

Study Skills: Writing

How much do you know about the IELTS Academic Writing module?
Do the quiz below to find out.

Quiz

- How long is the Writing module?
A 90 minutes B 60 minutes
C 50 minutes
- Complete the table.

	How long should you spend on this task?	Minimum number of words
Task 1		
Task 2		
- In Task 1 what do you have to do?
A present your opinions
B describe facts and data
C write a story
- In Task 1 what do you have to write?
A a report for a university lecturer
B an informal letter to a friend
C a description of an event
- In Task 2 what do you have to do?
A present and justify your opinions
B describe a historical event
C compare and contrast photographs
- In Task 2 what do you have to write?
A a report
B a formal letter to a company
C an essay or composition

Writing Task 1

In Task 1 you will be asked to describe visual data, for example a chart, graph or table in at least 150 words.

Skills development

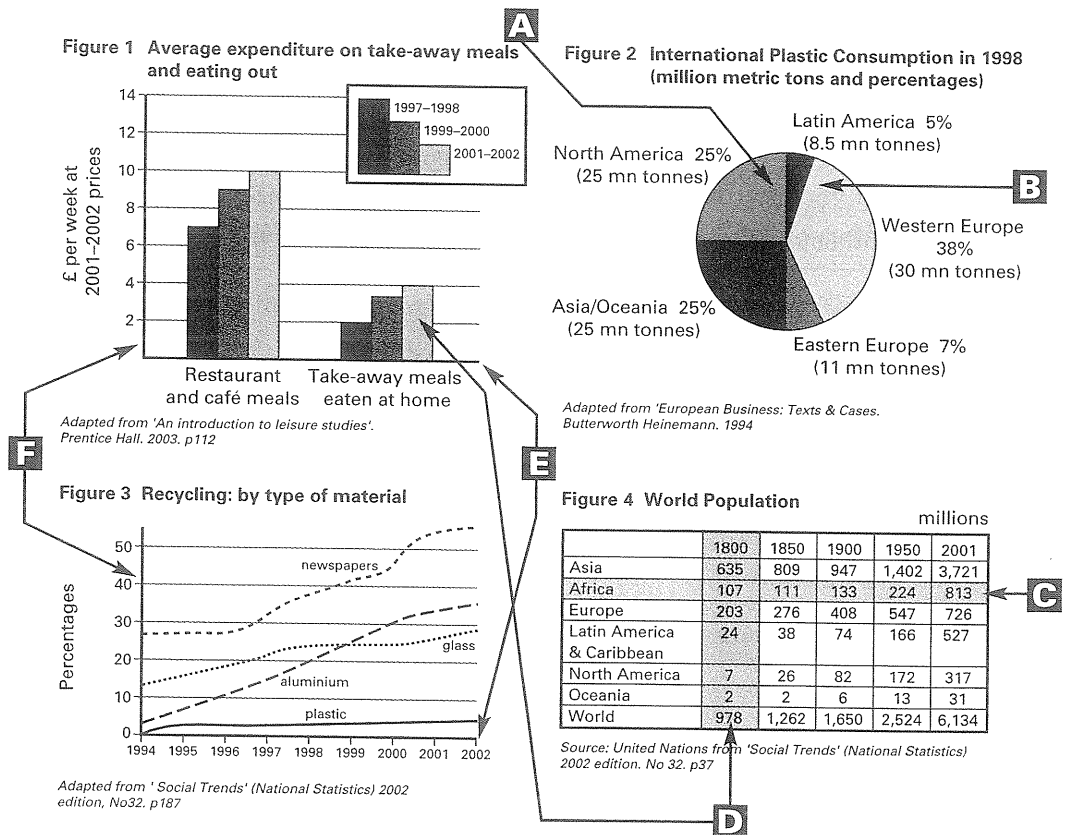
Understanding data

1 Look at the figures 1–4 and identify which one is:

- a line graph
- a bar chart
- a table
- a pie chart

2 Look at labels A–F and identify:

- vertical axes
- horizontal axes
- columns
- a row
- a segment showing a quarter
- a segment showing just over a third



3 Which figure 1–4 tells you about:

- 1 the amount of plastic used?
- 2 the number of people living in different continents?
- 3 the percentage of waste materials recycled?
- 4 eating habits?

