

**Lesson downloads > IELTS Academic Module preparation > Writing > Lesson 4****Introduction**

In the previous IELTS lesson we took a first look at describing charts - something you may be asked to do in Part 1 of the IELTS writing. You learned what to look for when you first 'read' a chart and how to tell the difference between dynamic and static charts. In this lesson we'll be taking a closer look at useful language for describing dynamic charts.

So far in these IELTS lessons we have looked at three kinds of composition you may be asked to write for Task 2 of the test. These are:

- describe causes of a problem and offer solutions
- present arguments in favour of and against an idea
- express your opinion on a controversial issue

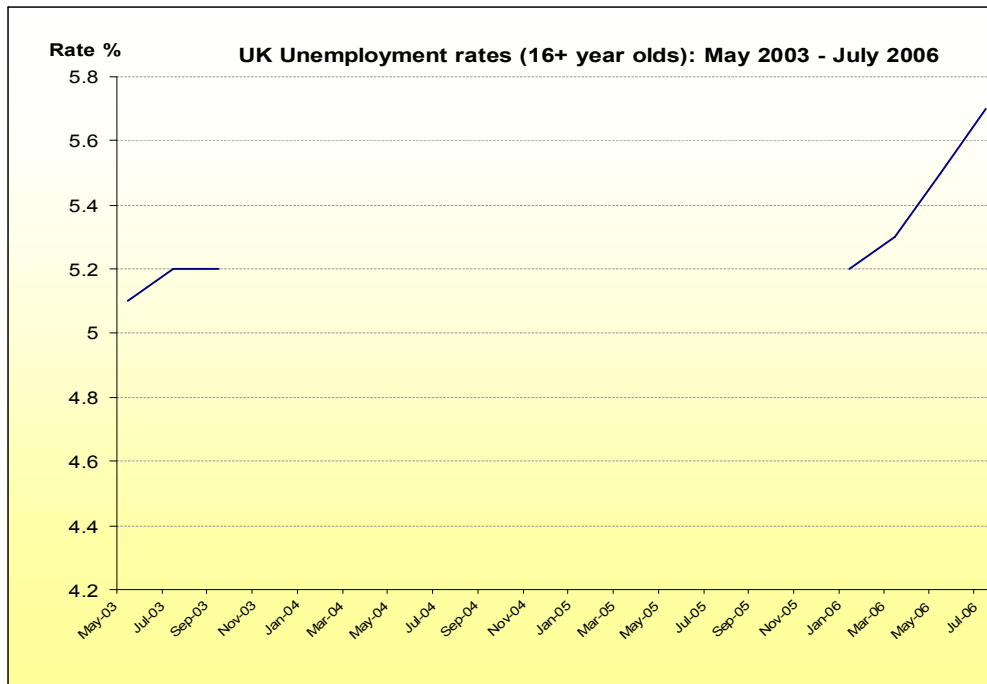
In this lesson we'll look in more detail about how to analyse a question and how to present your point of view clearly and effectively.

In this lesson you will...

- Practise reading and getting information from dynamic charts.
- Learn structures and expressions for describing increase and decrease.
- Practise using prepositions when describing numbers and dates.
- Learn how to use a mind map to generate ideas for Task 2.
- Practise supporting your opinions with reasons and examples.
- Learn useful words and expressions for supporting your opinions.
- Learn how topic sentences help to organise your writing

**IELTS WRITING TASK 1: MORE ABOUT CHARTS****Activity 1 > Understanding dynamic charts > 10 minutes**

a) The chart below is incomplete. In a moment, you're going to read a description of the chart and complete it. Before you do this, though, take a good look at the chart and answer the questions.



Source: National Statistics website: [www.statistics.gov.uk](http://www.statistics.gov.uk)  
<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/ci/nscl.asp?id=6682>

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1 What kind of chart is this?

- a) A pie chart
- b) A line graph
- c) A proportional bar chart

2 What does the chart show?

- a) The percentage of the workforce over 16 who were unemployed
- b) The percentage of the workforce over 16 who are unemployed
- c) The number of people over 16 who were unemployed

3 What are the units shown in the vertical axis (going up)?

- a) hundreds
- b) thousands
- c) percentages

4 What period does the chart cover?

- a) Just over 3 years
- b) Almost 3 years
- c) Just over 2 years

5 What was the unemployment rate at the beginning of the period?

- a) 5 per cent
- b) 5.1 per cent
- c) 5.2 per cent

b) Now read the description of the chart and draw the missing section of the line graph.

