

IELTS paraphrasing: synonyms for Task 1 and Task 2

Common words in IELTS questions and reports, with paraphrases and where each one fits.

Task 1: trends

increase (verb) rise (Neutral and very common in Task 1. Intransitive: prices rise, but you raise prices.); grow (Neutral; natural with numbers, populations, sales and economies, less usual with prices or temperatures.); climb (Neutral; common with prices, rates and figures, often for a continuing rise (prices climbed to...)); go up (Neutral but plain; fine in speaking, less academic than 'rise' or 'increase' in Task 1.)

The number of tourists visiting the city increased between 2010 and 2020. -> The number of tourists visiting the city rose between 2010 and 2020.

an increase (noun) a rise (Neutral; takes 'in': a rise in car ownership.); growth (Neutral; usually uncountable ('growth in sales'); common with economies, populations and sales.); an upturn (An improvement, especially in the economy or business; not used for any rising number.)

There was a sharp increase in car ownership during the 1990s. -> There was a sharp rise in car ownership during the 1990s.

decrease (verb) fall (Neutral and very common in Task 1; past tense 'fell', past participle 'fallen'.); decline (Slightly more formal than 'fall'; usually a gradual fall.); drop (Neutral; common with figures, prices and temperatures (dropped by 10%)); dip (A small fall, usually for a short time.)

The price of laptops decreased steadily over the decade. -> The price of laptops fell steadily over the decade.

a decrease (noun) a fall (Neutral; takes 'in': a fall in unemployment.); a drop (Neutral; common with a stated size: a drop of 10%); a decline (Slightly more formal than 'a fall'; usually gradual.); a reduction (Often used when something is made smaller on purpose: a reduction in taxes or prices.)

The graph shows a decrease in the number of people who smoke. -> The graph shows a fall in the number of people who smoke.

fluctuate rise and fall (Neutral; clearly describes repeated movement up and down.); go up and down (Neutral but plain; fine in speaking, less academic in Task 1.); vary (Means 'change' or 'be different'; it doesn't necessarily mean repeated ups and downs over time.); be volatile (Stronger: sudden, unpredictable changes; mainly used for prices and markets.)

Oil prices fluctuated throughout the year. -> Oil prices rose and fell repeatedly throughout the year.

peak reach a peak (Neutral; use 'of' before the figure: reached a peak of 500.); reach its highest point (Neutral and clear; 'its' or 'their' must agree with the subject.); hit a high (Neutral, common in news reports; often 'hit a high of' or 'hit a record high'.)

Sales peaked at 500 units in March. -> Sales reached a peak of 500 units in March.

remain stable remain steady (Neutral; almost the same meaning.); remain constant (Neutral; stresses that there was no change at all.); level off (Only after a rise or fall: it means the change stopped.); stay the same (Neutral but plain; fine in speaking.)

Unemployment remained stable at 5% for three years. -> Unemployment remained steady at 5% for three years.

sharply steeply (Neutral; a fast rise or fall, like a steep line on a graph.); dramatically (A very large or sudden change; too strong for moderate changes.); significantly (A large or noticeable change; it doesn't say how fast.)

The number of online shoppers rose sharply after 2015. -> The number of online shoppers rose steeply after 2015.

slightly by a small amount (Neutral; the same meaning, a little wordier.); marginally (Very slightly; common in reports and news.); a little (Neutral but plain; fine in speaking, less academic in Task 1.); modestly (Small to moderate; common with growth, prices and gains.)

The average house price increased slightly in 2019. -> The average house price increased by a small amount in 2019.

gradually steadily (Gradually and at an even rate; stresses regularity more than slowness.); slowly (Neutral; stresses low speed.); progressively (Slightly formal; often with comparatives (progressively worse).)

The proportion of older workers rose gradually over the period. -> The proportion of older workers rose slowly over the period.

double increase twofold (Formal; less common than 'double'.); rise by 100% (Neutral and precise; useful when you want to show the calculation.); twice as many / much (Use 'many' with countable nouns and 'much' with uncountable nouns.)

The number of cyclists doubled between 2000 and 2010. -> The number of cyclists rose by 100% between 2000 and 2010.

Task 1: describing data

show illustrate (Slightly formal; works for charts, graphs, tables and diagrams.); depict (Best for pictures, maps and diagrams; unusual for tables.); indicate (Means 'suggest' or 'point to'; better for what the data tells us than for what the chart contains.); present (Neutral; often with 'data' or 'information': the table presents data on...)

The bar chart shows the number of students enrolled in three subjects. -> The bar chart illustrates the number of students enrolled in three subjects.

proportion percentage (Use it when the figures are given in per cent, as here; otherwise keep 'proportion'.); share (Neutral; common with money, markets and spending: a share of the budget, market share.); fraction (When figures are fractions; 'a small fraction' means a very small part.)