4 Look at figures 1–4 again and find the answers to these questions.

- Figure 1 1 What type of eating was most popular in 2001?
2 What do the figures on the vertical axis represent?
- Figure 2 1 Which area consumed the most plastic in 1998?
2 How much plastic did Eastern Europe consume?
- Figure 3 1 What period of time is shown on this graph?
2 Which materials were recycled most in 2002?
- Figure 4 1 What does the column on the left refer to?
2 What does the row at the bottom refer to?

Language focus: Expressing figures and quantities

1 Now complete these sentences. Refer to figures 1–4.

- 1 On average, between 1997 and 1998 about per week was spent on eating at restaurants and cafés compared to about on takeaways.
- 2 Latin America consumed the least amount of plastic in at million tonnes.
- 3 Aluminium recycling increased steadily from about in 1994 to well over in 2002.
- 4 In 1800 approximately million people lived in North America but in 2001 this figure had risen to million.

exactly the same
much more very little
more than trebled
half as much a quarter
twice as many
slightly more

2 Complete the sentences below with a phrase from the box. Refer to figures 1–4.

- 1 Europe's population from 1800 to 2001.
- 2 Oceania had over people in 1950 as it did in 1900.
- 3 In 1999, the percentage of glass and aluminium recycled was
- 4 plastic was recycled in 1994.
- 5 In 1998, both North America and Asia/Oceania consumed of the world's plastic.
- 6 Eastern Europe consumed plastic than Latin America.
- 7 money was spent on takeaway meals in 1997–1998 as it was in 2001–2002.
- 8 In 2001–2002, money was spent on eating in restaurants and cafés than on eating takeaways at home.

Remember

- Take time to read and understand the title of the diagram.
- Check you understand what the vertical and horizontal axes represent.
- Be careful to describe the data correctly.
- Compare and contrast figures in different ways.

Remember

- Don't copy the title of the diagram. Instead, write a comment about the general trends shown.
- Stick to the information provided in the diagram.
- Specific details are not needed in the opening statement.

The opening statement

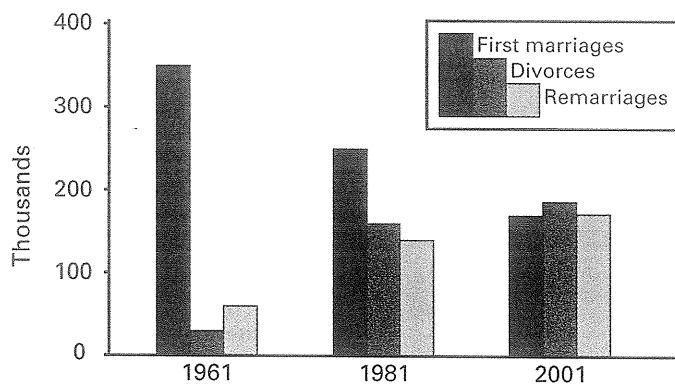
Here is a simple outline of a Task 1 answer:

- opening statement
- general information and most significant trends
- more specific information and evidence of significant trends

It is important that the first sentence of your answer shows that you understand the information shown in the diagram(s).

1 Look at the bar chart. Which of the sentences A–D below is the most appropriate opening sentence? Why?

Marriages and Divorces in the United Kingdom



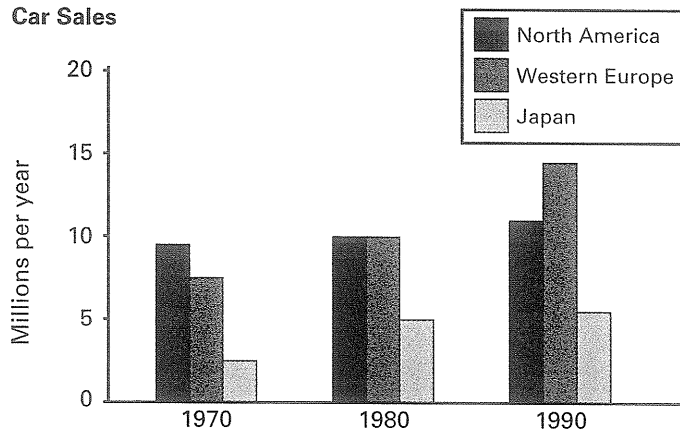
Adapted from 'Social Trends' (National Statistics) 2002 edition. No 32. p43