The line graph shows figures for unemployment in the UK workforce between May 2003 and July 2006. It is clear from the chart that the rate of unemployment **fluctuated a great deal** during this time. At the beginning of the period, unemployment stood at 5.1 per cent. A few months later the figure **had risen slightly** to 5.2 per cent. Unemployment then **remained stable** until September 2003. From this point on **there was a steady downward trend** and by January 2004 the rate **had fallen to** 4.9 per cent. It **stayed at this level** until May the same year, but from May to July **there was another small drop** of 1 per cent. There were no further changes in the level of unemployment until March the following year. From March to May 2005, **there was a small increase** of 1 per cent, but this did not last long and the figure had fallen back to 4.8 per cent by July. From September 2005 onwards, however, **there was a marked upward trend** in the rate of unemployment in the UK. From September 2005 to November the same year, **the figure shot up** from 4.8 to 5.2 per cent. The rate remained stable for a few months, but then **rose sharply** again, and had **reached a peak** of 5.7 per cent by July 2006.

c) The highlighted words in the description of the chart that you've just read are useful phrases for describing increases and decreases. Read the report again and find phrases from the text which mean...

went up and down frequently  
did not change (2 phrases)

went up a little  
went up very quickly (2 phrases)  
arrived at its highest point  
went up noticeably over a period

went down (2 phrases)  
went down gradually over a period

### Activity 2 > Describing increase and decrease (1) > 5 minutes

a) In the last task you learned some useful phrases for describing increases and decreases. There are also two useful sentence structures for doing this:

1 [noun phrase] + [verb] + [adverb]

For example:	The unemployment rate	rose	rapidly
	The cost of living	fell	dramatically

2 [There is/are] + [noun phrase]

For example:	There was	a rise in unemployment
	There has been	an increase in the cost of living

Finish each sentence below so that it means the same as the one given.

1 The price of oil rose sharply.  
There...

2 There is a noticeable increase in temperature from May onwards.  
Temperature...

3 The number of people attending the theatre has fallen dramatically.  
There....

4 There had been a steady rise in DVD sales for the first six months of the year.  
DVD sales...

5 There has been a rapid growth in the use of alternative energy sources.  
The use of alternative energy sources...

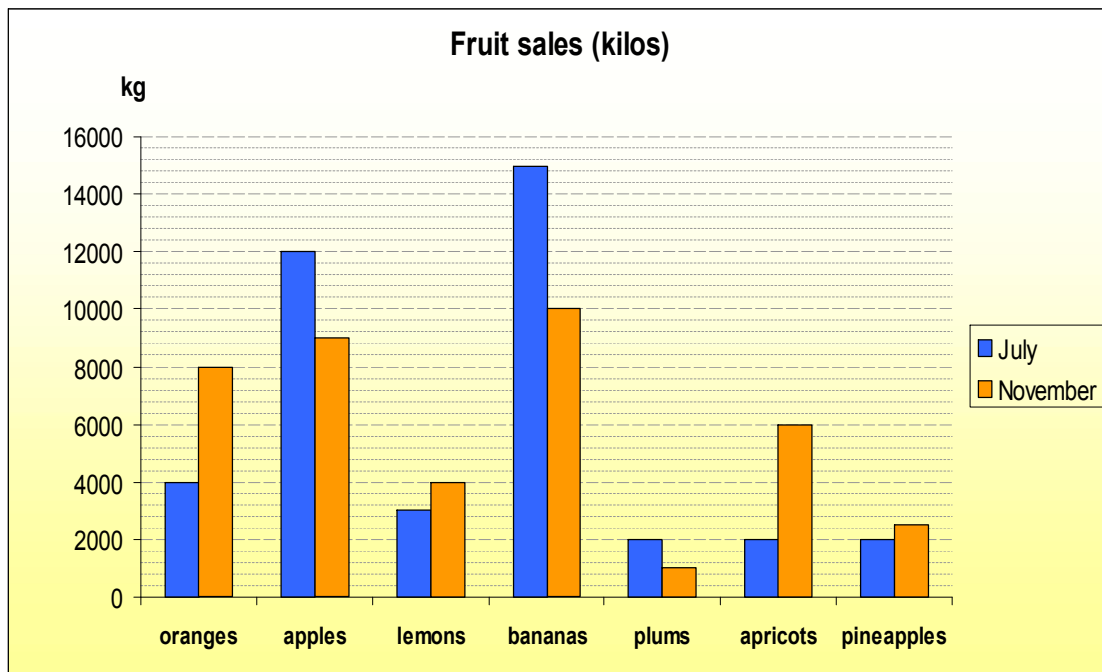
6 The popularity of self catering holidays decreased significantly during the 1990s  
There...

