

1. IELTS Grammar: some typical mistakes

Some people believe that, all police officers should carry a gun. While, others disagree with this idea, and argue that it is intimidating to see armed police officers on the streets. From my view, the advantages of police officers carrying guns have outweighed the disadvantages. Because the police need to be able to protect both themselves and the general public.

CORRECT ANSWERS:

1. 'Some people believe that all...' (no comma after "that")
2. '... should carry a gun, while...' (don't begin a sentence with "While," - use "while" after a comma to link contrasting ideas in the same sentence)
3. 'In my view' OR 'From my point of view' (not "From my view")
4. 'the advantages of police officers carrying guns OUTWEIGH the disadvantages' ("outweigh" NOT "have outweighed")
5. '... the disadvantages because...' ("because" is used to connect ideas in the SAME sentence. You don't need a comma before "because")

2. IELTS Grammar: before or ago?

Use "past time + ago"

- 10 years ago, a long time ago, a few weeks ago, a couple of days ago

Use "before + action / event"

- before you left, before we start, before lunch

Don't use "before + past time" (~~before two weeks, before three days~~)

3. IELTS Grammar: linking with "this"

Look at the following examples:

- Nowadays, people can use the Internet, fax and mobile phones to work from home. In **this** way, people who do not have access to transport can find employment.
- Most products are built to last only a short time, and **this** creates a "throw-away" culture.
- A global economy means free trade between countries. **This** can strengthen political relationships.

4. IELTS Grammar: because

Students often make mistakes when using the word "because". You can't use "because" to connect ideas in two separate sentences. Put both the main idea and the reason in the same sentence.

Which sentence is NOT correct?

1. Some children behave badly at school because their parents are too lenient at home.
2. Because parents are often too lenient at home, discipline in schools is becoming more difficult to enforce.
3. Children's behaviour is getting worse nowadays. Because parents are not strict enough.

Sentence 3 should be written as one sentence with no stop or comma:

"Children's behaviour is getting worse nowadays because parents are not strict enough".

5. IELTS Grammar: 'because of'

Compare these two sentences:

- I stayed at home **because** the weather **was** bad.
- I stayed at home **because of** the bad weather.

The important difference is the use of the word 'was' in the first sentence. After 'because', you need a subject and a verb (e.g. the weather was). After 'because of', we don't use a verb, only a noun, nouns or noun phrase.

Find 5 common mistakes in the paragraph below:

Don't say: I came to Manchester before two weeks.

Do say: I came to Manchester two weeks ago.

All students learn to link ideas using words like "however", "furthermore" etc. Most students don't realise that the word "this" is also a linking word.

The word "this" refers to **the sentence or idea that came before**. "This" helps you to **link ideas and avoid repetition**. Native speakers and good writers use "this" a lot, and **the IELTS examiner will be impressed if you can use it**.

Last week I looked at how to use the word 'because'. One of my students then asked me to explain the difference between 'because' and 'because of'.

6. IELTS Grammar: 'however' and 'whereas'

Use 'however' (followed by a comma) at the beginning of a sentence to contrast with the previous sentence:

- Some people believe that schools are responsible for the behaviour of their students. However, others argue that discipline is the responsibility of parents.

Use 'whereas' (after a comma) to contrast two ideas in the same sentence:

- Some people believe that schools are responsible for the behaviour of their students, whereas others argue that discipline is the responsibility of parents.

7. IELTS Grammar: while, whilst, whereas, as

Here's my simplified explanation:

- While** and **whilst** are the same, but **whilst** is a bit more formal (according to one famous grammar book).
- Whereas** is always used for contrast. **While/whilst** can be used for contrast, OR to mean "at the same time".
- As** can mean "because" or "exactly at the moment when".

- 1- A lot of people prefer travelling by car, while others choose the train. (Contrast)
- 2- The phone rang, while I was sleep. (At the same time)
- 3- Some people like hot, weather while others not. (Contrast)
- 4- I want to graduate from Oxford University, as it an international one. (Because)
- 5- My brother called me, as I reached the station. (Exactly at the same moment when)

- 1- Mark fell asleep while the boring film was showing. (at the same time or during)
- 2- Mark sees this film as a tedious one while Jimmy feels it entertaining and amused. (contrast)
- 3- During leisure time, Mark likes to do some outdoor exercises, whereas Jimmy prefers to stay at home. (contrast)
- 4- I feel so happy today as my team wins the final game. (because)
- 5- Jordan took the last shot, as the final buzzer sounded. (at the same moment)

8. IELTS Grammar: correct the mistakes

1. We are friends ever since we first met.
2. If people work in teams can help them to achieve more.
3. If we consider unemployment is another important issue.
4. It is difficult to live in a new country, it is also difficult to speak a new language.
5. Many children behave badly, could be because their parents are not strict enough.

CORRECT ANSWERS FROM SIMON:

1. We have been friends.... (present perfect - from the past until now)
2. If people work in teams, THIS can help them to achieve more.
3. Unemployment is another important issue.
4. It is difficult to live in a new country and speak a new language.
5. Many children behave badly, perhaps because their parents are not strict enough.

