doing athletics.

(185 words, band 9)

The diagram below shows the life cycle of a salmon, from egg to adult fish.
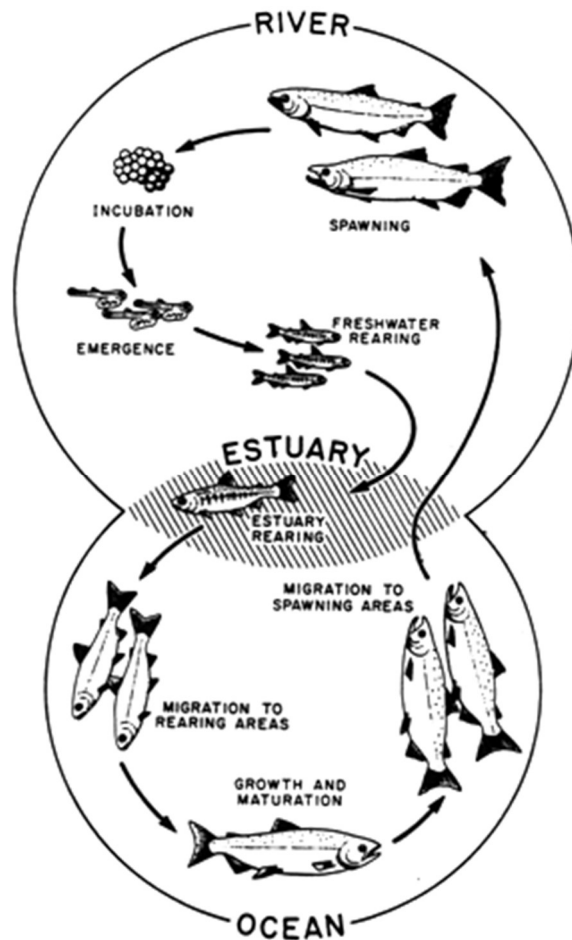
The diagram illustrates the stages in the life of the salmon, from birth to maturity.

It is clear that there are six* main stages as the salmon develops from egg to mature adult. We can also see that salmon spend time in three distinct locations during the cycle, moving from river to estuary to ocean and then back upstream.

Salmon begin their lives in rivers where the adult fish lay and incubate their eggs. After emerging from eggs, the young salmon spend the next stage of their lives being reared in freshwater areas. Then, at some point in their development, the fish swim downstream to river estuaries where rearing continues.

Following the estuary rearing period, the maturing salmon migrate to the ocean, where they eventually become fully grown adults. Finally, the adult fish travel back upstream to spawning areas of rivers; here they reproduce and lay their eggs, and the life cycle begins anew.
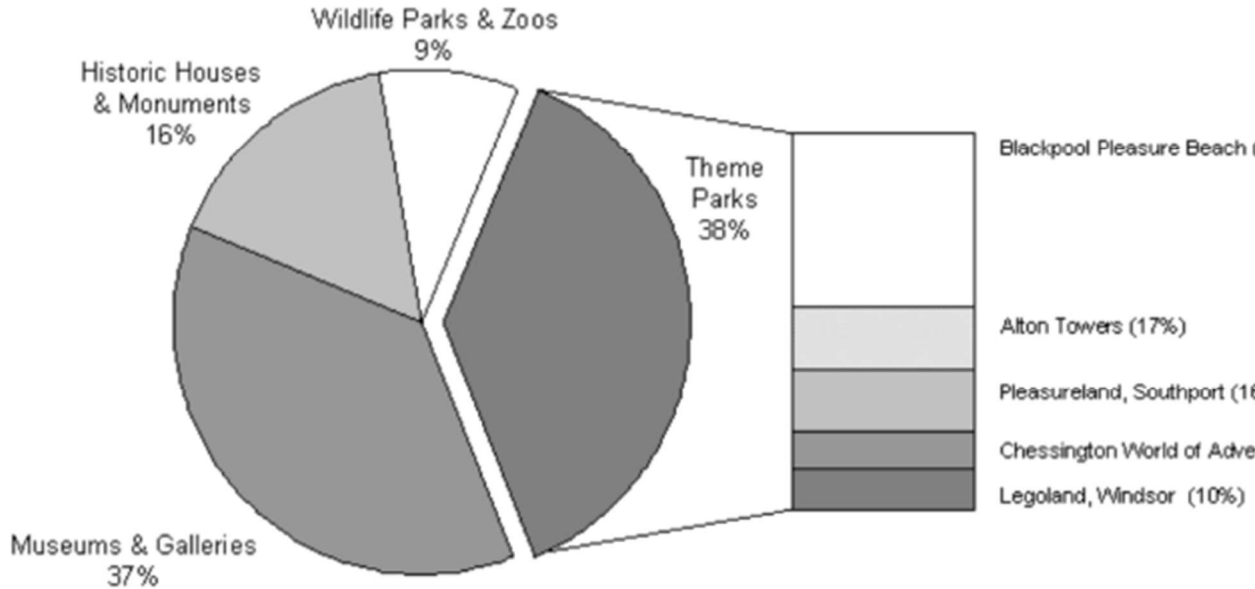
(154 words, band 9)