**Activity 3 > Describing increase and decrease (2) > 5 minutes**

You can also describe increases and decreases by using fractions to show the size of the change over a certain period. For example:

The cost of rents **doubled** in less than a year.  
Birth rates **have halved** since the turn of the century.  
By July, the price of petrol had fallen **by a third**.  
The number of school leavers going on to university has risen **by a quarter** since 1980.

a) The chart below compares monthly sales for two months from a fruit wholesaler. Check the title, the key and the axes so that you understand the chart.



b) Now write sentences about the changes in fruit sales from July to November. Use the words from the box.

a quarter a third doubled fell by halved rose by tripled

Orange sales doubled. (example)

Apple sales fell by a quarter.

Lemon sales...

Bananas sales...

Plums sales...

Apricot sales...

Pineapple sales...

#### Activity 4 > Making approximations > 5 minutes

The chart in the previous activity had very convenient numbers. However, in real life things aren't quite so easy! The chart in the IELTS test is not likely to show figures that rise and fall by exact fractions, such as a half or a third.

What you need to do is make approximations. For example, if real sales figures for oranges rose from 4000 kilos to 7850 kilos, you can say that orange sales almost doubled.

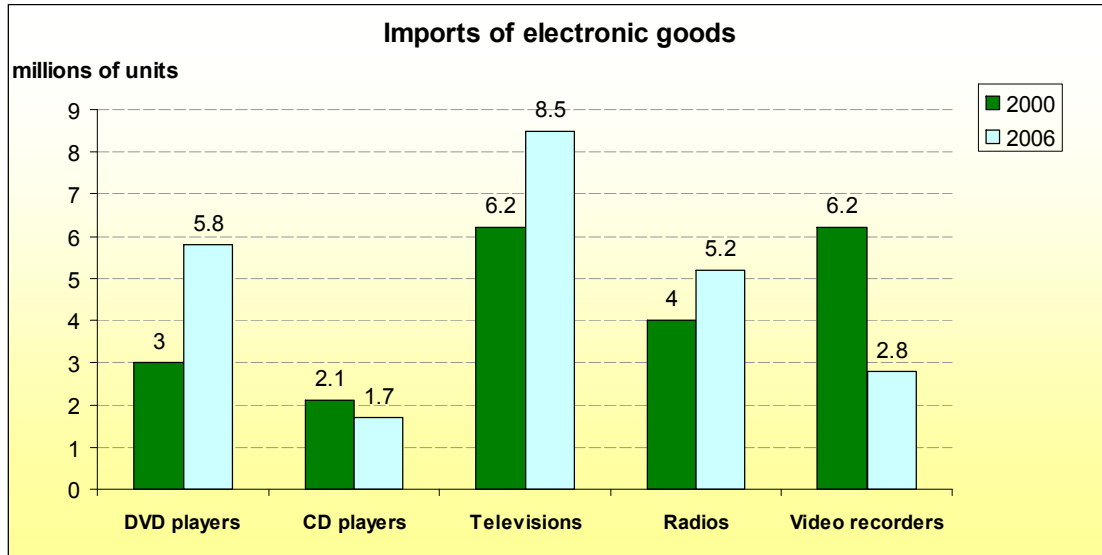
##### a)

Here are some useful words and phrases for making approximations Match phrases with the same meaning

- |                 |                      |
|-----------------|----------------------|
| 1 just over     | a around             |
| 2 approximately | b nearly             |
| 3 just under    | c slightly more than |

##### b)

Now write sentences about the chart below, which shows changes in the quantities of imports of certain electronic goods. Again, use the words in the boxes.



a quarter a third doubled fell by  
halved rose by tripled

just over approximately just under around  
nearly slightly more than

- 1 (DVD players)
- 2 (CD players)
- 3 (Televisions)
- 4 (Radios)
- 5 (Video recorders)

