Academic Task 1 – How to compare data in your answer

We have already looked at how to choose significant data and logically order your answer – click here if you want to read this document. We will use the same approach here, and then look at how we can compare the data in the graph.

Comparing data in one chart

Look at the graph below.

Visitors to two different websites in 2009

Number of visitors

- Site A
- Site B
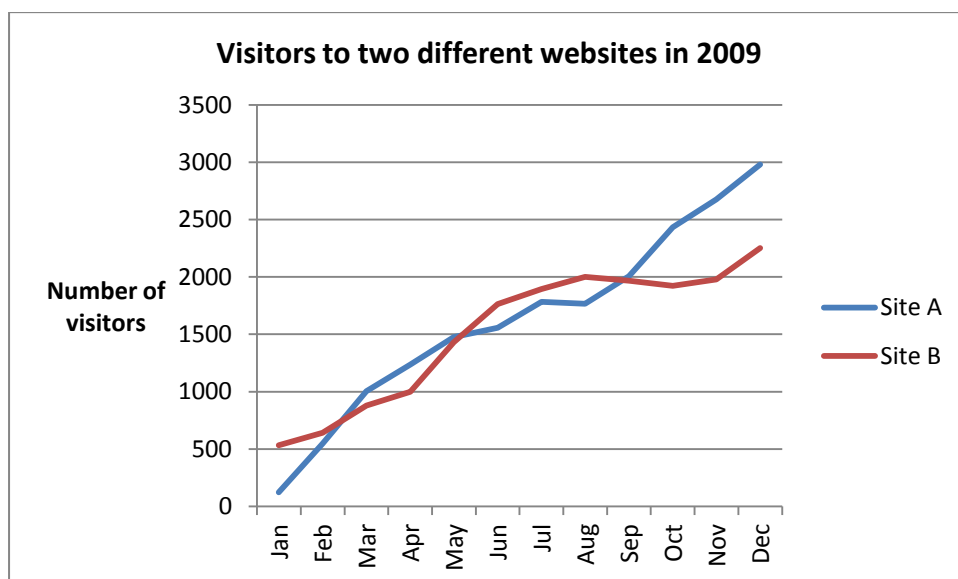
I start my IELTS answer by answering these questions:

1. What does the graph show?
2. What is the overall trend?

The graph shows the number of people who viewed two web pages during 2009. It can be seen that this number increased dramatically from January to December, for both companies.

I then select the most significant data on the chart that I want to write about. I do this by circling various parts of the graph and numbering them. These numbers represent the order I will describe them in my answer, and need to follow each other in a logical order.

See below:

Visitors to two different websites in 2009
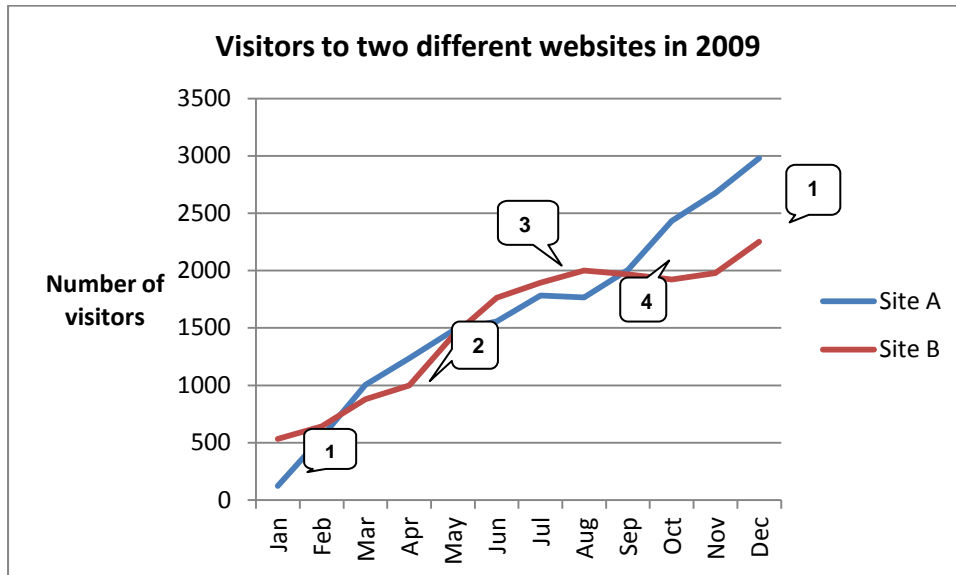
1. This represents the start and finish numbers.
2. Site B starts higher but dips lower than A at this point.
3. Site B is now higher than A again. Growth has levelled off slightly.
4. Site A rapidly increases again but B remains stable.

What's interesting about this chart is that even though both A and B rise, when you compare them, you realize the popularity of each site changes throughout the year. This is the comparison that the examiner is looking for, as well as comparison between the months of the year. So your answer shouldn't include one paragraph about A and one paragraph about B, but it should include a comparison of the two sites throughout the year.