* I wrote "six" main stages because these are the stages that I describe in paragraphs 3 and 4.

The chart below shows the results of a survey of people who visited four types of tourist attraction in Britain in the year 1999.

Distribution of visitors to different types of tourist attractions in Britain, 1999

The pie chart compares figures for visitors to four categories of tourist attraction and to five different theme parks in Britain in 1999.

It is clear that theme parks and museums / galleries were the two most popular types of tourist attraction in that year. Blackpool Pleasure Beach received by far the highest proportion of visitors in the theme park sector.

Looking at the information in more detail, we can see that 38% of the surveyed visitors went to a theme park, and 37% of them went to a museum or gallery. By contrast, historic houses and monuments were visited by only 16% of the sample, while wildlife parks and zoos were the least popular of the four types of tourist attraction, with only 9% of visitors.

In the theme park sector, almost half of the people surveyed (47%) had been to Blackpool Pleasure Beach. Alton Towers was the second most popular amusement park, with 17% of the sample, followed by Pleasureland in Southport, with 16%. Finally, Chessington World of Adventures and Legoland Windsor had each welcomed 10% of the surveyed visitors.

(181 words, band 9)

The graph below shows the amounts of waste produced by three companies over a period of 15 years.
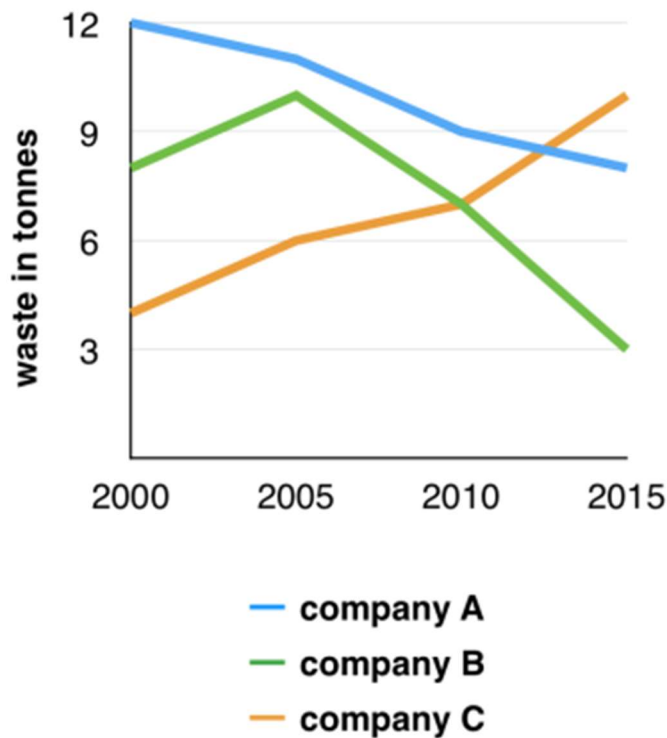
The line graph compares three companies in terms of their waste output between the years 2000 and 2015.

It is clear that there were significant changes in the amounts of waste produced by all three companies shown on the graph. While companies A and B saw waste output fall over the 15-year period, the amount of waste produced by company C increased considerably.