**Activity 5 > Prepositions of time > 5 minutes**

In the last IELTS lesson you learned how important verb tenses are when describing dynamic charts and tables. Correct use of prepositions is also important. Here are some of the main prepositions you will need to use:

**in** [month / year / morning, afternoon etc]  
**at** [9 o'clock, 10.30 am etc]  
**from**..[a point in time]..to... [another point]  
**between**...[a point in time]..and... [another point]  
**during** [a period of time]  
**before** [a point in time or a period of time]  
**after** [a point in time or a period of time]  
**by** [a point of time arrived at]  
**until** [a point of time reached]  
**since** [from a point in the past until now]

**a)** Go back to the description of the chart in activity **1b** and underline examples of the prepositions of time listed above.

**b)** Now complete each of these sentences with the correct preposition.

1 ..... January there was a noticeable rise in the number of people taking sick leave from work.

- 2 Temperatures usually reach a peak ..... about 1 o'clock in the afternoon.  
 3 From 1997 ..... 2006 there was a steady increase in sales of organic produce.  
 4 ..... the recession, unemployment grew steadily.  
 5 Televisions audience viewing figures rise dramatically ..... 6 o'clock in the evening.  
 6 ..... June sales figures were low, but later they began to increase rapidly.  
 7 The price of oil had shot up to \$70 per barrel ..... August.  
 8 From November ..... the end of the year energy consumption continued to rise.  
 9 There has been a marked decrease in road accidents ..... the new laws were introduced in 2005.

**Activity 6 > Preposition to describe increase and decrease > 10 minutes**

You will also need to be careful when using prepositions with numbers. Simply changing the preposition can change the whole meaning of a sentence. For example, what's the difference between these two sentences?

- 1) Newspaper circulation rose **by** 20,000 newspapers per month.
- 2) Newspaper circulation rose **to** 20,000 newspapers per month.

Sentence 1 *describes the size of the increase*. Perhaps newspaper circulation was already 40,000 per month, and there has been a 20,000 per month increase. The final figure will be 60,000 per month.

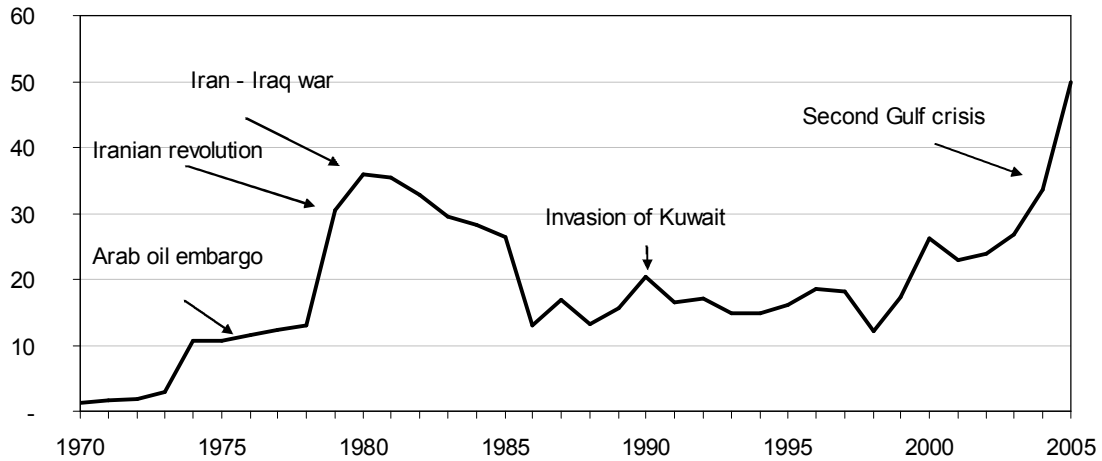
Sentence 2 *shows the point reached*. Perhaps newspaper circulation had been 15,000 per month and it then rose by another 5,000 to reach 20,000 per month.

Remember also that not all words for describing rise and fall will take a preposition, and the preposition will depend on whether you're using the word as a verb or a noun. See the table below for more details:

<b>Verbs that take a preposition</b>	<b>Verbs that don't take a preposition</b>	<b>Nouns that take a preposition</b>
rise to/by increase to/by fall to/by drop to/by shoot up to/by plunge to/by stay at remain at fluctuate between/around	reach	a rise of an increase of a fall of a decrease of

Now look at the chart and complete the report below with a suitable preposition where needed.

