How to prepare for IELTS Writing
# How to prepare for IELTS – Writing

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Make sure you have a copy of the [How to prepare for IELTS – FAQs booklet](#) in addition to this booklet.
How to prepare for IELTS – Writing

Details of the Writing Test

Procedure of the test
The writing test is the third test you do on the test day. You have 60 minutes for this test. There are two tasks or parts to do. You will be given a card with the two tasks – one task on each side of the card. You can make notes or write your plans on the card but it will not be seen by the examiner.

You will also be given an answer booklet. You have to write your essays in the answer booklet. Notes are not acceptable and essays under the word limit will be penalized.

The Tasks

Task 1
This task tests your ability to perform one or more of the following functions in English:
- describe and interpret graphic data
- describe the stages of a process or procedure
- describe an object or event or sequence of events
- explain how something works

The question
You are given graphic or pictorial information and you have to write a description of this information.

Bar charts, line graphs, pie charts and tables are most frequently given for this task. However, you could also be given an object or series of pictures or diagrams or a flow chart to describe.

If graphs are used there may be just one – usually a line graph or a bar chart. However, there could also be more than one of the same type of graph or a combination of graphs and charts. For example, you could get a bar chart and a pie chart together (see Cambridge IELTS 1, p.31) or a line graph and a table.
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Length & Timing
You have to write at least 150 words.
You are advised to spend 20 minutes on this task.

Marking
Your performance in Task 1 will be assessed on the criteria below:

Task Achievement
Being able to follow the instructions properly.
Being able to write a clear, accurate and relevant description of the information.
Being able to focus on the important trends presented as graphic information.

Coherence and Cohesion
Being able to organize your writing using a suitable structure.
Using connective words to link sentences and paragraphs logically.

Lexical Resources
Being able to use a wide range of vocabulary naturally.
Being able to spell accurately and using the appropriate word formation.

Grammatical Range and Accuracy
Using the appropriate grammatical structures accurately
Using a variety of sentence structures.
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Task 1 – Bar and line graphs, pie charts & tables

Look at the two examples below.

**Example 1**

You should spend about 20 minutes on this task.

*The chart below shows how primary, secondary and tertiary students in Britain spend their free time.*

*Summarise the information by selecting and reporting the main features, and make comparisons where relevant.*

You should write at least 150 words.

**How students in Britain spend their free time (5 or more hours a week).**
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Example 2

You should spend about 20 minutes on this task.

The pie charts below show incidences of firework injuries in Great Britain in 1984 and 1998.

Summarise the information by selecting and reporting the main features, and make comparisons where relevant.

You should write at least 150 words.

Incidences of firework accidents in 1984.

Incidences of firework accidents in 1998.
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How to do Task 1 – Bar and line graphs, pie charts & tables

- Spend about 5 minutes reading the graph(s) or chart(s) and preparing your answer.
- Make sure you understand what the axis on the graph(s) or the percentages in the pie chart(s) represent.
- Make sure you follow the lines in a line graph correctly and don’t confuse the individual lines if more than one is present. (See Cambridge IELTS 1, p.72 for example).
- Remember there will usually be too much information for you to describe every detail, so you will need to focus on the key information or significant trends.
- If there are two graphs or charts look for ways to compare the data.
- Think about the time period represented and the tense(s) you should be using.
- Think about varying your vocabulary and avoiding repetition by using synonyms. If, for example, the graph refers to job types – interchange ‘job’, ‘occupations’, ‘types of employment/work’ etc.
- Make sure you organize your information clearly. You will need an introductory statement, body and conclusion.
  - Your introduction should introduce the graph(s) by stating what it represents and give an overview to describe what the overall trend is.
  - Your body will need to describe the graph(s) in detail.
  - Your conclusion should include a brief summary your report.
- Don’t copy phrases from the question as this will not be assessed. Use your own words.
- Don’t include information that is not on the graph or in the chart. This may be considered irrelevant and cause you to get a lower mark.
- Don’t take more than 20 minutes over this task.
- Try to write neatly and cross out errors with one line only.
- Leave a couple of minutes to read through what you have written.

