6 The Internet

Aims: Interpreting a table | Making effective main points | 'Signposting' main points
Planning an essay | Organising an essay | Modifying statements

Part 1: Vocabulary



1 **What are the a–f activities below called when you do them online? Match them to the images 1–6 above.**

a accessing the news
b downloading films
c Internet shopping
d online banking
e searching for information
f social networking

2 **In IELTS Writing Tasks, it is important to highlight key points. The words a–f below can be used to do this. Match them with the correct definitions i–vi.**

a distinctive	i affecting many people or places
b main	ii easy to see
c noticeable	iii important
d significant	iv most important
e underlying	v real and basic but not obvious
f widespread	vi unique, special or characteristic

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3 **Complete the sentences 1–5 with the best adjective from Exercise 2. Notice how they form common collocations with the nouns in italics.**

Example: *There was a significant correlation between age and number of hours spent gaming online.*

1 At first glance, the most _____ *change* was in the growing popularity of social networking; however, on closer examination, it is clear that other changes were more fundamental.

2 The graph shows that the spread of wireless technology has a _____ regional *pattern*. In fact, this pattern is characteristic of the spread of new technology generally.

3 While there was some variation in the use of online auction sites, the _____ *trend* has been upward.

4 Although price is undoubtedly a factor, the _____ *reason* customers chose the newer mobile devices is because of their wide range of applications.

5 The _____ *distribution* of towns in that region made investment in telecommunications infrastructure worthwhile. Less populated regions attracted less investment.

4 **The words in italics in the passage below are useful for writing about science- and technology-related topics. Read the text and match the words in italics a–f with the definitions 1–6.**

1 arrival
2 development
3 gradual change
4 make possible
5 speeded/sped up
6 tools

It is often said that the technological (a) *advance* that had the greatest impact on everyday life in the early twentieth century was the telephone. This is not surprising given the effect (b) *devices*, such as the telephone, have had on social relationships. When first developed, the telephone was marketed as a practical tool for conducting business; however within a few decades, it was being increasingly used to meet people's emotional and social needs. This (c) *trend* has (d) *accelerated* with the (e) *advent* of a new generation of wireless devices, which (f) *enable* users to stay in touch with friends and family virtually twenty-four hours a day.

5 **The paragraph below comes from an essay written in response to the Task 2 question:** *Which new technology of the last fifty years has had the greatest impact on daily life?* **Complete the paragraph with the correct form of the words in italics a–f in Exercise 4.**

Although there have been many important technological (1) _____ over the last five decades, the (2) _____ of the Internet has probably had the most significant effect on everyday life. The Internet (3) _____ people to access more information than ever before. This (4) _____ is (5) _____ as whole libraries are being made available online. Moreover, with instant messaging and social networking, it is cheaper and more convenient to communicate with others via the Internet. Within the next decade, the Internet will probably replace the older generation of telecommunication (6) _____, such as the telephone.

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Part 2: Practice exercises: Task 1

1 **Study the table below which shows the percentage of time Internet users spent on the eight most popular online activities in 2007 and 2009. Compare the two responses and answer the questions 1–3.**

1 Which response do you think is more satisfactory? Why?

2 Which sentences in the two responses contain main points? How are these signposted? Underline the signposting.

3 In each response, where is the detailed information in relation to the general statements?

Rank	Activity	Share of time 2007 (%)	Share of time 2009 (%)
1	Social networking	14	24
2	Watching videos	10	11
3	E-mailing	16	9
4	Instant messaging	11	6
5	Downloading music	4	5
6	Searching for information	4	4
7	Online banking	3	3
8	Accessing news	2	2
	Other	36	36

Response 1

The table shows that there were significant changes in how Internet users spent their time online over a two-year period.