Crude oil prices: US dollars per barrel



Source for chart: OECD Factbook 2006 - ISBN 92-64-03561-3 - © OECD 2006  
<http://stats.oecd.org/WBOS/default.aspx?DatasetCode=CSP6>

The chart shows fluctuations in the price of crude oil over a thirty five year period, and clearly illustrates how oil prices are affected by world events.

In general there has been an upward trend in the price of crude oil [1]..... 1970, when it was only \$1.30 per barrel. The oil embargo of the early 1970s, however, caused the price to rise sharply [2]..... nearly \$11 per barrel. The crisis ended soon afterwards, but the price remained [3]..... around \$11 to \$13 per barrel until 1979. The Iranian revolution of that year had a huge impact on oil prices, which shot up [4]..... \$17 to reach [5]..... about \$30 per barrel in the same year. The following Iran-Iraq war caused a further increase, and the price reached [6]..... a peak [7]..... nearly \$36 in 1980. From that point until 1985, the price fell steadily. However, from 1985 to 1986 the price suddenly plunged [8]..... \$13. For the next few years the price fluctuated [9]..... \$14, but with the invasion of Kuwait in 1990 there was a sudden rise [10]..... \$5. The price quickly fell again and remained stable for most of the 1990s. Things changed once again at the end of the decade, and from 1999 to 2000 the price increased [11]..... almost \$10 per barrel. Despite a slight drop in 2000, the rise continued and by the end of the period, the price of crude oil had shot up [12]..... a peak of \$50 per barrel.



IELTS WRITING TASK 2: USING A MIND MAP

Activity 7 > Getting started - using a 'mind map' > 15 minutes

Getting started with your composition can be the worst part. Sometimes it can be difficult to think of ideas, but there are things you can do to help. One technique is to draw a mind map.

A mind map is simply a way of generating ideas about a topic by looking at it from different angles. Each 'angle' is a heading in the mind map. You should keep the headings as general as possible because this will help generate more ideas. For example, you can look at almost any question from one of these angles:

personal, economic, political, educational, scientific, psychological etc.

Let's look at an example. Here's a typical IELTS task 2 writing task:

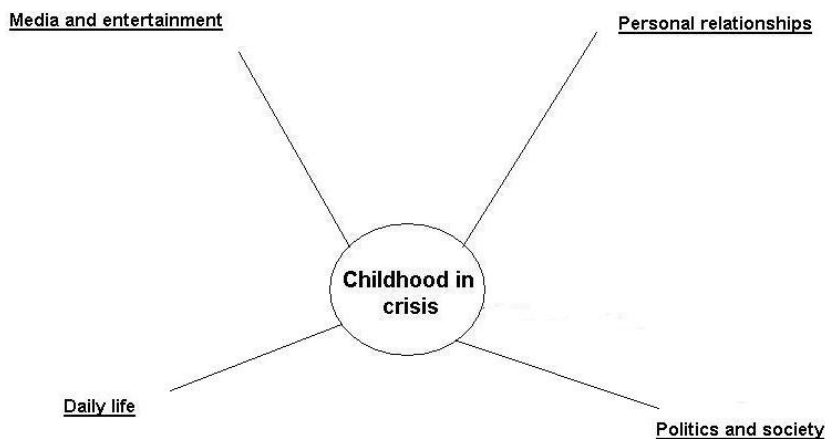
Present a written argument or case to an educated reader with no special knowledge of the following topic.

***Levels of depression and anti-social behaviour in children have increased dramatically in modern societies. This situation has led many people to believe that childhood itself is in crisis. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this view?***

You should use your own ideas, knowledge and experience and support your arguments with examples and relevant evidence.

Below is a mind map for the question you've just read. There are five very general headings, each one representing a different way to look at the question of childhood in crisis.

a) Try to think of two ideas of your own to note down under each heading.



b) Here are some ideas we thought of. Now complete the mind map by putting each of these ideas under the best heading.

