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In response to the growing popularity of IELTS the Taipei Times, in conjunction with the British Council, brings our readers an IELTS preparation page which will run every Saturday on p14 of the Taipei Times. Each week will focus on a different area of the test. IELTS, the International English Language Testing System, is an upper-intermediate test of English communication. It can be used for university entry and emigration around the English-speaking world and beyond. It measures your ability to communicate across the four language skills — reading, writing, listening and speaking — through authentic challenging tasks. With over 700,000 people taking IELTS annually, it is one of the fastest growing English tests in the world, trusted and accepted by over 4,000 organisations and faculties worldwide, and is a great alternative to TOEFL.

IELTS writing task 1: describing charts and graphs

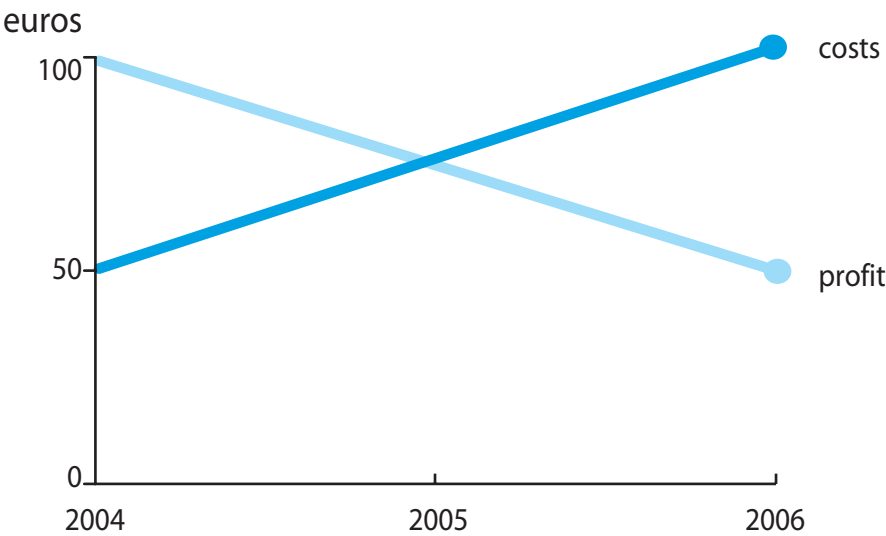
The visual data you have to describe could be a pie chart, flow chart, diagram or graph. Your description should be around 150 words long, and you should aim to spend no longer than 20 minutes on it.

Writing tips

- Carefully analyse the table or chart before you start writing. What are the topics and the time frame? What do the numbers and labels represent?
- Be clear about what you are describing: A number? A percentage? A price?
- Start by describing the overall situation.
- DO NOT describe every single detail. Find important trends. Select examples that represent the overall picture.
- Try not to keep repeating the same language and sentence structures.
- DO NOT describe the reasons or give your opinions — stick to the facts.
- Finish with a concluding sentence summarising what we learn from the chart.

Describing change and making comparisons

In a previous week we looked at key language to describe change through time and to make comparisons. Look at the first chart and complete the sentences describing the data.



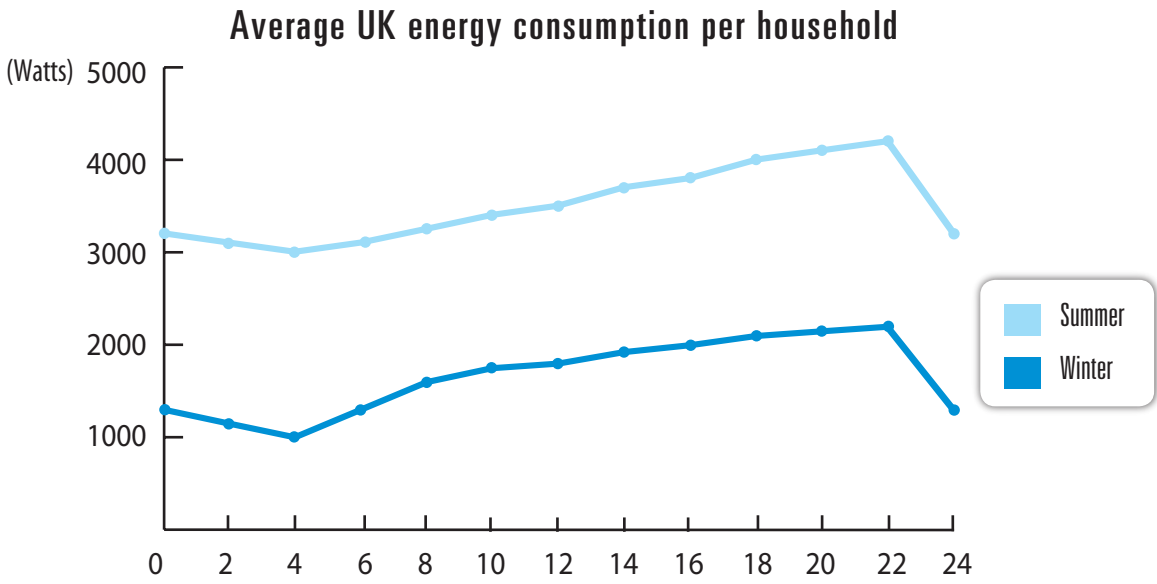
Between 2004 and 2006, costs (1) _____ dramatically, (2) _____ 50 euros to 100 euros.