9. IELTS Grammar: find the mistakes

1. With developments in nuclear technology, the risk of accidents are being reduced.
2. Scientists need to make more researches to improve the safety of nuclear power stations.
3. Using of nuclear power not only does it produce cheap electricity, but also it does not have any pollution.

CORRECT ANSWERS FROM SIMON:

1. With developments in nuclear technology, the risk of accidents IS being reduced. ('risk' is singular)
2. Scientists need to DO more RESEARCH to improve the safety of nuclear power stations. ('do research', not 'make researches' - never use the plural, 'research' is uncountable)
3. There are several ways to write this. this is a good one:
The use of nuclear power produces not only cheap electricity, but also less pollution.

"Can you explain while, whilst, whereas, as? Either can be used to connect two sentences, but I am not sure how to identify them and quite often I use them wrongly."

You can't use 'however' and 'whereas' in the same way. Follow these general rules in order to avoid grammar mistakes:

You can use 'on the other hand' or 'by contrast' in the same way as 'however'. You can use 'while' instead of 'whereas'.

2. Don't use the comma when "while" is used for "at the same time".

3. Put the comma before "while others DO not"

4. No comma

5. No comma

2. I'd put a comma before "while".

4. "won" or "has won" would probably be better.

5. No comma

The following sentences contain mistakes. Try to correct them.

Correct the mistakes in the sentences below.

PS. 'developments' is just a normal plural. The meaning doesn't change.

10.1 IELTS Grammar: more mistakes!

1. I am completely agree that job satisfaction for workers are important.
2. On the other side, maybe it is difficult for all workers to be happy in their jobs.
3. Although, we all need to work in order to pay our bills etc, but we also need to enjoy our jobs.

CORRECT ANSWERS FROM SIMON:

1. I completely agree... IS important. (NEVER "I am agree")
2. On the other HAND, it may be (2 words) difficult... OR: perhaps it is difficult... (Don't use "maybe" at the start of a sentence in formal/academic writing)
3. Although (NO COMMA) we all need to work in order to pay our bills, (NO "BUT") we also need to enjoy our jobs. Also, don't use "etc." in your essays.

Try to correct the mistakes in the following sentences:

Be careful with "although". Most English learners make mistakes with this word.

10.2 IELTS Grammar: find the mistakes

1. The graph shows the number of people travelled to and from UK.
2. In 1979, the number of people visited UK was 10 millions.
3. Turkey was the least country in terms of the number of people visiting it.

CORRECT ANSWERS FROM SIMON:

1. WHO travelled (or TRAVELLING)... THE UK
2. WHO visited THE UK... 10 MILLION (no "s" on hundred, thousand, million etc. after a number)
3. You can't say "the least country" - change it to "least popular country".

Find the mistakes in the sentences below.

Students often make mistakes with the verbs lead, contribute and result. Try to correct the sentences below.

11. IELTS Grammar: lead, contribute, result

1. Qualifications and skills may lead to get promotions.
2. Lack of exercise contributes to have an unhealthy body.
3. Violence on television is one factor that results to increase the crime rate.

CORRECT ANSWERS FROM SIMON:

1. *Qualifications and skills may lead to promotions.*
2. *Lack of exercise contributes to an unhealthy body.*
3. *Violence on television is one factor that results in an increase in the crime rate.*

What is the rule for these 3 verbs?

REMEMBER: lead to + noun
contribute to + noun
result in + noun

NOTE: It's ok use the "ING" form e.g. "lead to getting promotions", but it's better without it.

12. IELTS Grammar: correct the mistakes

1. Governments have played an essential place in society.
2. Lack of exercise has bad effects to health.
3. Qualifications lead to get promotions.
4. This may contribute to reach their dreams.
5. The main important thing is to make people aware for this problem.

CORRECT ANSWERS FROM SIMON:

1. *Governments have played an essential role in society. OR: Governments have an essential place in society. In English, we don't say "play a place", we say "have a place in" or "play a role in".*
2. *Lack of exercise has bad effects ON health. OR: Lack of exercise has a bad effect on health.*

I prefer "has a bad effect on" (singular). You must know how to use 'effect' and 'affect'. I've done a lesson on this in the IELTS Grammar section.

3. *Qualifications lead to promotions.*

Lead to + noun. 'Lead to getting' is ok, but I'd just use the noun 'promotions'.

4. *This may help them to reach their dreams.*

'Contribute to' needs to be followed by a noun. 'Contribute to reaching' is ok, but I'd prefer to keep 'reach' and change the verb: 'help them to reach' is much more natural.

5. *The main thing is to make people aware of this problem. OR: The important thing is to make people aware of this problem.*

"Aware OF" not "aware for". But also, we don't say "the main important". You should use either "the main thing" OR "the important thing".

The following sentences contain mistakes. Can you find them?

13. IELTS Grammar: verb + noun collocations

Here are some useful 'verb + noun' collocations:

- to make a mistake (not 'do' a mistake)
- to do/carry out/conduct research (not 'make' research, not 'a' research)
- to make/take/reach a decision
- to have/gain/lack experience
- to have/face/experience difficulties

Think about this, especially when you are writing essays. Check in a dictionary to make sure you have used the right verb with the right noun.