Children spending more time alone  
 Computer games often promote violence  
 Dangers of the Internet  
 Disappearance of traditional home routines such as family mealtimes  
 Exposure to sex and violence on TV at an early age  
 Less clear views in society about suitable behaviour for children and adults  
 Less structured days at home - e.g. no fixed bedtime  
 Long working hours interfere with family life  
 Marketing of products and 'image' creates consumers from children  
 More and more testing and exams at schools  
 More competitive society adds to pressure to succeed  
 Too much time taken up by 'lonely' activities such as computers and TV  
 Parents often absent or disinterested  
 Peer pressure from friends and classmates  
 Poor discipline in school disrupts routines and patterns  
 Pressure from parents to succeed and achieve

**Activity 8 > Stating and supporting your point of view (1) > 5 minutes**

The IELTS writing task 2 question often ends with the words '*To what extent do you agree or disagree with this view?*' You don't have to agree with the statement, but it is important that you express an opinion of your own. Whether you disagree or agree, you should give good reasons why. Examiners want you to:

- state your opinion
- clarify what you mean
- give reasons for your views
- give examples when appropriate
- emphasise important points

a) Here are some useful words and phrases for doing these things. Put them under the correct headings.

A typical example is, Clearly, For example, For instance, From my point of view, I am convinced that, In fact, In my opinion, In other words, Indeed, It is my belief that, Needless to say, Obviously, such as, That is to say that..., The reasons for this are, This is because, This is due to, This is on account of, What I mean by this is

Stating your opinion
Clarifying what you mean
Giving reasons for your views
Giving examples
Emphasising important points

**Activity 9 > Stating and supporting your point of view (2) > 5 minutes**

Every time you state an opinion, it's important that you follow this up with your reasons or examples. Below are opinions which could be expressed in answer to the question about childhood. Match the opinions (1-5) with the supporting sentences (A-E).

- 1 School has become a source of anxiety more than a source of learning.
- 2 Today's children lead a much more 'lonely' life style than previous generations.
- 3 There has been a gradual breakdown of the bonds between children and their parents.
- 4 Children need the security of routine, but this is often lacking in today's families.
- 5 The frequency of unsupervised access to television and the Internet is also having an effect on the psychological state of many modern children.

- A For instance, they would much rather play computer games alone than play in the park with friends.
- B In other words, children are being allowed to view programmes and internet sites that are totally unsuitable for their age. As a result, their understanding of the world is often misbalanced or confused.
- C This is due to the fact that school pupils face more and more tests and exams each year.
- D One of the many reasons for this is that parents simply spend less time with their children.
- E In some families, for example, there are no set meal times and children may be not be going to bed before 11.00pm

**Activity 10 > Writing Task (1) > 10 minutes**

Now it's your turn to write.

- a) Make a plan for your own answer to the question you read in Activity 7. You can use the ideas in the mind map from earlier, or your own ideas. Remember that you don't need to use all the ideas.
- b) Write your answer. You need to write at least 250 words. Try to use some of the expressions from Activity 8 and remember to follow up all your opinions with reasons or examples.

**Activity 11 > Topic sentences > 10 minutes**

A good writer makes things easy for the reader and you need to make things easy for the examiner. One way you can do this is to use topic sentences. Topic sentences introduce the theme of a paragraph. They are like sign posts in your composition and they tell the reader that you are moving on to a new theme.

- a) Read the sample answer and match the topic sentences with the correct paragraphs [A,B,C].

Another area of concern is the pressure to succeed.  
There is also what I would call the pressure to grow up or mature too early.  
The first is the pressure to conform.

Crisis is a strong word to describe a situation. Although I would not go so far as to say that childhood is in crisis, I would certainly agree that modern children are under more pressure from more directions than ever before. But what are these pressures and what problems do they cause? [1....] there are three main areas of concern.

[A.....] [2....], children are under pressure to be like each other and to be like the role models that they see in the media. 'Pop' and 'rock' culture has become so much a part of children's lives that it is now the defining characteristic of the 10-18 year old age group. [3....] are purely economic. The pop music and fashion industries are worth a fortune, and they benefit from the most easily persuaded

consumers: children. The result, however, is that children as young as ten feel like outcasts among their peers unless they buy the latest CDs and clothes. [4....], not being able to conform with the group can lead to conflict with parents and even depression.

[B.....] [5....] is that school children are being tested on their learning much more frequently. Furthermore, most children these days are expected to take exams for university entrance. Constant testing makes children anxious about school. Likewise, children who are not suited to academic study feel inadequate when they take exams and then fail. [6....], instead of helping children's minds grow, the education system has become the cause of many mental health problems in the young today.