- A This bar chart shows the number of marriages and divorces in the UK.
- B This bar chart proves that weddings are not as popular as they used to be and people often get married when they are older.
- C The chart shows that the number of first marriages decreased in the period 1961–2001, while figures for divorces and remarriages increased.
- D The chart clearly illustrates that the number of first marriages has risen and the number of divorces is at a similar level.

2 Sometimes Task 1 requires you to write a report about two diagrams. In this case you need to write an opening statement which comments on both sets of data.

1 Which of the statements below is most appropriate for the bar chart?

Car Sales



Source: *Car Sales from European Business: Texts & Cases*. Butterworth Heinemann. 1994.

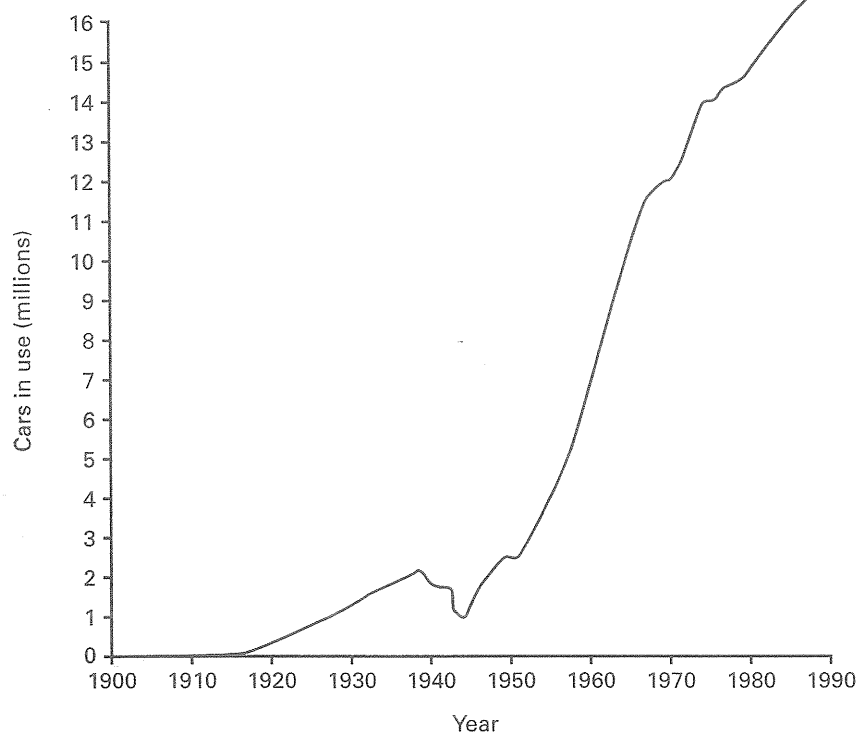
- A In general car sales have increased since 1970.
- B Car sales in North America, Western Europe and Japan are different.

Remember

- Your opening statement should include information about the main trend(s) shown in the diagram, eg *increase in car sales since 1970*.
- If there is more than one diagram, you should include any other important information, eg *number of car owners has increased dramatically since 1900*.

- 2 Which of the statements below is most appropriate for the line graph?
- A Over 15 million people were using cars in 1990.
B From 1900 to 1990 the number of car owners dramatically increased.