In 2000, company A produced 12 tonnes of waste, while companies B and C produced around 8 tonnes and 4 tonnes of waste material respectively. Over the following 5 years, the waste output of companies B and C rose by around 2 tonnes, but the figure for company A fell by approximately 1 tonne.

From 2005 to 2015, company A cut waste production by roughly 3 tonnes, and company B reduced its waste by around 7 tonnes. By contrast, company C saw an increase in waste production of approximately 4 tonnes over the same 10-year period. By 2015, company C's waste output had risen to 10 tonnes, while the respective amounts of waste from companies A and B had dropped to 8 tonnes and only 3 tonnes.

(192 words, band 9)

The tables below give information about sales of Fairtrade*-labelled coffee and bananas in 1999 and 2004 in five European countries.

Sales of Fairtrade-labelled coffee and bananas (1999 & 2004)

Coffee	1999 (millions of euros)	2004 (millions of euros)
UK	1.5	20
Switzerland	3	6
Denmark	1.8	2
Belgium	1	1.7
Sweden	0.8	1

Bananas	1999 (millions of euros)	2004 (millions of euros)
UK	15	47
Switzerland	1	5.5
Denmark	0.6	4
Belgium	1.8	1
Sweden	2	0.9

*Fairtrade: a category of products for which farmers from developing countries have been paid an officially agreed fair price.

The tables show the amount of money spent on Fairtrade coffee and bananas in two separate years in the UK, Switzerland, Denmark, Belgium and Sweden.

It is clear that sales of Fairtrade coffee rose in all five European countries from 1999 to 2004, but sales of Fairtrade bananas only went up in three out of the five countries. Overall, the UK saw by far the highest levels of spending on the two products.

In 1999, Switzerland had the highest sales of Fairtrade coffee, at €3 million, while revenue from Fairtrade bananas was highest in the UK, at €15 million. By 2004, however, sales of Fairtrade coffee in the UK had risen to €20 million, and this was over three times higher than Switzerland's sales figure for Fairtrade coffee in that year. The year 2004 also saw dramatic increases in the money spent on Fairtrade bananas in the UK and Switzerland, with revenues rising by €32 million and €4.5 million respectively.

Sales of the two Fairtrade products were far lower in Denmark, Belgium and Sweden. Small increases in sales of Fairtrade coffee can be seen, but revenue remained at €2 million or below in all three countries in both years. Finally, it is noticeable that the money spent on Fairtrade bananas actually fell in Belgium and Sweden.
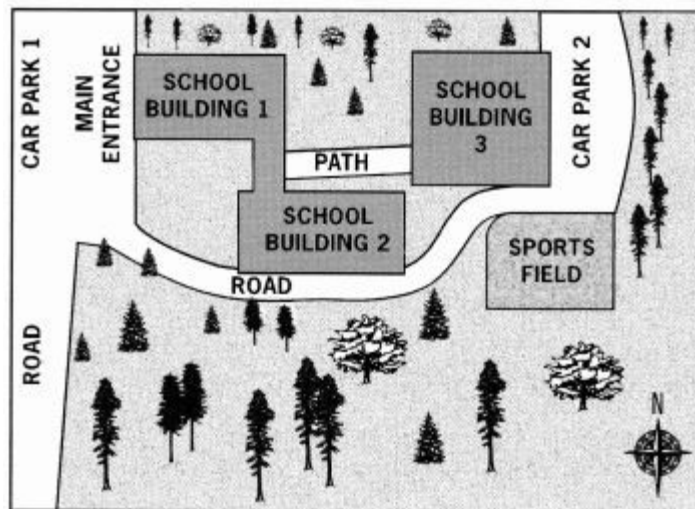
Note:
This report is a bit longer (216 words) than necessary, but I think it's a useful model answer in terms of its structure and the language used.

The diagrams below show the site of a school in 2004 and the plan for changes to the school site in 2024.