[C.....] [7....] many modern children are being forced to behave like adults before they are ready. [8....], many children now have to look after themselves at home because their parents are staying ever longer hours at work. More worrying, though, is the effect of unsupervised television viewing and internet surfing. Children are expected to have the judgement to decide what is suitable for them. [9....], they do not have such judgement. As a result, young children are often exposed to material that can frighten, worry and confuse.

To sum up, although [10....] childhood is in crisis, there have recently been worrying changes in the way children grow up. If these trends continue, there may indeed be a crisis.

b) Now look back at the mind map for this question from Activity 7. Tick the ideas that were used in the final composition.

c) Now use the words and expressions below to complete the sample answer.

For instance

I believe

In fact

In other words

Indeed

it is not my belief that

Needless to say

The reasons for this

This is to say that

What I mean by this

## Lesson Review

### In this lesson you have:

- Practised reading and getting information from dynamic charts.
- Learned structures and expressions for describing increase and decrease.
- Practised using prepositions when describing numbers and dates
- Learned how to use a mind map to generate ideas for Task 2.
- Practised supporting your opinions with reasons and examples.
- Learned useful words and expressions for supporting your opinions.
- Learned how topic sentences help to organise your writing

**Lesson 4 > Answer key**
**Activity 1**
**a)**

1b

2a - Notice that the use of the past tense - 'were'.

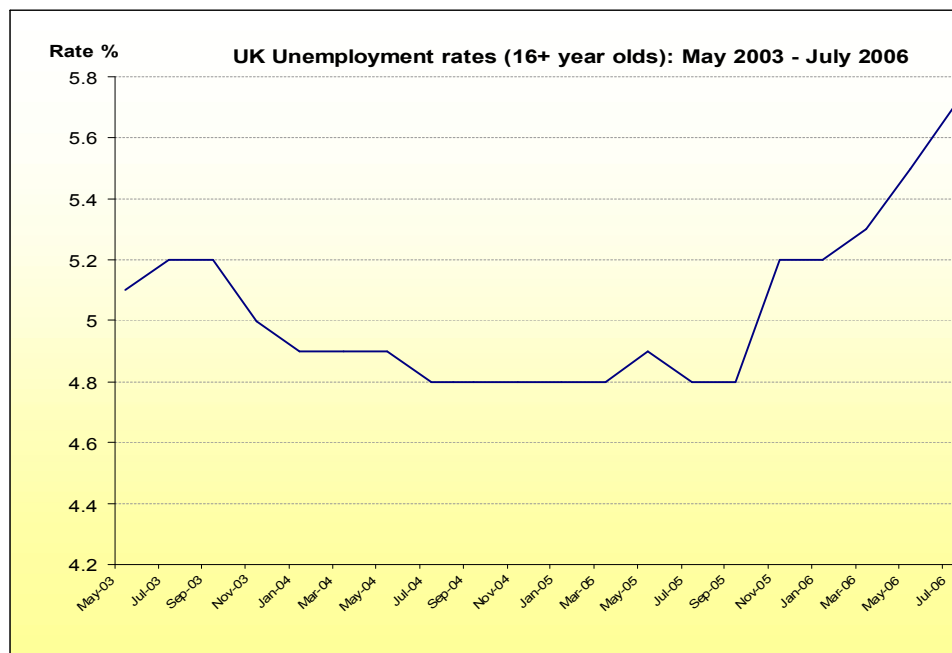
3c - the chart does not show actually numbers

4a

5b

**b)**

Your complete chart should look something like this:


**c)**

 went up and down a lot: **fluctuated a great deal**

 did not change (2 phrases): **remained stable, stayed at this level**

 went up a little: **there was a small increase**

 went up very quickly (2 phrases): **the figure shot up, rose sharply**

 arrived at its highest point: **reached a peak**

 went up noticeably over a period: **there was a marked upward trend**

 went down (2 phrases): **had fallen to, there was another small drop**

 went down gradually over a period: **there was a steady downward trend**
**Activity 2**

1 There was a sharp rise in the price of oil.

2 Temperature increases noticeably from May onwards.

3 There has been a dramatic fall in the number of people attending the theatre.

4 DVD sales had risen steadily for the first six months of the year.

5 The use of alternative energy sources has grown rapidly.

6 There was a significant decrease in the popularity of self catering holidays during the 1990s.

**Activity 3**
**b)**

Apple sales fell by a quarter.