The percentage of time spent on social networking sites increased sharply from fourteen per cent to twenty-four per cent. The proportion of time devoted to watching videos also increased, but only by a small amount (from ten per cent to eleven per cent). There was also a twenty per cent increase in time spent downloading music. The time spent on email, on the other hand, dipped significantly (sixteen per cent to nine per cent). This was also true of instant messaging, which fell from eleven per cent to six per cent. The other activities listed (searching for information, online banking, and accessing the news) all remained constant at four, three, and two per cent respectively.

Overall, the way that users spent their time on the Internet varied significantly, with some activities, such as social networking, becoming more popular and others becoming less popular.

Response 2

The table shows that there were significant changes in how Internet users spent their time online over a two-year period.

The most significant change was in the way users communicated online. The use of social networking increased significantly from fourteen per cent to twenty-four per cent. However, this appears to be at the expense of other forms of online communication, namely email and instant messaging, which both declined sharply to only nine per cent and six per cent respectively of total activity.

Another noticeable trend was the relatively small increase in entertainment-related activities, such as watching videos and downloading music, with each climbing one percentage point. Other activities, which can be seen as more practical, such as searching for information, online banking, and accessing the news remained constant at a relatively low four, three, and two per cent respectively.

Overall, in 2009 users continued to spend a large share of their time online interacting with others (nearly forty per cent in total); however, their preferred way of doing so had changed.

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Exam tip: To find patterns in the data more easily, try grouping similar items together and looking for associated trends. If you can't see a pattern immediately, switch your focus. In the second response above, the writer started by grouping online activities into themes: communication, entertainment, practical needs. Alternatively, she could have started by grouping items according to type of change (positive, negative, or neutral) and then looked for other connections within each group.

2 **Study the table below and follow steps 1–4.**

1 Focus on the bottom row. What general points can you make from the data shown? Which figure seems to be the most important?

2 Now focus on the regions listed in the first column. How might you group these regions into different categories? Think about developed and developing regions.

3 Switch your focus to the percentages listed in the third column. Which regions have the largest percentages of Internet users? Which regions have the smallest? How does this information relate to the categories of regions you have identified?

4 Switch your focus again to the last column. Notice the biggest and smallest changes. How does this information relate to the information in column 3? What connections can you make?

World regions	Number of Internet users (millions)	Internet users as % of population	Growth in Internet use 2000 – 2010
Africa	109	10%	2,421%
Asia	921	24%	602%
Middle East	59	30%	1,785%
Europe	473	59%	353%
Latin America	199	33%	1,123%
North America	271	78%	137%
Australia	20	60%	181%
TOTAL	**2,052**	**29%**	**455%**

Exam tip: You should 'signpost' general statements, i.e. introduce them with expressions such as *The table/pie chart/graph/*etc. *shows ... The most significant change ... Another noticeable trend ... Overall ...* You must also support general statements with detailed information from the table/graph/etc.

3 **Write three general statements about the information in the table above. Then develop each of your general statements with one or two supporting details.**

Example: *The table shows that over the last ten years there has been an exponential increase in Internet use worldwide. The number of Internet users expanded nearly five-fold, with the proportion of the world's population enjoying Internet access now standing at nearly thirty per cent.*

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Part 2: Practice exercises: Task 2

4 **Study the Task 2 essay question and essay plan below. What are the strengths and weaknesses of this plan?**

To what extent does the Internet increase social cohesion?

Essay outline

Introduction: Internet very important in modern life; two sides to this debate

1 Internet can increase social isolation
   - **a** Shy teens always surfing net – losing social skills & real friends?
   - **b** Couple addicted to online gaming, arrested for child neglect
   - **c** At work spend all morning reading emails, no time for meeting – bad for teamwork?