School Site - 2004: 600 students
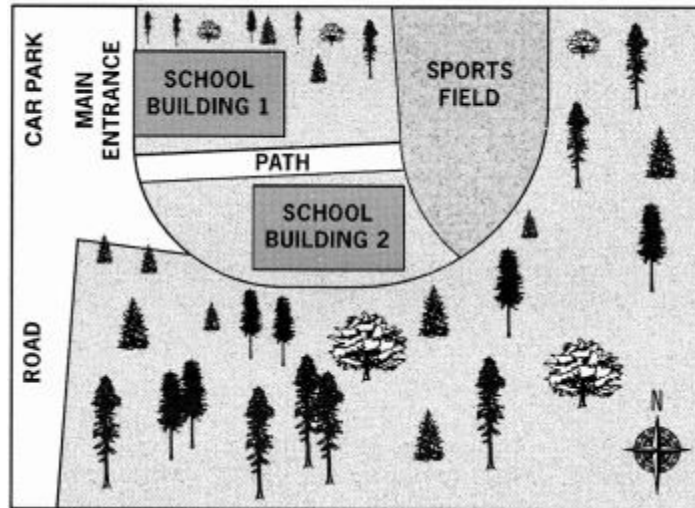
School Site - 2024: 1,000 students

(Source: Official IELTS Practice Materials 2)

The two pictures compare the layout of a school as it was in the year 2004 with a proposed site design for the year 2024.

It is clear that the main change for 2024 involves the addition of a new school building. The school will then be able to accommodate a considerably larger number of students.

In 2004, there were 600 pupils attending the school, and the two school buildings were separated by a path running from the main entrance to the sports field. By 2024, it is expected that there will be 1000 pupils, and a third building will have been constructed. Furthermore, the plan is to join

the two original buildings together, creating a shorter path that links the buildings only.

As the third building and a second car park will be built on the site of the original sports field, a new, smaller sports field will need to be laid. A new road will also be built from the main entrance to the second car park. Finally, no changes will be made to the main entrance and original car park.

(183 words, band 9)

The charts below show the results of a questionnaire that asked visitors to the Parkway Hotel how they rated the hotel's customer service. The same questionnaire was given to 100 guests in the years 2005 and 2010.

2005

2010

Customer service was:

- Excellent
- Good
- Satisfactory
- Poor
- Very poor
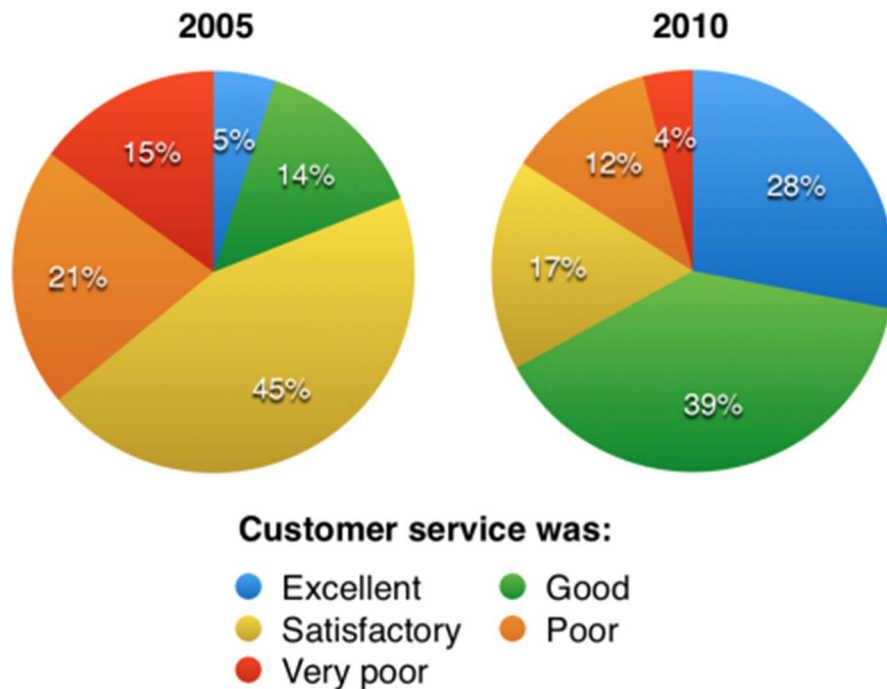
The pie charts compare visitors' responses to a survey about customer service at the Parkway Hotel in 2005 and in 2010.