Remember
- that you will receive a higher mark if your use a range of structures and vocabulary.
- you are NOT being asked for your opinion on the information, just to report it. An opinion would be considered ‘irrelevant’ for this task.
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Task 1 - Processes or flow charts

Look at the example below.

The following flowchart shows the process students at an English language school go through.

Summarise the information by selecting and reporting the main features, and make comparisons where relevant.

You should write at least 150 words.
How to do Task 1 – Processes and flow charts

- Spend about 5 minutes studying the flow chart or diagram and preparing your answer.
- Make sure you understand what the important stages of the flow chart or diagram are and that you know what order they all come in.
- Find a place to begin and work your way through or around the diagram or chart.
- You will need to include all the stages in your description.
- Make sure you are aware of any stages that happen at the same time as other stages or are alternatives.
- You will probably be using the present simple passive and present simple if you are describing a process.
- Use any notes on the diagram but put them into your own words.
- Think about varying your vocabulary. Use synonyms. If, for example, the diagram describes jobs – interchange ‘jobs’, ‘occupations’, ‘types of employment/work’ etc.
- Make sure you organize your information clearly. You will need an introduction and body for this report. A conclusion is not necessary.
  - Your introduction should introduce the process or flow chart and give an overview to summarize its overall function.
  - Your body will describe the process or flow chart in a logical order.
- For this report you will need to guide the reader with sequence expressions such as ‘first of all’, ‘after that’, ‘at the same time’, ‘concurrently’ etc. (See Holmesglen website downloadable writing booklet p.39).
- Don’t copy phrases from the instructions as this will not be assessed. Use your own words.
- Don’t take more than 20 minutes over this task.
- Try to write neatly and cross out errors with one line only.
- Leave a couple of minutes to read through what you have written.

Remember
- that you will receive a higher mark if your use a range of structures and vocabulary.
- you are NOT being asked for your opinion on the information, just to report it. An opinion would be considered ‘irrelevant’ for this task.
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Task 1 - Objects/how something works

See the example below.

You should spend about 20 minutes on this task.

The diagrams below show how to plumb in a washing machine.

Summarize the information by describing the main features and explaining how a washing machine works.

You should write at least 150 words.

How to do Task 1 – Objects/how something works

- Spend about 5 minutes studying the object and preparing your answer.
- Make sure you understand how the object works. Find the most logical place to begin a description of the object.
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- If you don’t know the precise word to describe part of the object, think of another way of saying it. You are not expected to have technical knowledge.
- Concentrate on significant features.
- You are not being asked for the reasons for the development of the object, just a description of it.
- Think about varying your vocabulary – using synonyms.
- Make sure you organize your information clearly. You will need an introduction and body. A conclusion is not necessary.
  - Begin with a brief description of the structure and function of the object.
  - Then describe step-by-step how it works.
- Remember for this report you will need to guide the reader with sequence expressions such as ‘first of all’, ‘after that’, ‘at the same time’, ‘concurrently’ etc. (See Holmesglen website downloadable writing booklet p.39).
- Don’t copy phrases from the instructions as this will not be assessed. Use your own words.
- Don’t take more than 20 minutes over this task.
- Try to write neatly. Cross out errors with one line only.
- Leave a couple of minutes to read through what you have written.

Remember
- that you will receive a higher mark if your use a range of structures and vocabulary.
- you are NOT being asked for your opinion on the information, just to report it. An opinion would be considered ‘irrelevant’ for this task.

How to prepare for Task 1
- Become familiar with the graph types. See Focus on IELTS, p.33.
- Do lots of practice exercises in describing graphs. See Focus on IELTS, pp.17-18; Insight, pp.67-75 & p.115.
- Practise identifying key information in graphs and charts. See Focus on IELTS, p.101.
- Practise working out what graph axes represent. See Insight into IELTS, pp.70-72.
- Become familiar with a variety of ways to:
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- express percentages
- express numbers & statistical data
- express the key points in a graph or describe trends
- describe increase and decrease
- make comparisons between data.


