Academic Task 1 – How to structure your answer

If you look at a variety of Task 1 questions you will notice that the instruction is always the same:

> **write a report** and **describe the information**.

So your answer should follow a "report" style of writing, not an essay format, and you should describe what you can see, not analyse the results in the graph.

How you organise this description is important, and so in this document the aim is to provide you with a "formula" that you can use for your answer.

The basic formula

Paragraph 1
What does the graph show? (using present simple)
What is the overall trend? (using appropriate tenses depending the dates shown)

Paragraph 2 (and 3 if appropriate)
Choose significant data from the chart (using appropriate tenses depending on the dates shown)

Final sentence
Your overall impression from the data (using appropriate tenses as in the second paragraph)
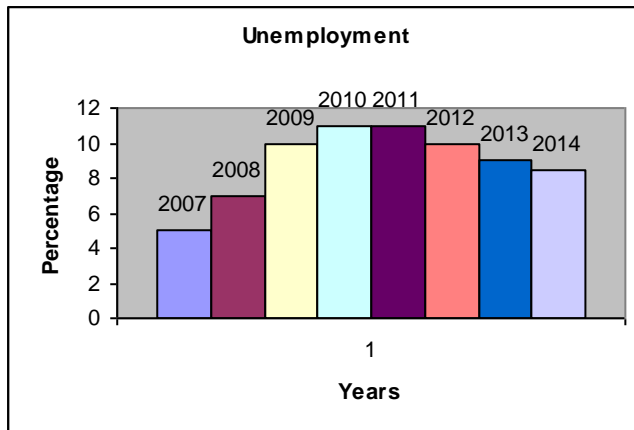
Please note that the graphs in the exam will be more complex than those shown in this document, or will include several sets of data for you to compare. As a result, your second/third paragraph(s) will be much longer than those in these examples. The examples given here are only for training purposes.

Paragraph 1

What does the graph show?
First of all you should write a sentence that explains what you can see in the graph. This means you should write about the information in the title, and on the axes (or other descriptions on a chart). So using the graph below, your first sentence could be:
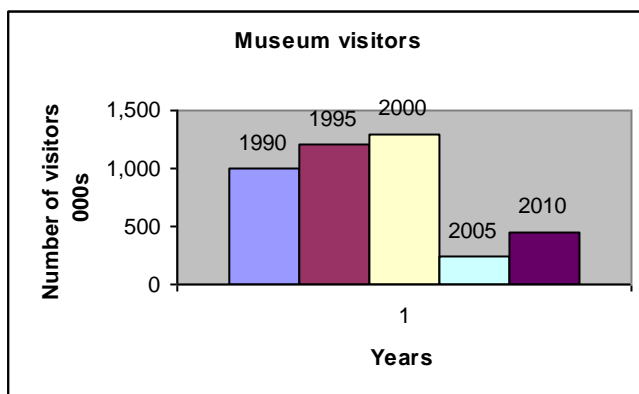
The graph shows the level of unemployment between 2007 and 2014.

This sentence works like an introduction to your answer, so DO NOT write any other details at this stage.

Here's another example:

The bar chart presents information on the number of people who visited the museum from 1990 to 2010.

Notice that in both examples I have tried to use my own words as far as possible – so it's far better to write "people who visited" rather than "visitors".

What is the overall trend?
The next sentence should describe the overall trend. In other words, it describes the shape of the graph. Some people might consider this the same as a summary sentence. The important thing to remember is that you shouldn't write lots of details or data in this sentence.

So for the unemployment chart:

It can be seen that unemployment gradually rose to the current year, and is expected to fall after this.

And for the museum visitors chart:

The overall trend demonstrates that visitor numbers rose during the first ten years, but then dropped dramatically over the next decade.

So, if someone read your second sentence they could draw an approximate picture of the graph without seeing the original. In other words, they could produce a shape that *looks similar* to your graph.
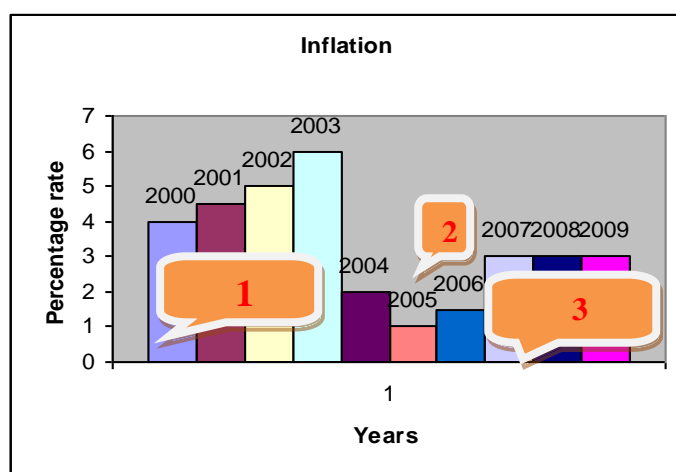
This completes your first paragraph.

