

IELTS Academic Writing: Organising Paragraphs

An activity which helps students plan and structure paragraphs so they develop ideas more clearly and coherently. The session can be used for *IELTS* preparation or for more general academic writing skills.

Time required: 60–70 minutes

Additional materials required:

- sample task: One copy for each pair of students, or display on board https://www.ielts.org/PDF/120430_academic_writing_task_2A.pdf
- assessment criteria for Academic Writing Task 2
- Worksheet 1 – one copy for each pair of students (tables 1 and 2 must be cut into strips)
- Worksheet 2 – one copy for each student (folded, where indicated, before the lesson)
- Worksheet 3 – one copy for each student

Aims:

- to enable students to plan in a way that will help them write more cohesive paragraphs
- to improve students' understanding of the requirements of *IELTS* Academic Writing Task 2
- to practise planning and writing well-organised paragraphs

Procedure

1. Write the following questions on the board and ask students to discuss them in pairs for two minutes.

What problems can be caused by having too many cars on the road?

What alternatives to travelling by car could be encouraged?

Do you think it would be a good idea to have international laws to control the number of cars people own and how much people use their cars?

Ask a few students to share their answers in open class.

2. Present the essay question from the **sample task** and ask students to discuss the following questions:

How many points do you need to discuss? (2)

Do you need to present both sides of the discussion for each point? (Yes)

In pairs, ask students to decide on how many paragraphs such an essay would have. Elicit the following on the board:

1. *Introduction.*
 2. *Reasons for encouraging alternative forms.*
 3. *Reasons against encouraging alternative forms.*
 4. *Reasons for introducing international laws.*
 5. *Reasons against introducing international laws.*
 6. *Conclusion.*
3. Give each pair a copy of **Table 1** on **Worksheet 1**, cut into strips and mixed up. Students must work together to reconstruct the paragraph. When they have finished, give them the headings from **Table 2** on **Worksheet 1** and ask them to match them to the sentences – tell them that two of the headings have two sentences each. Hand out the folded version of **Worksheet 2** for feedback and a written record. Elicit what makes this a well-structured paragraph (a clear topic sentence which just says ‘this paragraph is about the advantages of encouraging alternative forms of transport’ (and doesn’t introduce the arguments themselves); clear ordering of ideas; supporting evidence for each main idea; a concluding statement that draws the main ideas together). For more advanced groups you could also draw their attention to the range of structures used in the paragraph.
 4. Ask the students to unfold **Worksheet 2** and look at the grid used for planning the paragraph. Ask students, in pairs, to use the blank grids on **Worksheet 3** to brainstorm their reasons and supporting evidence against encouraging alternative forms of transport. Share some ideas in open class.
 5. Remind students of the six-part structure of the original paragraph then ask them to work in pairs to write up the ideas from their grids as paragraphs, including a topic sentence and a concluding statement. While monitoring you might like to encourage the pairs to use a wider range of linkers than the ‘firstly’ and ‘secondly’ used in the text, but as that is not the focus of this lesson that might be distracting for lower levels.
 6. Join pairs into groups of four. The new groups must compare their paragraphs and choose the best bits of both to create one paragraph they all agree is very well structured. Carry on until you can have 2–3 groups who can share their paragraphs with the whole class and discuss the good features of each one.
 7. Assign pairs/small groups to ‘for’ or ‘against’. Ask each group to plan their paragraph either ‘for international laws’ or ‘against international laws’ using a grid as they did for step 4. Ask ‘for’ groups to compare work with each other and ‘against’ groups to compare with other ‘against’ groups. Then pair each ‘for’ group with an ‘against’ group and have them compare paragraphs.
 8. For homework, students can produce the whole essay complete with introduction and conclusion.

IELTS Academic Writing Task 2 – Sample Task

ACADEMIC WRITING SAMPLE TASK 2A

You should spend about 40 minutes on this task.

Write about the following topic:

The first car appeared on British roads in 1888. By the year 2000 there may be as many as 29 million vehicles on British roads.

Alternative forms of transport should be encouraged and international laws introduced to control car ownership and use.

To what extent do you agree or disagree?

Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your knowledge or experience.

Write at least 250 words.

Academic Writing, organising paragraphs (IELTS Task 2): Worksheet 1

Table 1

Encouraging people to use bicycles or public transport would have many benefits for us as individuals and as a society.
Firstly it would help us to be healthier and happier.
Cycling to work or walking between your home or place of work and the nearest bus stop or train station will help you maintain or even improve your fitness.
They are also less stressful ways of commuting than sitting in a traffic jam and cycling can even help you reduce your stress.
Secondly, these ways of travelling are better for our cities and more environmentally friendly.
If more people cycled or took public transport to work there would be a dramatic reduction in traffic congestion making our cities less stressful places to be.
Less traffic also means less pollution and cleaner air.
Encouraging greater use of cycles and public transport could therefore improve our standard of living through better health and a more pleasant, greener environment.

Table 2

Topic sentence	First reason	Second reason
Concluding statement	Evidence to support the first reason	
Evidence to support the second reason		

Academic Writing, organising paragraphs (IELTS Task 2): Worksheet 2

Example paragraph structure:

Topic sentence	<i>Encouraging people to use bicycles or public transport would have many benefits for us as individuals and as a society.</i>
First reason	Firstly it would help us to be healthier and happier. <i>Cycling to work or walking between your home or place of work and the nearest bus stop or train station will help you maintain or even improve your fitness. They are also less stressful ways of commuting than sitting in a traffic jam and cycling can even help you reduce your stress.</i> Secondly, these ways of travelling are better for our cities and more environmentally friendly. <i>If more people cycled or took public transport to work there would be a dramatic reduction in traffic congestion making our cities less stressful places to be. Less traffic also means less pollution and cleaner air.</i> Encouraging greater use of cycles and public transport could therefore improve our standard of living through better health and a more pleasant, greener environment.
Evidence to support the first reason	
Second reason	
Evidence to support the second reason	
Concluding statement	

..... fold here

Reason	Evidence/supporting arguments
<i>Healthier</i>	<i>cycling, walking to bus stop = fitter less stressful</i>
<i>better for cities + environment</i>	<i>less traffic = nicer cities = less pollution</i>

Academic Writing, organising paragraphs (IELTS Task 2): Worksheet 3

Reason	Evidence/supporting arguments

Reason	Evidence/supporting arguments