Growth in car ownership in the UK 1900–1990



Adapted from 'An introduction to leisure studies.' Prentice Hall, 2003, p20

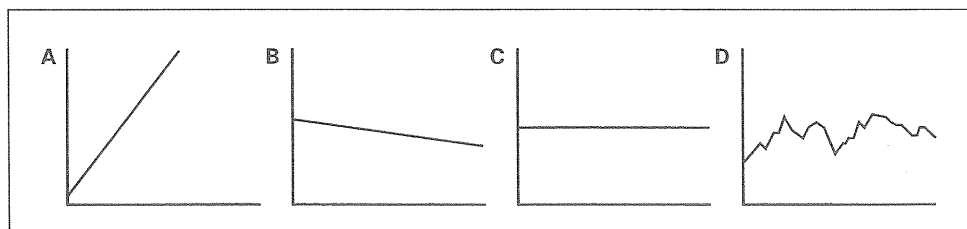
- 3 Now find the best way to combine the two sentences you chose in exercise 2 in an opening statement.

Language focus: Describing change over a period of time

The main aim of Writing Task 1 is to describe information shown in diagrams.

- 1 Look at the diagrams below. Match the phrases to the appropriate diagram.

increased sharply fluctuated fell gradually remained stable



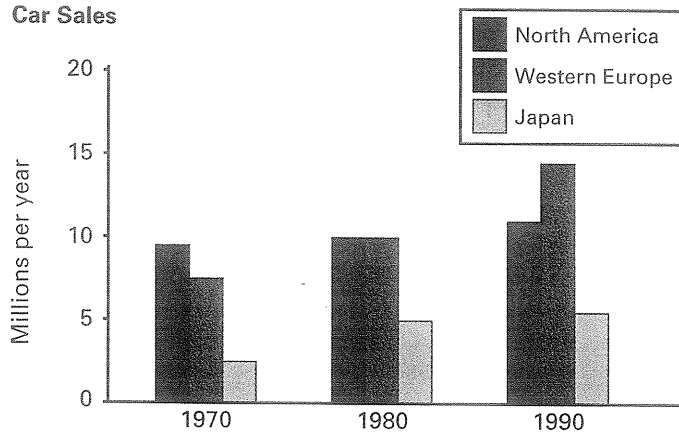
- 2 Look at the phrases below. Match them to the phrases in exercise 1. Not all of the phrases will match.

Example: *sharp increase* – sharp rise

reached a peak rose dramatically decreased steadily varied
stayed the same increased gradually fell slightly

3 Read the paragraph below which describes the bar chart. Underline the verbs and say why each tense is used.

The bar chart shows that sales of cars rose most significantly in Western Europe where the number almost doubled from about 7.5 million per year in 1970 to nearly 15 million in 1990. More cars were sold in this area than anywhere else.



Source: Car Sales from *European Business: Texts & Cases*. Butterworth Heinemann, 1994.

4 Choose the best alternative from the words in *italics*.

In Japan there was a (1) *same/similar* trend in that sales (2) *doubled/increased two times* between 1970 and 1980 from 2.5 to 5 million. However, over the next ten years the number of cars sold (3) *remained stable/stayed the same*. North America had the (4) *tallest/highest* sales (5) *figures/numbers* in 1970 (about 9 million) but there was only (6) *a little/slight* increase to just over 10 million over the next 20 years.

5 Read the text and complete the gaps with an appropriate word or phrase from the box.

sharp fall rise increased rose steadily remained stable
 increased dramatically

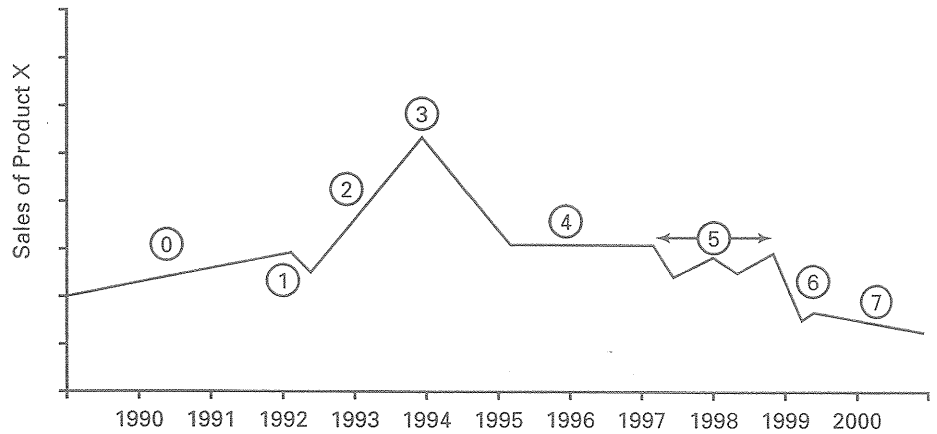
The line graph shows that the number of car owners in the UK (1) from less than 1 million in the early 1900s to over 15 million in 1990. In the first quarter of the century sales (2) but in the 1940s there was a (3) probably because of the Second World War. From the 1950s onwards the amount of car users (4) from nearly 3 million to about 14 million in the mid 1970s. At this time, sales (5) for a short time before rising sharply again. Car sales and the number of cars in use have both increased significantly in these periods and it is likely that these figures will continue to (6) in the future.