14.1 IELTS Grammar: correct the mistakes

The sentences below contain some common mistakes. Try to correct them.

1. The number of holidays abroad was dramatically increased in 2005.
2. The figure was raised again in 2006, but it reduced in 2007.
3. In 2008, the number of foreign holidays was reduced to its lowest point.

CORRECT ANSWERS FROM SIMON:

1. The number of holidays abroad INCREASED DRAMATICALLY in 2005.
2. The figure ROSE again in 2006, but it FELL in 2007.
3. In 2008, the number of foreign holidays FELL to its lowest point.

NOTES: The main problem is the use of the passive (was increased) when the verbs should be active (increased).

Also, you need to use 'rise' (rose) instead of 'raise' (raised).

The meaning of these 2 verbs is the same, but we use them differently:

"Taxes ROSE last year" / "The government RAISED taxes last year"

14.2 IELTS Grammar: correct the mistakes

Find and correct the mistake in each of the sentences below:

1. Technology allowed the growing of factories.
2. Parents should be more conscious on their children's online activities.
3. The Internet allows people from all over the world to involve in discussions about current events.

CORRECT ANSWERS FROM SIMON:

1. Technology allowed the GROWTH of factories.
(past or present simple depending on the context)
2. Parents should be more conscious OF (or "aware of") their children's online activities.
3. The Internet allows people all over the world to BE/BECOME/GET involved in discussions about current events.

15.1 IELTS Grammar: word families

Let's look at the word family for "different".

- We usually say different from e.g. A is different from B.
- The noun is difference e.g. There is a difference between A and B.
- The verb is differ e.g. A differs from B (or A and B differ).

15.2 IELTS Vocabulary: word family for 'compare'

- The graph compares the number of males and females...
- 10% of males were unemployed, compared to only 8% of females.
- The unemployment rate was high in 2008 compared with previous years.
- The unemployment rate was high in 2008 in comparison with...
- By/in comparison, the unemployment rate in 2008 increased to...
- Figures for the USA were comparable with/to those for the UK.
- The figure for females was comparatively low, at only 8%.

You've probably noticed that this word family is really useful for writing task 1.

When deciding whether to give a band 7 in IELTS speaking or writing, one of the things that examiners look at is **your use of collocations**.

'Collocation' basically means using the right words together. Many students know a lot of nouns, but they don't always know the right verbs to use with those nouns.

What grammar point can we learn by correcting these 3 sentences?

For the same reason, you can't use 'reduced':

"Taxes fell..."

"The government reduced taxes"

If you want to improve your vocabulary knowledge, it's a good idea to study word families.

Let's look at the word family for 'compare'. Remember that we are looking at usage, not meaning (I'm sure you know the meaning of these words).

Usage note: illustrate Referring to a chart, graph or table

- This bar chart **illustrates** how many journeys people made on public transport over a three-month period.
- This table **compares** bus, train, and taxi use between April and June.
- The results **are shown** in the chart below.
- In this pie chart, the survey results **are broken down** by age.
- This pie chart **breaks down** the survey results by age.
- **As can be seen from** these results, younger people use buses more than older people.
- **According to** these figures, bus travel accounts for 60% of public transport use.
- **From** the data in the above graph, **it is apparent that** buses are the most widely used form of public transport.
- Language Banks at **EVIDENCE, FALL, INCREASE, PROPORTION, SURPRISING**

16. IELTS Grammar: notice your mistakes

Look at this example of a conversation between a student and a teacher:

Student: I gave the IELTS exam last week.

Teacher: Oh, you mean you took the exam last week?

Student: Yes, I have given the exam twice. (should be 'taken')

The student doesn't notice that the teacher is correcting a mistake. Your teacher can 'give' you a test or an exam, but you 'take' or 'do' the exam.

17. IELTS Grammar: mistakes with the passive

1. The amount of rainfall was increased last month.
2. An increase in rainfall was seen last month.
3. The UK was experienced an increase in rainfall.
4. Rainfall has been reduced this year.
5. Income tax has been reduced this year.

(I prefer 'decreased' because I normally use 'reduce' when someone is responsible for the reduction). OR: There has been less rainfall this year.

NOTE: We use 'is reduced' when someone is responsible for the reduction. So, 'taxes are reduced' by a government, but 'rainfall is reduced' is impossible.

Students often don't notice when a teacher corrects their mistakes.

When a teacher repeats something that you said in a different way, you probably made a mistake. Listen carefully, and try to correct yourself.

In which of these sentences is the passive used correctly?

CORRECT ANSWERS FROM SIMON:
2 and 5 are correct.

The others should be:

1. The amount of rainfall INCREASED last month.
3. The UK EXPERIENCED an increase in rainfall.
4. Rainfall HAS DECREASED / HAS REDUCED this year.

18.1 IELTS Grammar: correct the mistakes

1. It is clear that, diploma and degree were the most popular qualifications.
2. Parents are usually try to provide their children different alternatives.
3. Most of computer games contain several of violence.
4. The number of people living in cities will be sharply increased.
5. Advertising are widely spread nowadays.