- Look at the language used for:
  - describing charts (e.g. pie charts). See Preparation & Practice: Writing p.119.
  - describing tables. See Focus on IELTS, pp.67-68;
  - describing a process. See Focus on IELTS, p.83 –85.
  - describing how something works. See Focus on IELTS, p.131.
  - describing and comparing objects. See Focus on IELTS, p.166.
  - writing introductory sentences. See Preparation & Practice: Writing p.121.
  - making reference to graphs/figures. See Helpful Hints, p.56.

- Make sure you know how to use ‘sequencing expressions’ when describing a process. See Focus on IELTS, p.87.

- Think about the topics that could be used for this task. For example, for graphs and tables, information on:
  - Births
  - Crime
  - Deaths
  - Education
  - Environment
  - Heath
  - Leisure
  - Old Age
  - Populations
  - Science & technology
  - Transport
  - Travel & tourism
  - Work
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Practice for Task 1
Books in the SAC
Graphs/tables/charts
Focus on IELTS: p.102, p.117, p.150, p.182
Insight into IELTS: p.116 & p.117
Helpful Hints for IELTS: p.104. p.138, p.150
Cambridge IELTS 1: p.31, p.72
Cambridge IELTS 2: p.27, p.51, p.73, p.95
Cambridge IELTS 3: p.27, p.51, p.73, p.97
Cambridge IELTS 4: p.31, p.54, p.78, p.100
Cambridge IELTS 5: p.29, p.52, p.98
Cambridge IELTS 6: p.30, p.52, p.98
IELTS Foundation: p.69, pp.37-45
IELTS Academic Practice Tests: p.72, p.74, p.76
IELTS to Success: pp. 26-29, p.130, p.132, p.134
Focus on IELTS Practice Tests: p.72, p.74, p.76
Strategies to Success: p.65, p.67

Processes
Focus on IELTS: p.85
Insight into IELTS: p.77
Preparation & Practice – Writing: p.127, p.129
Cambridge IELTS 1: p.51
Cambridge IELTS 6: p.75
IELTS Foundation: p.46
Strategies to Success: p.55

Objects
Focus on IELTS: p.166, p.214
Cambridge IELTS 5: p.75
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Task 2
This task tests your ability to do one or more of the following:
- present and justify opinions
- argue a case
- evaluate and challenge ideas, evidence and argument

The Question
You are given a discussion topic. The question will either present you with an opinion or an argument. You have to discuss the question with two or three main points and supporting detail for each point.

Length & Timing
You have to write at least 250 words.
You are advised to spend 40 minutes on this task.

Marking
Your performance in Task 2 will be assessed on the criteria below:

Task Response
Being able to present a clear position with a logical, well-supported argument.
Being able to support your argument with personal experience and reasons.
Being able to focus on the topic and not include anything irrelevant.

Coherence and Cohesion
Being able to write fluently enough to make your message clear to the reader.
Being able to write cohesive sentences and paragraphs.

Lexical Resource
Being able to use a wide range of vocabulary naturally.
Being able to spell accurately and using the appropriate word formation.

Grammatical Range and Accuracy
Using the appropriate grammatical structures accurately
Using a variety of sentence structures.

This task carries more weight in marking than Task 1. If, for example, you get a 5 in Task 1 and a 6 in this task, you will get a 6 overall.

Task 2 Questions
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Look at the example below.

You should spend about 40 minutes on this task.

*Write about the following topic:*

*A great many countries around the world are losing their cultural identity because of the Internet.*

*To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?*

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

You should write at least 250 words.