It is clear that overall customer satisfaction increased considerably from 2005 to 2010. While most hotel guests rated customer service as satisfactory or poor in 2005, a clear majority described the hotel's service as good or excellent in 2010.

Looking at the positive responses first, in 2005 only 5% of the hotel's visitors rated its customer service as excellent, but this figure rose to 28% in 2010. Furthermore, while only 14% of guests described customer service in the hotel as good in 2005, almost three times as many people gave this rating five years later.

With regard to negative feedback, the proportion of guests who considered the hotel's customer service to be poor fell from 21% in 2005 to only 12% in 2010. Similarly, the proportion of people who thought customer service was very poor dropped from 15% to only 4% over the 5-year period. Finally, a fall in the number of 'satisfactory' ratings in 2010 reflects the fact that more people gave positive responses to the survey in that year.

(193 words, band 9)

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The pie charts below compare water usage in San Diego, California and the rest of the world.
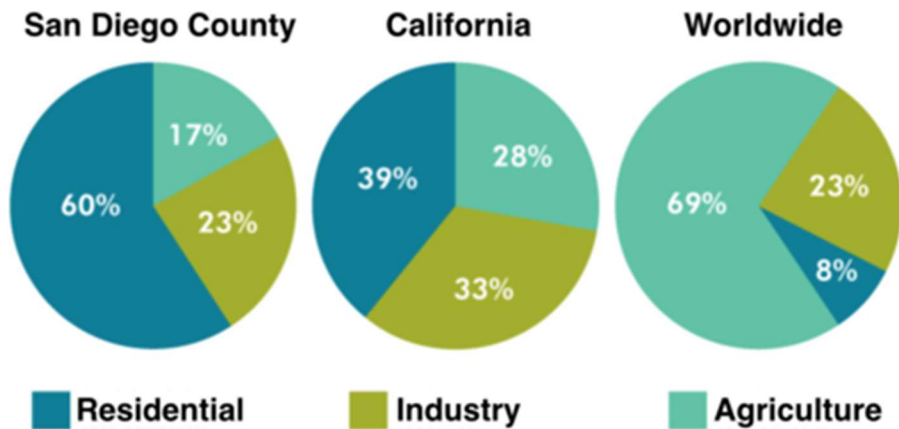
The pie charts give information about the water used for residential, industrial and agricultural purposes in San Diego County, California, and the world as a whole.

It is noticeable that more water is consumed by homes than by industry or agriculture in the two American regions. By contrast, agriculture accounts for the vast majority of water used worldwide.

In San Diego County and California State, residential water consumption accounts for 60% and 39% of total water usage. By contrast, a mere 8% of the water used globally goes to homes. The opposite trend can be seen when we look at water consumption for agriculture. This accounts for a massive 69% of global water use, but only 17% and 28% of water usage in San Diego and California respectively.

Such dramatic differences are not seen when we compare the figures for industrial water use. The same proportion of water (23%) is used by industry in San Diego and worldwide, while the figure for California is 10% higher, at 33%.

(168 words, band 9)