CORRECT ANSWERS FROM SIMON:

1. It is clear that diplomas and degrees were the most popular qualifications. - no comma after "it is clear that" - use plurals of 'diploma' and 'degree' because we are talking about a general category (it's similar to saying "dogs and cats are the most popular pets", not "dog and cat...")
2. Parents usually try to provide their children with different alternatives. - not "are try" - provide someone WITH something. Maybe I'd change the sentence to "Parents try to give their children different opportunities."
3. Most computer games contain a lot of violence. - Not "most of" - "several" is followed by a plural, countable noun e.g. several problems, several scenes of violence.
4. The number of people living in cities will increase sharply. - It's not passive ("will be increased" by someone?? - no)
5. Advertising is widespread nowadays. - If you're not sure, you could write: "Advertising is everywhere"

Can you find the mistakes in the following sentences? You might need to make several changes.

18.2 IELTS Grammar: correct the mistakes

Can you correct the mistakes in the following sentences?

1. The pollution and waste that we produce also affect on animals.
2. Many animals are in danger extinction.
3. Traffic congestion in nearly all over the world is on the increase.
4. Most of people who live in cities are suffering from traffic.
5. Schools can make a big part in educating children about this issue.

CORRECT ANSWERS FROM SIMON:

1. The pollution and waste that we produce also affect animals.
(**"affect" without "on" or "have an EFFECT on"**)
2. Many animals are in danger OF extinction.
3. Traffic congestion is on the increase in most countries.
(**NOT 'nearly all over the world'**)
4. Most people who live in cities are affected by traffic.
(**we don't say "most of people" or "suffer from traffic"**)
5. Schools can PLAY a big part in educating children about this issue.

19.1 IELTS Grammar: correct the mistakes

1. Children are not enough mature to make decisions.
2. Poor parenting has contributed children to misbehave more.
3. Good parenting encourages children acquire social skills.
4. Bringing up children and educate them is the responsibility of parents.

CORRECT ANSWERS FROM SIMON:

1. "mature enough" instead of "enough mature": Children are not mature enough to make decisions.
2. Poor parenting has contributed to children misbehaving OR Poor parenting has contributed to bad behaviour among children.
(**"children's misbehaviour" is ok**)
3. "... encourages children TO acquire..."
4. "educatING" - I'd probably write "Bringing up and educating children is the responsibility of parents".

Here are some more sentences that contain mistakes. See if you can find them.

19.2 IELTS Grammar: correct the mistakes

1. Parents influence on their children and give them many advices.
2. Students need to develop their knowledges and skills.
3. We can use the Internet to do some researches.
4. If we want to find some informations fastly, the Internet is the best resource.

CORRECT ANSWERS FROM SIMON:

Firstly, each sentence has a mistake **involving an uncountable noun**: **ADVICE, KNOWLEDGE, RESEARCH, INFORMATION** should not be used in the plural or with a/an.

Number 4 has one other mistake: **"fastly" is not a correct word. Use "quickly"**:

4. If we want to find some information quickly, the Internet is the best resource.

In number 1 there is a problem with "influence on". This is correct when influence is a noun e.g. "to HAVE AN influence on", but not when influence is a verb. We also need to change the word "many" because it isn't used with uncountable nouns:

1. Parents influence their children and give them advice.
OR: Parents have an influence on their children and give them advice.
"a lot of advice" is fine (in my opinion), but "lots of" is more informal. It might be better to find another word if you don't like "a lot of" e.g. **you could write "invaluable advice" (which means "important or useful advice")**.

Find the mistakes in the following sentences:

- 2 and 3 have no other mistakes:
2. Students need to develop their knowledges and skills.
 3. We can use the Internet to do some research.

20. IELTS Grammar: capital letters

A few people have asked me about using capital letters in different parts of the IELTS test.

Here's my advice:

- In the reading and listening tests, they don't care about capital letters. So you can write everything in lowercase or in capitals, and it won't affect your score.
 - In the writing test, try to follow the normal rules for capital letters. Grammar books and websites explain these rules in detail.
1. Use a capital letter for the **personal pronoun 'I'**: What can I say?
 2. Use a capital letter to begin a sentence or to begin speech:
 - The man arrived. He sat down.
 - Suddenly Mary asked, "Do you love me?"
 3. Use capital letters for many abbreviations and acronyms:
 - G.M.T. or GMT (Greenwich Mean Time)
 - N.A.T.O. or NATO or Nato (North Atlantic Treaty Organization)
 4. Use a capital letter for days of the week, months of the year, holidays:
 - Monday, Tuesday; January, February
 - Christmas; Armistice Day
 5. Use a capital letter for countries, languages & nationalities, religions:
 - China, France; Japanese, English; Christianity, Buddhism
 6. Use a capital letter for people's names and titles:
 - Anthony, Ram, William Shakespeare
 - Professor Jones, Dr Smith; Captain Kirk, King Henry VIII
 7. Use a capital letter for trade-marks and names of companies and other organizations:
 - Pepsi Cola, Walkman; Microsoft Corporation, Toyota
 - the United Nations, the Red Cross
 8. Use a capital letter for places and monuments:
 - London, Paris, the Latin Quarter; the Eiffel Tower, St Paul's Cathedral
 - Buckingham Palace, the White House; Oxford Street, Fifth Avenue
 - Jupiter, Mars, Sirius; Asia, the Middle East, the North Pole
 9. Use a capital letter for names of vehicles like ships, trains and spacecraft:
 - the Titanic; the Orient Express, the Flying Scotsman
 - Challenger 2, the Enterprise
 10. Use a capital letter for titles of books, poems, songs, plays, films etc:
 - War And Peace; If, Futility; Like a Virgin
 - The Taming of the Shrew; The Lion King, Gone With The Wind
 11. Use capitals letters (**sometimes!**) for headings, titles of articles, books etc, and newspaper headlines:
 - HOW TO WIN AT POKER; Chapter 2: CLINTON'S EARLY LIFE
 - LIFE FOUND ON MARS!; MAN BITES DOG