2 However, Internet can also bring people closer together
   - **d** Stuck at home with injury, used net to keep in touch with friends
   - **e** Used net to stay in touch with family when studying abroad – phone calls too expensive
   - **f** Through social networking can meet friends of friends
   - **g** Email & instant messaging more useful than phone for collaboration if written record needed

Conclusion: Internet can create more togetherness if used in right way

5 **Look at an alternative essay plan below. Write the topic sentences 2–3 by expanding the notes. Then indicate where you would place the supporting points a–g from Exercise 4 above. What are the advantages of this plan?**

Essay outline

Introduction: Internet can affect how relate to family, friends, and colleagues in both good & bad ways

1 The Internet has the potential to diminish family life but also to enhance it.
   Supporting points: b, ___

2 Similarly, the Internet can ... friends; however, it can also ...
   Supporting points: a, ___, ___, ___, ___

3 ... work ...
   Supporting points: ___, ___

Conclusion: Internet can create more togetherness if used appropriately

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6 **Read the sentences below and answer questions 1–2.**

Excessive Internet use leads to social isolation.

Excessive Internet use can lead to social isolation.

1 Which of these sentences is more appropriate for an academic context? Why?

2 In what other ways could you modify the first sentence to make it less sweeping?

Exam tip: It is important not to make absolute or sweeping statements. You can do this by using a range of modifiers and 'softer' vocabulary.

Quantifiers:	**Verbs:**	**Frequency adverbs:**
some	*appear*	*sometimes*
many	*seem*	*often*
most	*tend*	*rarely*
Expressions:	**Modal verbs:**	**Probability adverbs:**
It is said that ...	*can*	*possibly*
It is possible ...	*could*	*probably*
In some circumstances ...	*may*	*perhaps*

Example:

Rapid technological change destroys traditional values.

Rapid technological change can weaken traditional values.

7 **Modify the statements 1–6 so that they are more appropriate.**

1 People over the age of fifty cannot grasp new technology.

_____

2 Everyone wants to own the latest gadget.

_____

3 Children are corrupted by the Internet.

_____

4 People do not like new technology because they do not understand it.

_____

5 Too much technology makes people lazy.

_____

6 The world's problems will be solved by advances in science and technology.

_____

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8 Look at the Task 2 essay question and essay plan below. The candidate has written the introductory paragraph and notes (a–i) for the question:

To what extent has information technology reduced social inequality?

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

Complete the body of the essay by following steps 1–3.

Step 1: Write G next to the notes which can be expanded to form general statements and S next to those that give specific supporting information.

Step 2: Put the notes in a logical order. Think about the best sequence of general statements and make sure that each is followed by one or two supporting details.

Step 3: Write your essay and remember:

- Expand the notes into sentences.
- Add 'signposting' expressions to emphasise important points.
- If necessary, add modifiers or use 'softer' vocabulary to make statements less sweeping.

People who live in highly developed countries often take access to information technology for granted. They find it hard to imagine a world in which this technology does not bring greater prosperity. However, as the IT revolution moves forward in some parts of the world, in other parts of the world the poor are falling further and further behind. Indeed there are many barriers to wider IT access and its potential benefits.

a In some countries, fewer than 50% population able to read

b Use of blocking software & firewalls common

c Electricity supply irregular

d Government censorship of Internet widespread

e Even where IT access available, governments fearful of well-informed public

f Broadband access only in major cities

g Illiteracy a major obstacle

h Basic infrastructure inadequate

i Women & the poor especially likely to be illiterate

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Part 3: Exam practice

WRITING TASK 1

You should spend about 20 minutes on this task.

The table shows the average length of video advertisements on the Internet and the average length of time viewers spend watching them.

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

Write at least 150 words.

Average online video ad length and time viewed		
Type of advertisement	**Average length of advertisement (seconds)**	**Average time viewed (seconds)**
Public service	45.8	18.5
Automotive	27.2	14.7
Financial services	20.5	16.3
Travel	18.0	13.0
Entertainment	27.8	10.8
Home furnishings	17.3	10.0
Consumer electronics	15.3	7.1
Pharmaceuticals	16.6	6.3
Clothing	14.6	6.0
Other retail	21.0	4.5
Overall	**22.4**	**10.7**

WRITING TASK 2

You should spend about 40 minutes on this task.

Write about the following topic:

New technologies and ways of buying and selling are transforming the lives of consumers.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with this opinion?

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

Write at least 250 words.

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