**How to do Task 2**

- **Study** the question carefully. The instructions will always start with the sentence ‘Write about the following topic’ and include the sentence beginning ‘Give reasons for your answer’.
- **Underline key points** in the question.
- Make sure you **read all parts of the question**, so you include everything required.
- Quickly **brainstorm the topic**. Think about your point of view. Think about any personal experience you can add.
- Write a **plan**. Decide which points are your main points or **topic sentences**.
- Decide what **supporting details** you have for each main point. You should have at least two main points.
- Make sure you **organise your points** logically.
- You will need an **introductory statement**, **body** and **conclusion**.

The structure for your essay will depend on the type of question. There are two types of argumentative structures. For example:
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Type 1 – Two-sided Argument

Some people think that children get a better education if they study away from home at a boarding school. Others believe it is better for them to stay with their families and attend day school.

Discuss both these points of view and give your opinion.

You could use the argument structure - type 1.

INTRODUCTION
- Opening – general statement introducing the topic.
- Background information.
- * Scope and thesis statement.

* REMEMBER
Your scope tells your reader the main points you will make. Your thesis statement tells the reader your opinion.

BODY PARAGRAPH 1 (Point of View 1)
- Topic sentence/main point
- Supporting sentence 1
- Supporting sentence 2
- Supporting sentence 3

BODY PARAGRAPH 2 (Point of View 2)
- Topic sentence/main point
- Supporting sentence 1
- Supporting sentence 2
- Supporting sentence 3

CONCLUSION
- Restatement of your opinion.
- Summary of your main points.
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Type 2 – One-sided Argument

* Children are spending more time at their computers today than playing with their friends.

To what extent do you agree or disagree?

You could use the argument structure - type 2.

### A – Agree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTRODUCTION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>➢ Opening – general statement introducing the topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Background information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ * Scope and thesis statement of agreement.</td>
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</table>

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>BODY PARAGRAPH 1 (Reason 1 &amp; justification)</th>
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<tr>
<td>➢ Topic sentence/main point</td>
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<td>➢ Supporting sentence 1</td>
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<td>➢ Supporting sentence 2</td>
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<td>➢ Supporting sentence 3</td>
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</table>

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>BODY PARAGRAPH 2 (Reason 2 &amp; justification)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>➢ Topic sentence/main point</td>
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<tr>
<td>➢ Supporting sentence 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>➢ Supporting sentence 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>➢ Supporting sentence 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<tr>
<th>CONCLUSION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>➢ Restatement of your opinion.</td>
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<tr>
<td>➢ Summary of your main points.</td>
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</table>

### B – Disagree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTRODUCTION</th>
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<tr>
<td>➢ Opening – general statement introducing the topic.</td>
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<tr>
<td>➢ Background information.</td>
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<tr>
<td>➢ * Scope and thesis statement of disagreement.</td>
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<tr>
<td>➢ Supporting sentence 3</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>BODY PARAGRAPH 2 (Reason 2 &amp; justification)</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>➢ Topic sentence/main point</td>
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<tr>
<td>➢ Supporting sentence 1</td>
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<td>➢ Supporting sentence 2</td>
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<td>➢ Supporting sentence 3</td>
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<tr>
<th>CONCLUSION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>➢ Restatement of your opinion.</td>
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<td>➢ Summary of your main points.</td>
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### C – Neutral

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTRODUCTION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>➢ Opening – general statement introducing the topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Background information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ * Scope and thesis statement of neutrality.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BODY PARAGRAPH 1 (Reason for agreement &amp; justification)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>➢ Topic sentence/main point</td>
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<tr>
<td>➢ Supporting sentence 1</td>
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<td>➢ Supporting sentence 3</td>
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</table>

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<td>➢ Summary of your main points.</td>
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</table>

* **REMEMBER**

Your **scope** tells your reader the main points you will make. Your **thesis** statement tells the reader your opinion.
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- Remember to link ideas within/between sentences and paragraphs.
- You will receive a higher mark if your use a range of structures and vocabulary.
- Don’t copy from the question as this will not be assessed. Use your own words.
- Don’t take more than 40 minutes over this task.
- Leave at least 5 minutes to check through what you have written.
- You will lose marks if your essay is less than the required number of words.