Paragraph 2 (and 3)

Choosing significant data from the chart
In the remaining part of your answer you should write about some of the details on the graph. As IELTS graphs can be complex and include several sets of data, or more than one graph, you should also make comparisons between the data. (Making comparisons will be dealt with in a separate document, so at this stage we will focus on choosing which data to write about.)

Students often lose points in this part of the exam as they write about all the data. You will also be assessed on which data you choose. When you look at a graph see **which numbers or sections** are **noticeable** or **important** in your opinion.

Look at the graph below and see how I have chosen specific data and areas to write about.

Inflation

2000 2001 2002 2003 2004 2005 2006 2007 2008 2009

Percentage rate

Years

1. 2. 3.

I have numbered these areas as this is the order I would write about them in my answer. When you do this you want to follow the order of the data in the chart (as far as possible) as this seems most logical.

1. The most significant information to mention here is the peak at 6% in 2003, with data gradually rising from 2000.
2. The most significant data is the low point at 1% in 2005.
3. The most significant data here is how the percentages have levelled off at 3% over these 3 years.

So my answer might look like this:

Inflation increased steadily from 2000, reaching a peak at 6% in 2003. However, after that the rate dropped dramatically by 5% and hit a low point in 2005. Finally, after such a dramatic fluctuation, it levelled off at 3% over the remaining years of the decade.

Notice these points:
- I only refer to a few specific percentages and dates
- I try to vary the vocabulary as much as possible
- I use linking phrases and ordering/sequencing words
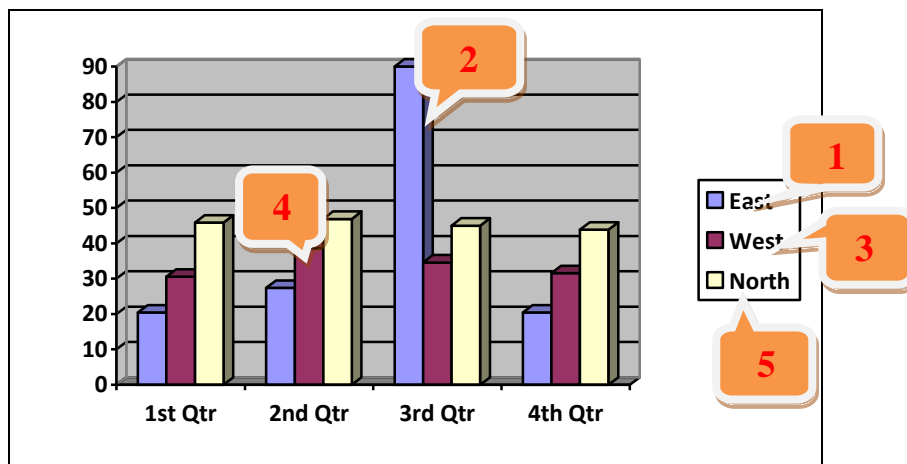
Final sentence
To finish your answer you can write your overall impression of what the graph represents. You should be very careful with this sentence – **only** state what you can see from the graph.

Here is a suggested final sentence for the inflation graph:

Overall, it can be seen that the rising cost of goods was a significant problem during the early years of the 2000s.

Let's look at another graph and choose the most significant data to include in the answer. Below you can see last year's sales for the same product in 3 regional branches. I have selected and numbered the data I would like to write about.

Sales in 2005 for Product A in three branches of the same company

Here is the suggested answer:

Those sales from the East branch showed the most dramatic change. Despite being lower than both other offices for most of the year, 90 products were sold during July to September, which was at least double the sales of either of the other departments at that time. In contrast, sales from the West demonstrated only a slight fluctuation between 30 and 40 products, with the highest sales in the second quarter. Only the

northern branch presented the least change with sales remaining almost the same throughout the year.

Overall, it can be assumed that in the east of the country the sales varied according to the season, however, this was not the case with the other regions.

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