6 Look at the line graph below and complete the gaps using an appropriate phrase to describe the changes shown.

Remember

- The language you use must reflect the diagram and data you are describing, eg are you talking about a *sharp* or *gradual* fall?

Describing change

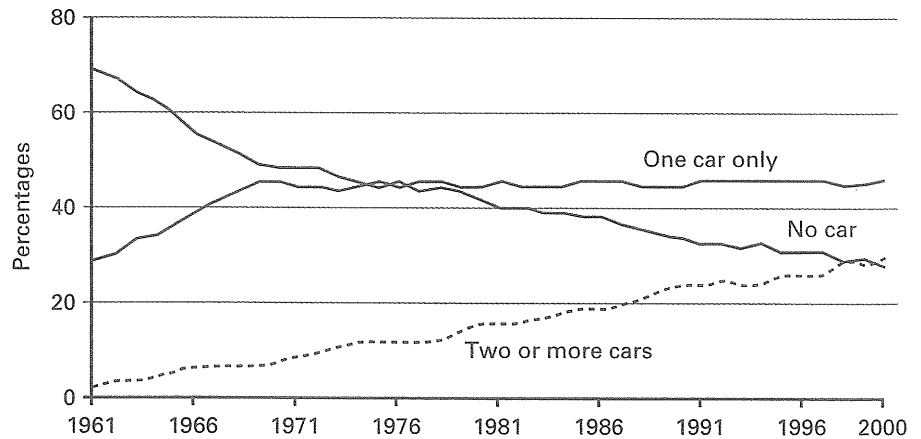


- 0 A steady increase/gradual rise..... in sales.
Sales increased steadily/rose gradually....
- 1 A in sales.
Sales
- 2 A in sales.
Sales
- 3 Sales in 1993.
- 4 Sales
- 5 Sales
- 6 A in sales.
Sales
- 7 A in sales.
Sales

Skills practice

Study the diagram. Then write four sentences to describe the information shown.