The chart below shows the amount of time that 10 to 15-year-olds spend chatting on the Internet and playing on games consoles on an average school day in the UK.
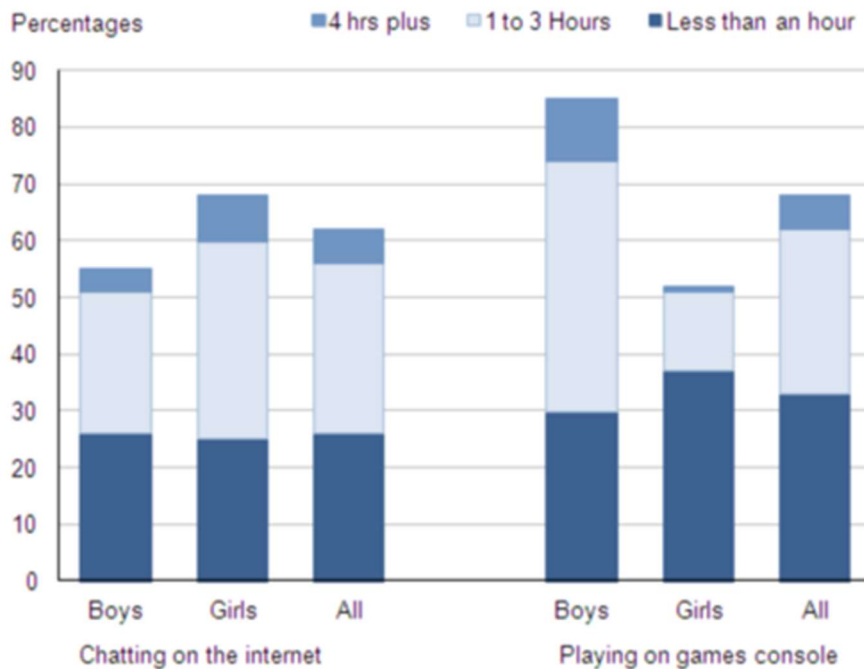
The bar chart compares the time spent by 10 to 15-year-olds in the UK on two activities, namely chatting online and playing computer games.

Overall, we can see that playing computer games is marginally more popular than chatting on the Internet. However, completely different trends can be seen if we look at the specific figures for boys and girls.

Boys aged between 10 and 15 clearly favour playing on games consoles over chatting online. According to the chart, while 85% of boys play computer games every day, only 55% chat online daily. Furthermore, the majority of boys play on their consoles for more than one hour each day, and 10% do this activity for four hours or more.

By contrast, girls prefer chatting online. Close to 70% of 10 to 15-year-old girls engage in online conversation each day, compared to about 50% of this cohort who play computer games. Of the girls who do play on consoles, most of them play for less than an hour, whereas most girls who chat online do so for more than one hour, and nearly 10% chat for four hours or more.

Note:
I decided to write about boys in one paragraph and girls in the other. However, it would also be fine to write paragraphs about chatting on the Internet and playing on consoles.

Internet Users as Percentage of Population
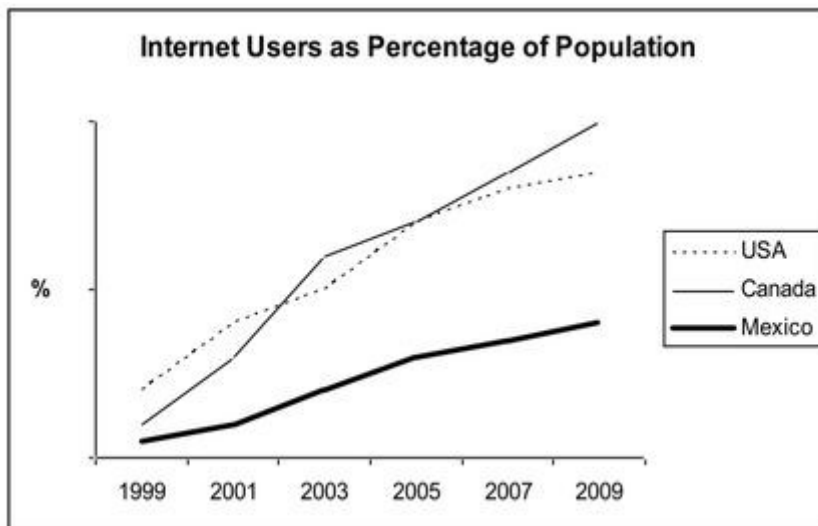
The line graph compares the percentage of people in three countries who used the Internet between 1999 and 2009.

It is clear that the proportion of the population who used the Internet increased in each country over the period shown. Overall, a much larger percentage of Canadians and Americans had access to the Internet in comparison with Mexicans, and Canada experienced the fastest growth in Internet usage.

In 1999, the proportion of people using the Internet in the USA was about 20%. The figures for Canada and Mexico were lower, at about 10% and 5% respectively. In 2005, Internet usage in both the USA and Canada rose to around 70% of the population, while the figure for Mexico reached just over 25%.