Sometimes the noun form and the verb form of a word are the same. For example, the word **"increase"** can be a noun or a verb.

The problem is that nouns and verbs are used differently. You should learn to use both forms correctly.

21. IELTS Grammar: nouns and verbs

Here are some examples:

Increase

There was an increase in the unemployment rate. (noun)

The unemployment rate increased. (verb)

Lack

There is a lack of investment in hospitals. (noun)

Many hospitals lack the investment they need. (verb)

Pay

Companies should give men and women equal pay. (noun)

Companies should pay men and women equally. (verb)

22. A student's questions about articles, with my answers

Note: the student's questions are in black, and my answers are in blue writing.

1. "The graph below shows UK acid rain emissions, measured in millions of tonnes, from four different sectors between 1990 and 2007." This is a graph title taken from one of your posts. I'm confused as to why the article "the" is not put before "UK". Likewise, I saw another sentence in which "the" is missing: "The chart below shows average hours and minutes spent by UK males and females on different daily activities."

In the two examples you gave, "UK" is used like an adjective before another noun e.g. UK males. When "UK" is used in this way we miss "the". When "UK" is the main noun we write "the UK" e.g. I live in the UK. It's the same with "USA" and some other countries.

2. Should we say "young and old" or "the young and the old" in this sentence: "A game show can encourage friendly competition amongst both young and old."

You might hear it said in both ways. If someone says "amongst both young and old", they really mean "amongst both young and old people". The noun "people" is implied, but I suppose it would be better to include it when writing. It's fine to write/say "amongst both the young and the old" or "amongst both the young and old". "The young" is a noun, whereas "young" is an adjective in the phrase "young people".

3. "It is noticeable that levels of poverty were higher for single people than for couples." Should we put "the" before levels?

In this case "the" is optional. You can put it if you want, or you can miss it. Research has shown that English native speakers make different choices about whether to use "the" in this kind of situation, so don't worry about it.

4. "While acid rain gases from the domestic sector and other industries fell gradually, the transport sector saw a small increase in emissions." Should we put "the" before emissions as you are talking about specific emissions here?

It would be ok to add "the", but I prefer it without. I would add "the" if I wrote something like: "a small increase in the emissions that it produced".

5. "The proportion of spending on leisure and education was also highest in Turkey, at 4.35%, while expenditure on clothing and footwear was significantly higher in Italy, at 9%, than in any of the other countries." Is it ok to put "the" before "highest in Turkey" and "higher in Italy"?

We tend to write "the highest + noun" e.g. "the highest amount of spending". If we put the noun before, we don't need "the" e.g. "the amount of spending was highest". It's less common to use "the" before a comparative like "higher", and we definitely wouldn't use "the" before "higher in Italy" in the sentence above.

23. IELTS Grammar: correct the mistakes

1. I agree that we should interest more with our own societies and countries.
2. There three main problems that we need to tackle first, education.
3. You should mention your opinion in the introduction so examiner have some idea what to expect from your essay.

CORRECT ANSWERS FROM SIMON:

1. I agree that we should BE MORE interestED IN our own societies and countries.
2. There ARE three main problems that we need to tackle. THE first (one) IS education.
3. You should mention your opinion in the introduction so (that) THE examiner HAS some idea what to expect from your essay.

Try to find and correct the mistakes in these sentences:

- we say "be interested in" not "interest with".
- You could also say "be more concerned about" or "take more interest in"

- the biggest mistake in that sentence was not starting a new sentence after 'tackle'.

- 'idea' can be singular or plural. We often say 'some idea'

24. IELTS Grammar: uncountable nouns

For example, you **can't** say "an information, two informations, many informations". You **can** say "some information, more information, a lot of information, a piece of information".

Here are a few more uncountable nouns:

1. give advice, some advice, a piece of advice (~~an advice~~, ~~advices~~)
2. do research, carry out research, research shows (~~a research~~, ~~researches~~)
3. gain knowledge, share knowledge, increase knowledge (~~knowledges~~)

Students often make mistakes with uncountable nouns. These are nouns that you can't count. Most importantly, they don't have a plural form.

25. IELTS Grammar: 'by/in contrast' and 'on the contrary'

By contrast / In contrast

I often use these two phrases in both writing task 1 and 2.

They are exactly the same, and are used in a similar way to "however" or "on the other hand" to introduce a contrast / comparison. Put "By / In contrast" at the beginning of a sentence, with a comma after "contrast".