Households with regular use of a car in Great Britain



Source: National Travel Survey, Department for Transport

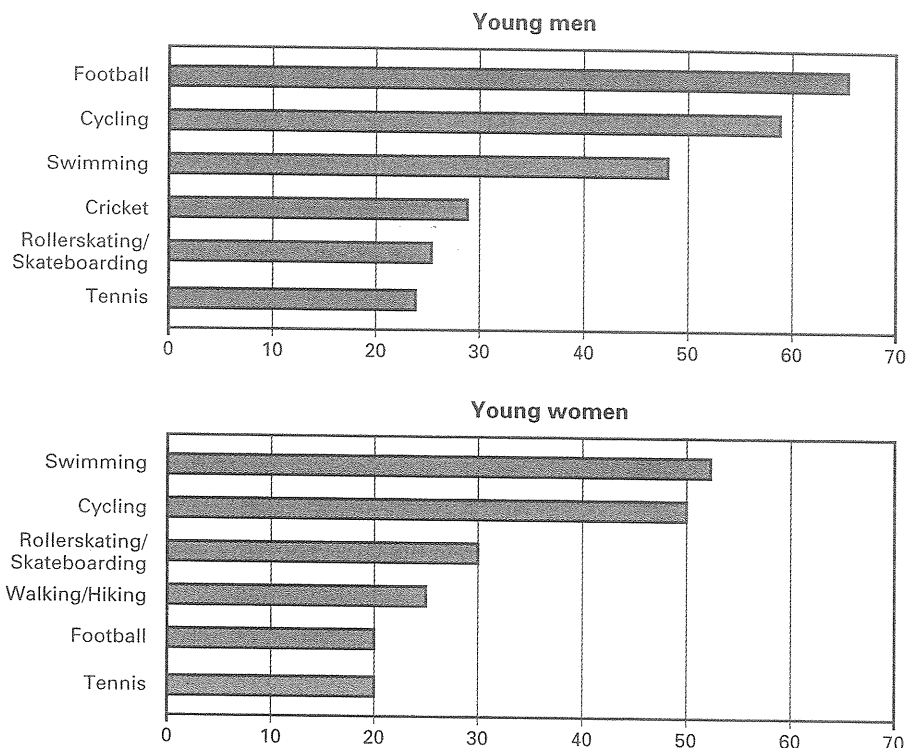
Remember

- You do not need to include all the details of the diagrams.
- Group key information in a logical, relevant way.
- Back up your statements with specific data from the diagram.

Skills development**Selecting and grouping key information**

1 Study the bar charts. Then read the six statements A–F below. Choose the three statements that best represent the most important information from the charts.

Most popular sports participated in by young people in England in 1999



Source: Sport England-Young People and sports in England (Morisocial Research)
Adapted from 'Social Trends' 2002 edition. No 32, p215

- A** Swimming is the most popular sport for young women.
B The same number of young women (20) said they liked football and tennis.
C Fewer than 30 young men interviewed play cricket.
D Cycling is nearly as popular as swimming for young women.
E Football is the most popular sport for young men.
F Rollerskating/skateboarding are the third most popular sports for young women.

2 Look at the bar charts above again. Read the six statements A–F below and choose the three that best show how to group key information from both charts.

- A** Young men and women both play tennis.
B Cycling and swimming are very popular sports for young men and women.
C 30 young women and 25 young men interviewed participate in rollerskating or skateboarding.
D Playing football is the most popular sport for young men, but is the least popular for young women (with tennis) of those shown on the chart.
E Swimming is more popular with young women than young men, whereas the opposite is true of cycling.
F Cricket is popular with young men, whereas hiking and walking are popular with young women.

3 Now read parts of three sample answers for the bar charts in exercise 1. Which do you think is the best answer and why?

- A** Football is the most popular sport for young men (64), but the least popular (with tennis) for young women (20). Cycling is the second most popular sport for young men (58) and women (50). Swimming is the third most popular sport for young men (48) and the most popular for young women (52). Tennis is the least most popular sport for young men (23) and women (20).
- B** The charts clearly show that playing football was the most popular sporting activity for young men (over 60 chose this), whereas young women prefer swimming. It is also evident that cycling and swimming are popular with both sexes. For young men cycling is far more popular than swimming (58 compared to 48), while slightly more young women swim than cycle (52 to 50). Although young men prefer football to any other sport, for young women it was the least popular sporting activity (with tennis) of those shown in the charts.
- C** First of all, number of young men play football are 3 times more than young women. And number of young men and young woman like to swimming are similar, just around six young woman more than young men. Secondly, number of young men like to cycling are approximate nine young men more than young woman which is nearly 50.

Remember

Include a range of different expressions to compare or contrast data in your answer.

Language focus: Expressing comparison and contrast

Find six examples of language which compares or contrasts the data shown in the charts from the best sample answer.