So how do I compare the sites? Like this:

It is interesting to note that at the start of the year both web sites had a far smaller number of visitors than at the end of the year, with site A showing the greatest growth from approximately 100 to 3,000 people. In addition, even though site B started the year ahead, it ended the year considerably lower than the other web page, with around 2,250 hits. This change in popularity also occurred between February and May, although site B recovered its higher position in the following four months. During this period both web sites experienced a period of slower growth. Finally, while the data for B continued to remain fairly stable for the rest of the year, visitors to A's site showed a dramatic increase.

Notice the words and phrases I have highlighted. These all illustrate the various structures and language we can use to compare things.

To finish the answer, I add one more sentence that represents something that I have noticed or realized about this data – this should be clearly seen in the graph, and not something that you imagine.

Overall, it seems that both web sites attracted a lot of visitors, but only site A managed to maintain a consistent growth throughout the year.

 (Total Word count 181)

Comparing data in one chart and with a second chart

Some Task 1 questions may include a second chart with data that is related to the first chart. You must write about both charts, although how much you write about each chart depends on what they show. If you look at the example charts below, the graph and the pie chart show more or less the same amount of information. Therefore, you should represent this in your answer by giving equal importance to both.

Student hours spent in the library according to faculty

## How students allocate their time at university
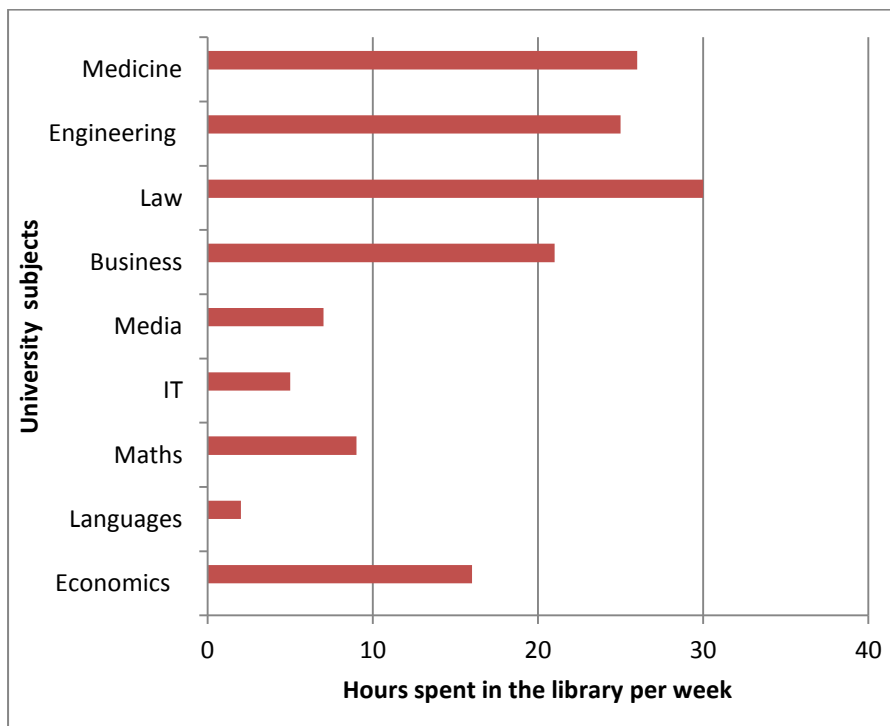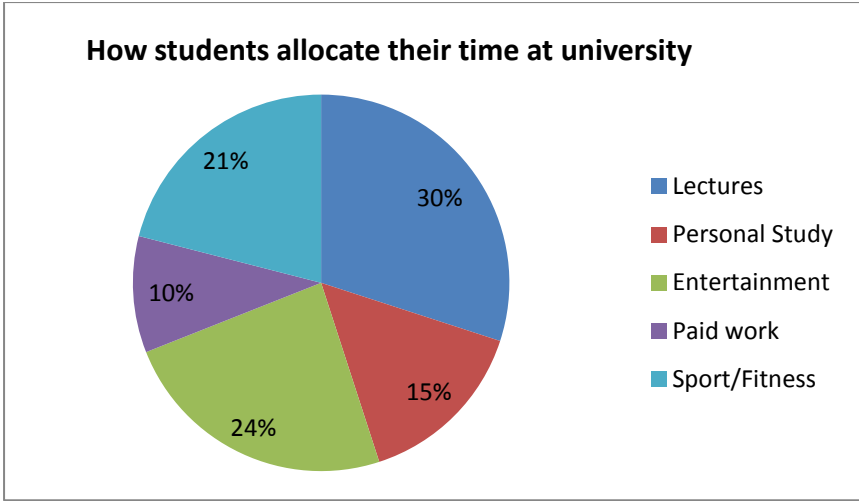
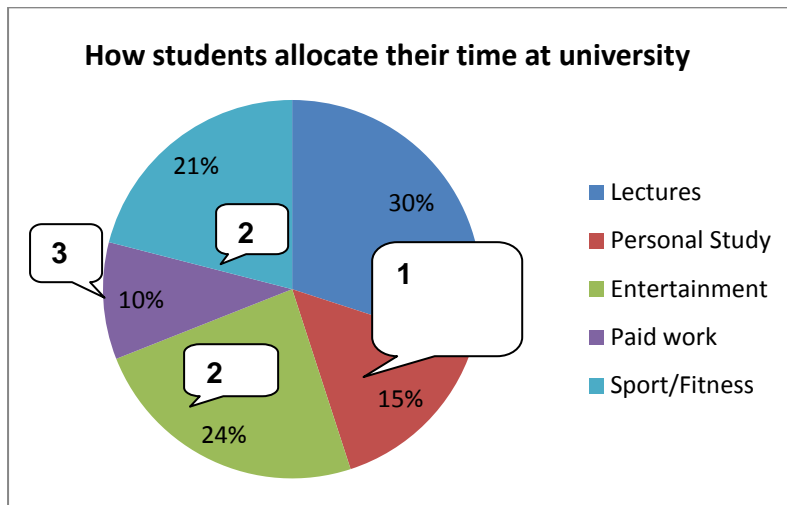As usual, start your answer with the description sentences:

> The two charts illustrate how university students spend their time. The bar graph shows how long students from different faculties work in the library, whereas the pie chart presents information on how all students organise their lives.

As there are two graphs to describe I have decided that I will write my overall sentence for both at the end of my answer. This is a personal choice, and my reason is if I write it at the beginning I feel that my first paragraph is suddenly becoming very long. This also saves me from having to make an overall observation at the end, which is more difficult when there are two charts. You are of course, free to write your overall trend sentence in the first paragraph.

So selecting and grouping data for my answer:
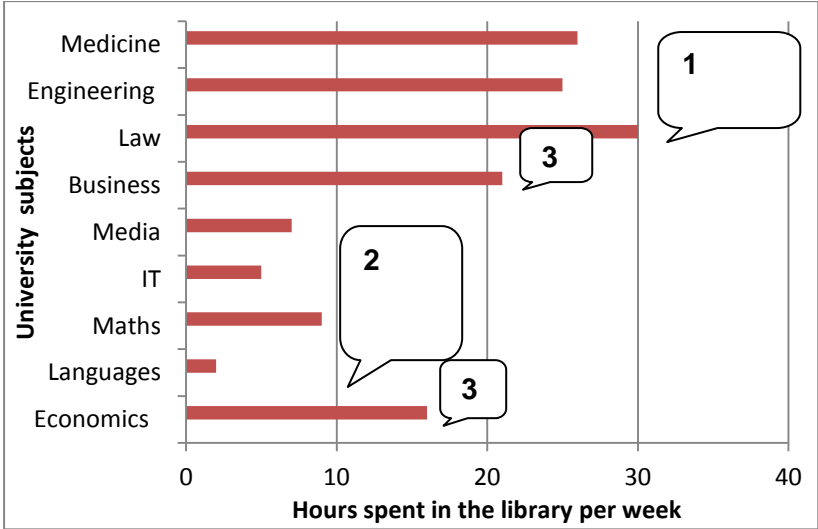
1. Medicine, Engineering and Law
2. Media, IT, Maths and Languages
3. Economics and Business

How students allocate their time at university

21%

3

2

10%

2

1

24%

15%

30%

- Lectures
- Personal Study
- Entertainment
- Paid work
- Sport/Fitness

1. Lectures and Personal study = 45%
2. Entertainment and Sport almost same = 45%
3. Paid work the smallest

With these two charts the data is static and so I have selected and grouped data that is similar. The main part of my answer is as follows:

It is apparent from the bar chart that those students studying traditional university subjects, such as Medicine, Law and Engineering, spend the greatest number of hours (over 20) in the library. In contrast, students from Media and IT faculties, as well as Language and Maths departments, spend less than 10 hours a week in the library. Those who study Business and Economics fall between these two groups.

According to the pie chart, all students spend almost half of their university lives (45%) studying or attending lectures. They spend almost a quarter of their time playing sport and another quarter entertaining themselves, which means they spend as much time enjoying free time activities as studying. The remainder of their time, 10%, is allocated to earning money.

A lot of my comparison in this answer comes from the way I have grouped the data, rather than speaking about each item separately. In addition, I have used some comparative structures and these are highlighted above.

To finish the answer, I include my overall trend sentence:

> *Overall, it can be seen that students spend half of their student lives studying and half having fun. Of the time spent studying, it appears that those following more modern subjects spend less time in the library.*

 (Total Word count 199)

Tables of data

Sometimes you may be presented with numbers in a table, see below:

Jan/Feb	Mar/Apr	May/Jun	Jul/Aug	Sep/Oct	Nov/Dec
3,250	2,988	2,775	2,345	2,124	3,781

You should describe this data in the same way as all the other charts referred to.

However, I find tables a lot harder to describe as the information isn't clear to see. My advice then is to draw a quick chart when you are planning your answer. It doesn't have to be very accurate, and should take no more than a few seconds to complete. Seeing the data in a graph might then help you to describe the overall trend more easily, as well as select the significant data.

However, don't include this personal graph in your answer – your answer must be all writing.

If you'd like more help with your IELTS preparation please visit my website
www.myieltsteacher.com.