Lemon sales rose by a third.

Banana sales fell by a third.

Plum sales halved.

Apricot sales tripled.

Pineapple sales rose by a quarter.

**Activity 4**
**a)**

1c

2a

3b

**b)**

1 Imports of DVD players nearly/almost/approximately doubled

2 Imports of CD players fell by just under/approximately/nearly a quarter

3 The number of televisions imported rose by just over/slightly more than a third.

4 The number of imported radios rose by slightly more than/just over a quarter.

5 Imports of video recorders approximately halved.

**Activity 5**
**a)**

The line graph shows figures for unemployment in the UK workforce **between May 2003 and July 2006**. It is clear from the chart that the rate of unemployment fluctuated a great deal **during this time**. At the beginning of the period, unemployment stood at 5.1 per cent. A few months later the figure had risen slightly to 5.2 per cent. Unemployment then remained stable until **September 2003**. **From this point on** there was a steady downward trend and **by January 2004** the rate had fallen to 4.9 per cent. It stayed at this level **until May** the same year, but **from May to July** there was another small drop of 1 per cent. There were no further changes in the level of unemployment **until March** the following year. **From March to May** 2005, there was a small increase of 1 per cent, but this did not last long and the figure had fallen back to 4.8 per cent **by July**. **From September 2005 onwards**, however, there was a marked upward trend in the rate of unemployment in the UK. **From September 2005 to November** the same year, the figure shot up from 4.8 to 5.2 per cent. The rate remained stable **for a few months**, but then rose sharply again, and had reached a peak of 5.7 per cent **by July 2006**.

**b)**

1 In / During

2 at

3 to / until

4 During

5 after / from

6 Before / Until / In

7 by

8 until / to

9 since (notice the use of present perfect in the main verb)

**Activity 6**

1 since	4 by	7 of	10 of
2 to	5 --	8 to	11 by
3 at	6 --	9 around	12 to

**Activity 7**

b)

Media and entertainment

exposure to sex and violence on TV at an early age  
 computer games often promote violence  
 much time taken up by 'lonely' activities such as computers and TV  
 marketing of products and 'image' creates consumers from children  
 dangers of the Internet

Personal relationships

peer pressure from friends and classmates  
 children spending more time alone  
 pressure from parents to succeed and achieve  
 parents often absent or disinterested

**Childhood in crisis**

Daily life

Disappearance of traditional home routines such as family mealtimes  
 Less structured days at home - e.g. no fixed bedtime  
 Poor discipline in school disrupts routines and patterns

Politics and society

More and more testing and exams at schools  
 More competitive society adds to pressure to succeed  
 Less clear views in society about suitable behaviour for children and adults  
 Long working hours interfere with family life

**Activity 8**

a)

<b>Stating your opinion</b>	
In my opinion	It is my belief that
From my point of view	I am convinced that
<b>Clarifying what you mean</b>	
In other words	What I mean by this is that
That is to say that...	
<b>Giving reasons for your views</b>	
This is because	This is due to
The reasons for this are	This is on account of
<b>Giving examples</b>	
For instance	A typical example is
For example	such as
<b>Emphasising important points</b>	
Clearly	Indeed
Obviously	In fact
Needless to say	

**Activity 9**

1 School has become a source of anxiety more than a source of learning.  
 C This is due to the fact that school pupils face more and more tests and exams each year.

2 Today's children lead a much more sedentary life style than previous generations.

A For instance, they would much rather play computer games than play in the park.

3 There has been a gradual breakdown of the bonds between children and their parents.

D One of the many reasons for this is that parents simply spend less time with their children.

4 Children need the security of routine, but this is often lacking in today's families.

E In some families, for example, there are no set meal times and children may be not be going to bed before 11.00pm

5 The frequency of unsupervised access to television and the Internet is also having an effect on the psychological state of many modern children.

B In other words, children are being allowed to view programmes and internet sites that are totally unsuitable for their age. As a result, their understanding of the world is often misbalanced or confused.

### Activity 11

#### a)

A The first is the pressure to conform.

B Another area of concern is the pressure to succeed.

C There is also what I would call the pressure to grow up or mature too early.

#### b)

1 I believe

2 In other words

3 The reasons for this

4 Indeed

5 What I mean by this

6 In fact

7 This is to say that

8 For instance

9 Needless to say

10 it is not my belief that