Skills practice

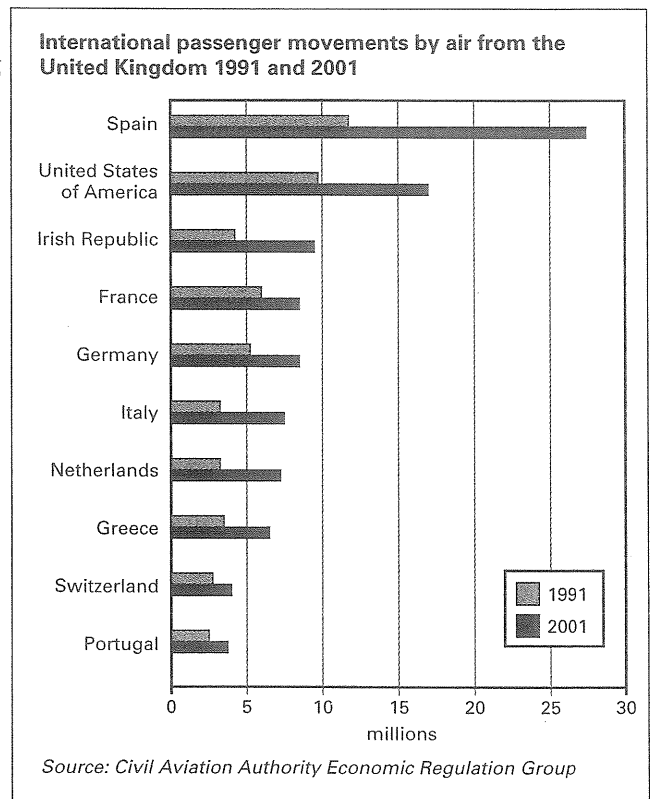
1 Look at the chart showing statistics for UK passengers travelling to other countries and answer the questions below.

- 1 What does this bar chart show?
- 2 What does the vertical axis represent?
- 3 What does the horizontal axis represent?
- 4 What do each of the shaded columns represent?
- 5 What are the most significant features in this diagram?

2 Read and comment on the sample answer below.

Consider:

- important information
- length
- style



From the bar charts it's easy to see increasing of the international passengers movements by air in 1991 and 2001. Ten countries had been researched and we can see that passenger movements by air are much higher in 2001 than 1991.

Spain passengers occupy the most frequent movements in 1991, the second most frequently movements are taken by USA passengers, the third is by France passengers. By 2001 in some case, the increasing is more than 100% such as Spain, USA and Irish Republic. Also in some countries, it was slight increased such as Switzerland and Portugal.

The data also shows that the international passenger movements by air in Spain and USA is 3 or 4 times higher than others both in 1991 and 2001. In the ten years, it has been increased a lot.

3 Check and correct the grammar, vocabulary and spelling.

Skills development

Describing a process

Read the statements below. They describe the different stages in the enrolment procedure for a person who wants to do an English course at a language school or college.

- The student pays the fees for the course.
- The student's details are put on the computer.
- The student goes to the institution and completes a placement test.
- The student has now enrolled and is given a student card.
- The student is placed in a class at the appropriate level.
- The student contacts the institution about the English course.
- The student is interviewed by an experienced teacher.
- The necessary forms are completed.

- 1** Which are the first and final stages of this process.
- 2** Number the sentences in a logical order.
- 3** Underline the verbs in each sentence. Are they active or passive? Which tenses are used?
- 4** Choose the best introduction for this enrolment procedure from A–C.
 - A The procedure for this activity is as follows:
 - B The procedure for improving your English at a language school or college is as follows:
 - C The procedure for enrolling for an English course at a language school or college is as follows:

Remember

- Decide whether the process has a start or end point or if it is a cycle (a continuous process such as blood circulation in the body).
- Write an introductory statement about the process you are describing.
- Write your description in a logical order by following the picture and using the vocabulary provided.
- Include linking words to help sequence your description.