There was a sharp (3) _____ in profit, which fell from 100 euros to 50 euros over the same (4) _____.

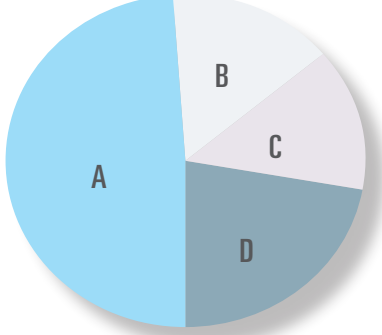
By 2006, costs were (5) _____ as high as profit.

Spotting important trends and making connections

Often you will be asked to describe and compare information from more than one chart. When you do this it is important to analyse any connections between the data that is presented. Look at the second set of graphs, and then read the first sample answer.



Electricity usage in the home



- A) heating and hot water 49%
- B) kitchen 15%
- C) washing and drying 14%
- D) other uses 22%

WRITING TASK 1

Sample answer one

The two graphs show energy consumption in the UK. The first chart shows energy consumption throughout the entire day in households in the winter and summer. In the winter, energy consumption is about 3200 watts at midnight. Over the next four hours it falls about 200 watts and then rises to a high point of 4200 watts at about 10pm. Consumption then falls dramatically back to 3200 watts at midnight.

In the summer, energy consumption is about 1300 watts at midnight. It falls to 1000 watts at 4am and rises dramatically to 1600 watts at 8am. It then rises slowly to a peak of 2200 watts at 10pm.

If we look at the pie chart, we can see that heating and hot water use 49 percent of household electricity. Another 15 percent of electricity is used in the kitchen, washing and drying account for 14 percent of usage and 22 percent of electricity is used for other things.

In conclusion, we can see that people in the UK use a lot of electricity in the home.

176 words

This answer describes all the data, but the writer has failed to highlight the key points or make any conclusions. Also, by repeating numbers and keywords from the graphs, the writer hasn't shown that he or she understands what the data means. Before you write, you need to analyse the data.

- In the line graph, what is the main difference between winter and summer usage?
- What similarities are there throughout the day at the two times of the year?
- What uses more electricity in the home than anything else?
- What is the connection between the data in the two graphs?



PHOTOS: MICHAEL KEARNEY, TAIPEI TIMES



Now read sample answer two. Does it answer all these questions?

Sample answer two

The two graphs show information about energy consumption at different times of the year and how energy is used in British homes.

Overall, we can see that energy consumption is far higher in the winter than in the summer, ranging from about 3000 to over 4000 watts. In the summer, consumption is roughly 2000 watts lower, fluctuating between about 1000 and just over 2000 watts. Interestingly, we can see that the daily pattern of consumption is similar at both times of the year, with a low point at around four in the morning and a high point at around 10pm, with a similar rise in consumption throughout the day.

Turning to the pie chart, we can see that heating and hot water account for almost half of all home consumption. Kitchen usage, washing and drying and other uses of electricity each account for about one sixth of energy usage in the home.

Comparing the two graphs, it seems very clear that winter usage is higher because of the cold weather and increased use of heating at that time of year. People also possibly prefer outdoor activities during the summer months.

190 words

Answers

1. Increased/rose
2. from
3. drop/decrease/fall
4. period/time span
5. twice
6. Winter usage is much higher.
7. Energy consumption follows a similar pattern throughout the day and peaks at about the same time.
8. Heating and hot water.
9. More energy is used in the winter because of the need for heating at that time of the year.