Example: Unemployment rose in the UK. By contrast, the number of unemployed people in Canada fell.

On the contrary

I've never used this phrase in any of my IELTS lessons. It doesn't mean the same thing as "by / in contrast". We use "on the contrary" to deny that something is true, and to explain that the opposite is true.

Example: - Person 1: "You had some problems with your hotel, didn't you?"

- Person 2: "On the contrary, the hotel was great, but the airline lost my suitcase."

26. IELTS Grammar: punctuation

Here are some simple rules to help you with punctuation for IELTS writing:

Full stops

Full stops are very important. Put a clear full stop at the end of each sentence, and then begin the next sentence with a capital letter. If you don't do this, you will get a low score.

Commas

1. When you start a sentence with these words, put a comma after them: Nowadays, Recently, Firstly, Secondly, Finally, Furthermore, In addition, Also, However, By contrast, On the other hand, In my opinion,...
2. We use commas in lists:
e.g. This problem affects individuals, communities and society in general.
3. We don't usually put a comma after the word "that":
e.g. It is clear that the rate of immigration increased.
4. Don't worry about other uses of commas. The use of a comma is often optional in other situations.

Apostrophes

Avoid contractions in IELTS writing. Use "do not" instead of "don't".

You may sometimes need to show possession e.g. the government's decision.

Other punctuation

You don't really need to use any other punctuation in IELTS writing.

My advice is to avoid trying to use colons and semicolons.

27. IELTS Grammar: cause and effect

Here are some useful phrases for describing causes and effects (for IELTS Writing Task 2 and maybe Speaking Part 3). I'll use the topic of 'global warming' to show how the phrases work.

1. Cause and Effect

Pollution causes global warming.

Pollution leads to global warming.

Pollution results in global warming.

Pollution is the main cause of global warming.

Factories pollute the atmosphere. As a result, global warming is occurring.

2. Effect and Cause

Global warming is caused by pollution.

Global warming is the result of pollution.

Global warming is due to pollution.

Global warming occurs as a result of pollution.

Notice the different uses of 'result' (results in, is the result of, as a result). Students make a lot of mistakes with these phrases.

A few people have asked me about these phrases recently. Do they have the same meaning? When is each one used?

28.1 IELTS Grammar: correct the mistakes

Can you find and correct the mistakes? Not all of them are grammar mistakes!

1. There were 51 million pmt incidents than 35 million pmt injuries by bus.
2. In general, both the figures for serious fatalities and injuries were dramatically higher for the demand response field.
3. The number of people having injuries showed the more popular level than that of people having incidents.
4. There is a somewhat difference between the number of people using heavy rail and light rail.
5. The bar chart illustrates the amount of passengers who were been incidents and injuries travelled by five types of transport such as demand response, bus, heavy rail, light rail, and commuter rail in 2002.
6. The bus, which is used by almost 80 people, tallied 66 injuries.
7. In three types of rail, being lower than light rail, heavy rail surpassed commuter rail in the amount of incidents and injuries.
8. Injuries by bus was went up approximately 4 times than commuter rail.

CORRECT ANSWERS FROM SIMON:

Problems:

1. There were NOT 51 million incidents. There were 51 incidents per million passenger miles.
2. 'Incidents' does NOT mean 'serious fatalities'.
3. Don't use the word 'popular' when talking about negative things like injuries.
4. You can't say 'a somewhat difference'. Also, the figures don't show numbers of people USING the services.
5. "who were been incidents and injuries travelled" = bad grammar. Also, only use 'such as' when you give a few examples, not when you mention ALL of the items.
6. The bus was not USED by 80 people. Don't use 'tallied' in this way.
7. Strange sentence organisation - especially the use of "being lower than light rail".
8. Don't use 'went up' - you can't talk about increases or decreases when the items are different and no times are shown.

28.2 IELTS Grammar: correct the mistakes

1. More proportion of American people in 1970 than in 2000 got married.
2. There are many things easy enough for those young people to do.
3. I am agreed that volunteer work can build up the responsibilities in youngs.
4. Society gets benefitted as the juvenile crime rate reduced.
5. Having a work experience may help to having a job quicker and easier.

CORRECT ANSWERS FROM SIMON

1. A higher proportion of American people got married in 1970 than in 2000. (problems were 'more proportion' and the position of 'got married')
2. There are many things WHICH/THAT ARE easy enough for those young people to do. OR: Many things are easy enough...
3. I agree that volunteer work can help to teach young people about having responsibilities. (don't write 'I am agreed' or 'youngs', and we don't really say 'build up the responsibilities')
4. Society benefits (or 'will benefit') as the juvenile crime rate falls. (not 'gets benefitted' and not 'reduced' in the past tense)
5. Work experience may make finding a job quicker and easier. ('experience' is usually uncountable, so don't write 'having a work experience'. You can't say 'help to having')

PS. If a survey showed that "households spent seven hours a day on transporting themselves and their goods", does this mean that it was "a survey of household expenditure on transport"?

The answer is NO. "Expenditure" means "money spent", but not "time spent".