By 2009, the percentage of Internet users was highest in Canada. Almost 100% of Canadians used the Internet, compared to about 80% of Americans and only 40% of Mexicans.

The following bar chart has a total of 24 bars. It's impossible to describe 24 pieces of information in only 20 minutes, so you need to *select*.

Amount spent on consumer goods
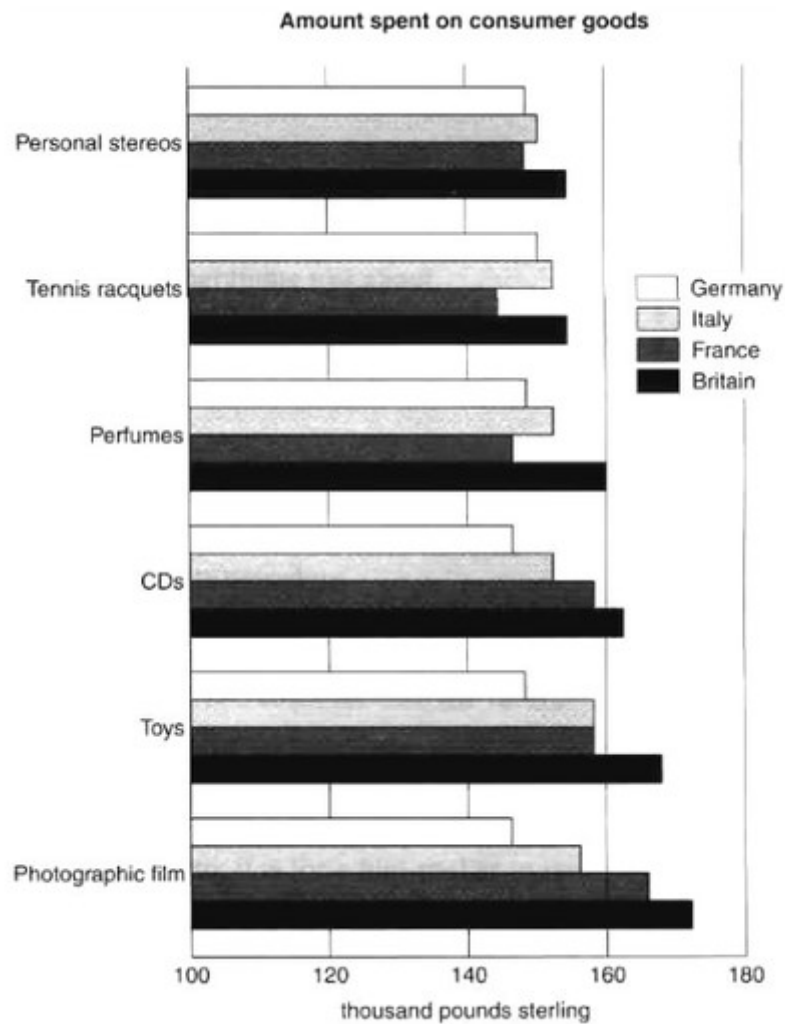
A simple rule is to select at least one key thing about each country. Here are some examples:

Britain: highest spending on all 6 products, give the figure for photographic film.
France: second highest for 3 products, but lowest for the other 3.
Italy: Italians spent more money on toys than on any other product.
Germany: lowest spending overall, similar figures for all 6 products.

The bar chart compares consumer spending on six different items in Germany, Italy, France and Britain.

It is clear that British people spent significantly more money than people in the other three countries on all six goods. Of the six items, consumers spent the most money on photographic film.

People in Britain spent just over £170,000 on photographic film, which is the highest figure shown on the chart. By contrast, Germans were the lowest overall spenders, with roughly the same figures (just under £150,000) for each of the six products.

The figures for spending on toys were the same in both France and Italy, at nearly £160,000. However, while French people spent more than Italians on photographic film and CDs, Italians paid out more for personal stereos, tennis racquets and perfumes. The amount spent by French people on tennis racquets, around £145,000, is the lowest figure shown on the chart.

Note:
- I tried to keep the essay short (154 words) by selecting carefully.
- It's difficult to change *spend*, but I used *spending*, *spenders* and *paid out*.