How to prepare for Task 2
- Look at as many sample questions as you can. Practise underlining the key points and brainstorming the topics, making plans for each one. Gradually reduce the time you allow yourself to do this, so you can do it in under 5 minutes. See all the practice books and web sites for sample questions. Lots of them have sample answers as well.
- Look at the language used:
  - for making paragraphs and sentences cohesive (linking your ideas within and between sentences and paragraphs). For example, logical links that show addition (as well as, in addition) or contrast (whereas, on the other hand). See Focus on IELTS, p.21-22, Helpful Hints for IELTS, p.54
  - for expressing views. For example, ‘I believe that …’ ‘I would argue that …’. See Insight into IELTS, p.88.
  - for making contrasts and concessions. For example, ‘Despite the fact that …’. See Insight into IELTS, p.88 & Focus on IELTS, p.100
  - for refuting an argument. For example, ‘There is little evidence to support the …’ See Insight into IELTS, p.89
  - for giving opposing arguments. See Helpful Hints for IELTS, p.71.
  - for providing support to your main points. For example, ‘In my experience …’ or ‘A good example of this is …’. See Insight into IELTS, p.92
  - in conclusions. For example, ‘In conclusion ..’ or ‘On balance…’. See Focus on IELTS, p.120, Helpful Hints, p.71.
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• **Think about the topics** that could be used for this task. *For example,*
  Technology
  Crime
  Tourism
  Transport
  Education
  Population
  Media
  Health
  Society

• **Brainstorm the topics** for possible questions.

• **Write as many timed essays as possible.** Do the ones that have sample and model answers in the books in the SAC.

**Practice for Task 2**

**Books in the SAC**
- Cambridge IELTS 1: p.32, p.52, p.73 (p.73 inc. model answer)
- Cambridge IELTS 2: p.28, p.52, p.74, p.96 (all inc. model answers)
- Cambridge IELTS 3: p.28, p.52, p.74, p.98 (all inc. model answers)
- Cambridge IELTS 7: p.31, p.54, p.79, p.102
- Focus on IELTS Practice tests: p.73, p.75, p.77
- IELTS Foundation: p.69, pp.47-53
- IELTS Aptitude Tests: p.73, p.75, pp.77
- Action Plan for IELTS: pp.70-77, p. 105

**Online Materials**

[www.cambridgeesol.org](http://www.cambridgeesol.org)
This is the official IELTS website. It offers tips & advice plus practice exercises.
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http://www.writefix.com/index.html This page has sample questions for argumentative essays as well as information on describing graphs.

http://adw.hct.ac.ae/site_ilc/sites_ielts/graphsite/index.htm This page has a lot of visual information on describing graphs.

http://www.ielts-exam.net/index.php?option=com_frontpage&Itemid=1 From the homepage, go to the IELTS writing links. There are many videos here to give you help on the writing tests.

http://hkcityu.netlanguages.com/ This site provides an excellent introduction to the IELTS exam. There is also information, tips and practice exercises, plus a complete IELTS test can be completed online.

Road to IELTS. Access through the ELC Activities and Self Study Page: http://www.cityu.edu.hk/ELC/study_preparation.html enter the site with your cityu login information. This page gives you hints and tips on the test based on 12 recurrent themes.

General tips for Writing

Before the exam
- Practise writing answers to the tasks in the time allowed, especially if you haven’t written at speed by hand for a while.
- Keep up-to-date with current affairs.

During the exam
- Use a pen. It should be easier to write faster with a pen.
- Make sure you have a checklist in mind for editing your writing at the end. Make one up now with the errors you know you make. For example,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have I ....</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✓ written enough words?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ dealt with all parts of the question?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ added ‘s’ to all the 3rd person singular verbs in the present simple?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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✓ used the correct articles (a, an or the)?
✓ added ‘s’ to all the countable nouns I have used in the plural?
✓ used the correct prepositions?
✓ used the correct tenses?
✓ used a variety of sentence structures?
✓ used a variety of vocabulary?
✓ used a variety of connective words?