Corrections:

1. There were 51 incidents and 35 injuries per million PMT on buses.
2. In general, both the figures for incidents and injuries were dramatically higher for the demand response field.
3. The number of injuries was higher than that of incidents.
4. There was a small difference between the number of incidents and injuries on heavy rail and light rail.
5. The bar chart compares the number of passengers who were involved in incidents and injuries on five types of transport in 2002.
6. There were nearly 80 incidents and exactly 66 injuries on buses.
7. Of the three types of rail service, light rail services saw the highest number of incidents and injuries, followed by heavy rail and then commuter rail.
8. Injuries on buses WERE approximately 4 times higher than those on commuter rail services.

Try to correct the mistakes in the following sentences.

29. IELTS Grammar: be careful with the 's'

1. Thousandss of people watched the show.
2. Fifty thousand people watched the show.
3. over a period of ten yearss
4. over a ten-year period
5. The fish weighed 5 kiloss.
6. It was a five kilo fish.
7. The boy is three yearss old.
8. He is a three-year-old boy.

Notice where we put the "s" on the end of a word and where we don't:

30. Students' grammar questions

1. Which is better: "like normal" or "as usual"?

You might hear people say "like normal", but it's much better to use "as usual".

2. What do "in order to" and "in terms of" mean?

A dictionary will explain the meaning of these phrases. However, it's probably more useful to see some examples of how they are used. A search engine like Google will give you many more examples than I can.

3. Is it correct to write "it is worth spending maintaining libraries" or "libraries are worth spending"?

Neither is correct I'm afraid. I would write: "It is worth spending money to maintain libraries" or "libraries are worth maintaining".

4. Can we put "for example" in the middle of a sentence like this: "There are many environmental problems, for example, people litter everywhere"?

The use of "for example" in the sentence above is not correct. To avoid confusion, I'd recommend using "for example" only at the beginning of sentences. Use "such as" in the middle (e.g. There are many environmental problems, such as air pollution).

31. IELTS Grammar: find the mistakes

1. Families who do not have cars have decreased from 1971 to 2007.
2. Households without a car percentage gradually decreased.
3. There is a rise can be noted in the proportion of households with two cars.
4. The number of household with no car were well below 50% in 1971.
5. There were least percentage of household who had three or more cars, but it steadily improved to 5% by 2007.

CORRECT ANSWERS FROM SIMON:

1. There are 2 problems:
 - families didn't decrease, the NUMBER of families decreased
 - the time is past, so don't use present perfect "have decreased", use past simple "decreased"
2. You can't say "Households without a car percentage"
3. The problem is the 2 verbs in "there is" and "can be noted"
4. Several problems:
 - "the number were" (number is singular, and it's really a percentage rather than a number)
 - "well below" means "a lot below"
 - this is not true in the graph
5. Several problems:
 - "There were least percentage of household" is not good English.
 - "improved" is the wrong word to use
 - an increase isn't always an improvement (e.g. an increase in pollution is not an improvement)

Find the mistakes in the following sentences. All of the sentences relate to the graph in [this lesson](#). (writing task1 page20)

CORRECT SENTENCES:

1. The proportion of families without a car decreased between 1971 and 2007.
2. The percentage of households without a car decreased gradually.
3. There was a rise in the proportion of households with two cars. OR: A rise can be noted in the proportion of...
4. The proportion of households with no car was just under 50% in 1971.
5. In 1971, only a small percentage of households had three or more cars, but the figure rose steadily to about 7% by 2007.

32. IELTS Grammar: simplify to avoid mistakes

1. There is no doubt that the attraction of video games are catching people's attraction easily.
2. In our world today where technologies bound to run in our daily existence, playing video games plays a vital part to our own society.
3. All RPGs (role-playing games), as the name already suggests, involves the player assuming a character and controlling the entire process and unlock tasks to advance.
4. On the one hand, it is undoubtedly that video games have offered much more benefits to human beings.
5. I personally believe that video games seem to have noxious implications.

FROM SIMON:

1. It is true that video games are extremely popular with many people.
2. In today's world, technology is all around us, and video games have become a normal part of our daily lives.
3. Role-playing games involve the player assuming a character, controlling the narrative, and completing tasks in order to advance.
4. On the one hand, playing video games can certainly be a positive experience.
5. I personally believe that video games have a harmful impact on those who play them.

33. IELTS Grammar: affect or effect?

"Affect" is a verb. **Don't** write "affect on".

1. Smoking affects your health. (~~smoking affects on your health~~)
2. The Internet is affecting our way of life.
3. Children are affected by what they see on television.

"Effect" is a noun. **Do** write "have an effect on".

1. Smoking has a harmful effect on your health.
2. The Internet is having a significant effect on our way of life.
3. Television can have a negative effect on children.

If you use these words correctly, the examiner will be impressed.

Try to correct / improve the following sentences by writing them in a simpler way.

Here are some alternatives to the above sentences. I've tried to simplify them and write them in a more 'natural-sounding' way.

Almost every week I see mistakes in the use of "affect" and "effect". These are common and important words, especially in the IELTS writing test, so you need to get them right.