5 Choose an appropriate linking word and verb to complete each part of this description of an everyday activity.

after a few minutes then after that finally next ~~first of all~~

add pour ~~boil~~ drink put take out

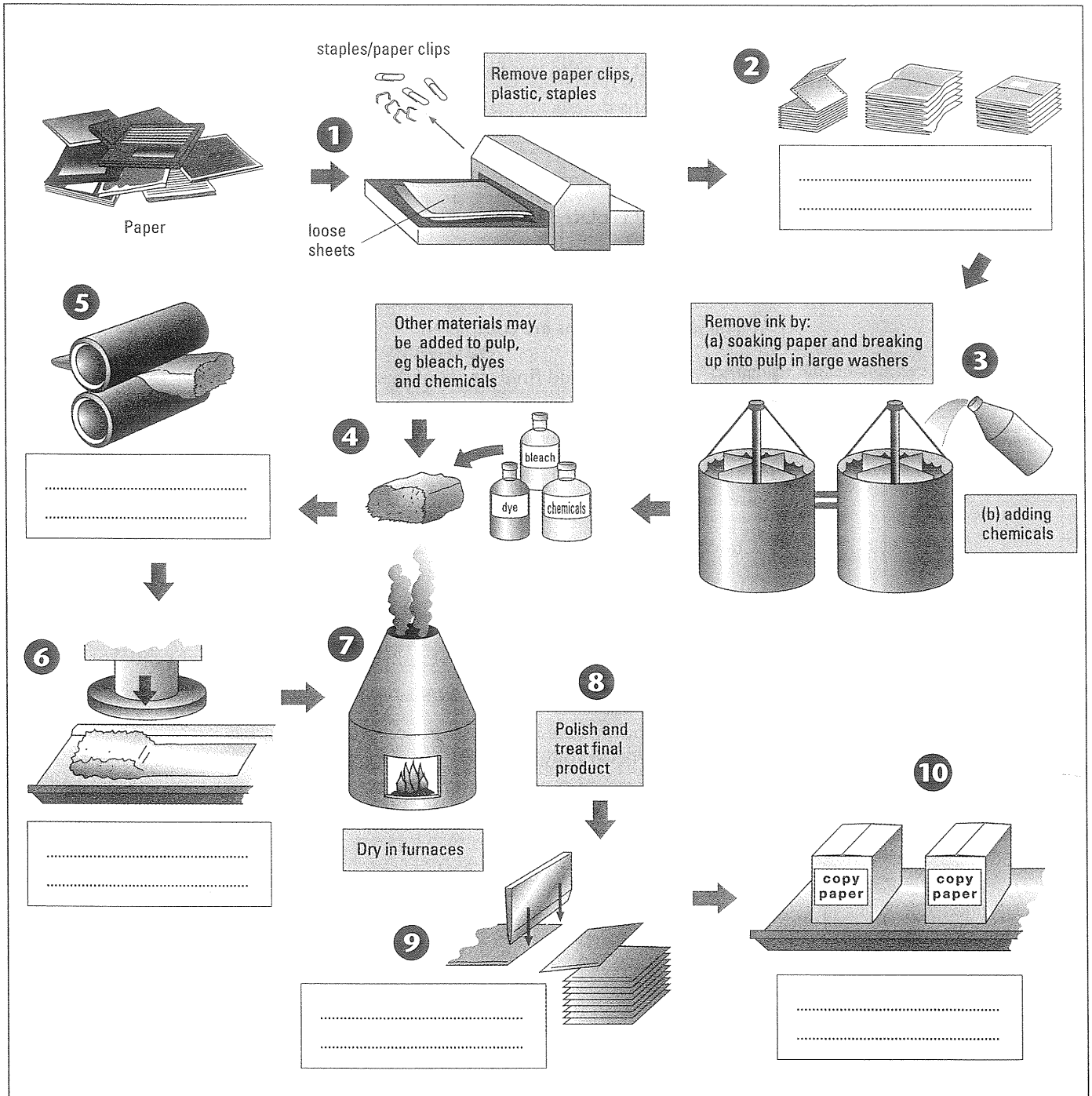
- 0 *first of all boil*..... the water.
- 1 a teabag into a cup.
- 2 the boiling water into the cup.
- 3 the teabag.
- 4 some milk and sugar and stir.
- 5 the tea.

6 Now add appropriate sequencing words to the sentences in exercise 1 to give the passage more cohesion, eg *first of all, then, finally*, etc.

Skills practice

1 Look at the diagram below about how waste paper is recycled to make better quality paper. Complete the diagram by matching each of the phrases below to a particular stage in the process.

- a Package product for distribution to customer
- b Pass through heavy roller → squeeze out water
- c Press and flatten into thin sheets
- d cut into sheets or rolls
- e sort into categories, eg newspapers, computer paper and magazines



2 Now write a description of the process. Use an appropriate tense, use the passive form where necessary, and add appropriate linking words.