34. IELTS Grammar: correct the mistakes

1. Most of advertising aim to persuade people that buying things will make them happier.
2. Advertisers use every efforts to make their products more attractive.
3. Governments should control advertising or even banned.

CORRECT ANSWERS FROM SIMON:

1. Most advertising aims (OR: most advertisements aim) to persuade people that buying things will make them happier.
2. Advertisers MAKE every effort to make their products more attractive.
OR CHANGE THE SENTENCE: Advertisers try to make their products as attractive as possible. (You can't say "use every effort")
3. Governments should control advertising or even BAN IT.

Try to correct the mistakes in the sentences below:

35. IELTS Grammar: 'finally' or 'at last'?

This week I wrote a lesson about using "Firstly, Secondly, Finally", and a student asked me whether it's ok to use "at last" instead of "finally".

The answer is no. "Finally" and "at last" **are not** used in the same way. Use "finally" in the IELTS writing test when you want to make your final point, or to talk about the final stage in a process e.g. Finally, as well as making life more fun and interesting, new experiences can be good for our physical and mental health. (taken from [this lesson](#))

Only use "at last" when you have been waiting for a long time for something to happen e.g. At last I've passed the IELTS exam!

36. IELTS Grammar: opinion + conditional

Look at these examples:

1. In my opinion, governments should invest more money in public transport. If rail and bus services were more reliable, fewer people would need to drive.
2. Schools have an important role to play in children's health. If schools banned junk food, they would help to reduce the problem of childhood obesity.
3. In the future I think more people will do their shopping online. But if Internet shopping becomes more popular, many traditional shops will lose customers.

37. IELTS Grammar: correct the mistakes

1. It is clear that, the commuter numbers by car are dominant.
2. The number of passengers in train showed upward trend.
3. The number of commuters favor car and train significantly increase.
4. About average 5 million commuters traveled by car.
5. The figure for train started from about 2 millions.
6. British people continuously used more car than other vehicles.

FROM SIMON: Here are my suggestions:

1. It is clear that the car was the most popular form of transport throughout the period shown. (Don't put a comma after 'that'. Also, the phrase 'numbers are dominant' sounded strange)
2. There was an increase in the number of train users.
(I would avoid the phrase 'showed upward trend' - it's easy to use it wrongly)
3. The number of commuters favouring the car or train increased significantly.
4. Around 5 million commuters travelled by car.
5. The figure for train users stood at around 2 million. (No 's' on 'million'.)
6. The car was the most popular form of transport in each of the years shown on the graph. (You can't say 'continuously used more car')

38. IELTS Grammar: 'for example' and 'such as'

Students often make mistakes when using these two phrases. To avoid mistakes, follow this simple advice:

- Use **For example**, at the start of a sentence.
- Use **such as** in the middle of a sentence.

Compare these examples:

1. Children should eat less junk food. **For example**, they should avoid eating burgers and chips.
2. Children should avoid eating junk food **such as** burgers and chips.

Notice that 'For example' is followed by a comma and a full sentence.

'Such as' is in the middle of the sentence, followed by two nouns. You can use 'For instance' instead of 'For example'. You can use 'like' instead of 'such as'.

39. IELTS Grammar: 'lead to'

1. Consumerism can lead to increase the economy.
 2. Tourism can lead to destroy natural habitats.
 3. A competitive atmosphere in lessons leads to motivate students.
- The problem is that we need a **noun or noun phrase after 'lead to'**, not a verb.

So, here are some ways that you could rewrite the sentences:

1. Consumerism can lead to a more successful economy.
2. Tourism can lead to the destruction of natural habitats.
3. A competitive atmosphere in lessons motivates students.

Notice that in sentence 3 it is better to keep the verb 'motivates' and miss out 'leads to'.

Try this useful technique for IELTS writing and speaking:

Give an opinion, then follow it with a conditional sentence.

I've underlined the conditionals.

Examples 1 and 2 are second conditionals, while 3 uses the first conditional.

Practice: Prepare your own "opinion + conditional" ideas for different topics. Having a few of these ideas ready could help you in the writing and speaking tests.

Try to improve the following sentences.

Students often make mistakes when using 'lead to' in their writing. What's the problem with these sentences?

40. IELTS Grammar: 'most' or 'most of'?

Should you write "most people", "most of people" or "most of the people"?

Answer:

1. Don't write "most of people".
2. "Most of the people" is correct when you are talking about a specific group of people e.g. most of the people in my department.
3. For IELTS writing and speaking "most people" is the best phrase.

Here are some examples for IELTS Writing:

- English is taught in most countries. (~~most of countries~~)
- Most people agree that the ability to speak English is a useful skill.
- Most products are made in factories rather than by hand.
- Crime is on the increase in most major cities.

41. IELTS Grammar: using 'with' instead of 'and'

Here's a structure that my students found interesting:

A) The IELTS exam is popular, and over 1 million people take it every year.

B) The IELTS exam is popular, with over 1 million people taking it every year.

A) The cost of living is high, and prices are going up every year.

B) The cost of living is high, with prices going up every year.

Notice the use of the 'ing' verb form after 'with'. Notice also that there is no auxiliary verb 'are' in the second example. To practise this type of sentence, try making an example of your own!