The proportion of households with a car rose from 60% to 75%. -> The percentage of households with a car rose from 60% to 75%.

the number of the figure for (Neutral; refers to the value for a category: the figure for buses.); the total (Only when you mean the sum of all the categories.); the amount of (Only with uncountable nouns: the amount of water, not 'the amount of people'.)

The number of bus passengers fell in 2020. -> The figure for bus passengers fell in 2020.

compare give a comparison of (Slightly formal and wordier; fine in an introduction.); contrast (Focuses only on differences, not similarities.)

The table compares the average incomes of men and women in five countries. -> The table gives a comparison of the average incomes of men and women in five countries.

approximately about (Neutral; common in both writing and speaking.); around (Neutral; often used with figures and times.); roughly (Neutral; very common in speech and fine in writing.); just under / just over (More precise: says which side of the figure the value is on.)

Approximately 40% of workers commuted by car. -> Around 40% of workers commuted by car.

the majority of most (Neutral; no 'of' before a general noun: most people.); over half (Neutral and precise; only when the figure is clearly above 50%.); the bulk of (Neutral to slightly formal; means 'the largest part', usually with uncountable nouns (the bulk of the budget).)

The majority of respondents preferred online shopping. -> Most respondents preferred online shopping.

account for make up (Neutral; very common in Task 1.); represent (Slightly formal.); constitute (Formal.)

Coal accounted for 40% of electricity production. -> Coal made up 40% of electricity production.

Task 2: prompt words

nowadays these days (Neutral; slightly less formal than 'nowadays' but fine in essays.); currently (About the present moment or a current state; fits less well for long-term habits.); today (Neutral; context must show it means 'in the modern period', not 'on this day'.); in today's world (Common in essays; can sound like a set phrase if overused.)

Nowadays, many people work from home for at least part of the week. -> These days, many people work from home for at least part of the week.

people individuals (Slightly formal; stresses people as separate persons rather than a group.); citizens (People of a particular country with legal rights there, not people in general.); the public (People in general as a group in society.); residents (People who live in a particular place: city residents.)

People living in large cities often suffer from stress. -> Residents of large cities often suffer from stress.

very important essential (Means 'necessary'; about as strong as 'very important'.); crucial (Extremely important, often for a result ('crucial to success'.)); vital (Necessary for something to work, survive or succeed; extremely important.); of great importance (Formal and as strong as 'very important': 'It is of great importance that...', 'a matter of great importance'.)

It is very important for children to get enough sleep. -> It is essential for children to get enough sleep.

problem issue (Neutral; interchangeable here, but it can also mean a topic for discussion that isn't negative.); challenge (Something difficult that needs effort to deal with; sounds more positive than 'problem'.); difficulty (Often plural for practical troubles: financial difficulties.); concern (Something people worry about; it may not be a problem yet.)

Traffic congestion is a serious problem in many cities. -> Traffic congestion is a serious issue in many cities.

advantage benefit (Neutral; a helpful or good effect: the benefits of exercise.); merit (Slightly formal; usually plural: 'the merits of an idea or plan'.); strength (A good quality of a person, plan or system, often contrasted with weaknesses.)

One advantage of public transport is that it reduces air pollution. -> One benefit of public transport is that it reduces air

pollution.

disadvantage drawback (Neutral; a negative feature of something otherwise useful.); downside (Neutral; very common in speech, often 'the downside of...' or 'the downside is...'); limitation (What something cannot do or achieve, rather than a harmful effect.)

One disadvantage of working from home is isolation from colleagues. -> One drawback of working from home is isolation from colleagues.

government the authorities (Official bodies in general, including councils and police, not only the national government.); the state (The country as a political body; close to 'government' when talking about public money (state funding).); policymakers (The people who decide policy; can include advisers and officials.); local councils (Only local government, not the national government.)

The government should invest more money in public transport. -> The state should invest more money in public transport.

believe / think hold the view that (Formal; good for reporting other people's opinions.); be of the opinion that (Formal and wordy; use it once at most.); argue (Stronger: suggests they give reasons for the view.); claim (Can suggest the writer doubts the view.)

Some people believe that university education should be free. -> Some people hold the view that university education should be free.

children pupils (Children at school; common in British English ('students' is more usual in American English).); schoolchildren (Neutral; children who go to school.); young people (Usually teenagers and young adults, not small children.); minors (Legal term for people under the age of adulthood (18 in most countries); unnatural in everyday contexts.); kids (Informal; fine in speaking, avoid in essays.)

Children should not be allowed to use smartphones at school. -> Pupils should not be allowed to use smartphones at school.

old people older people (Neutral and respectful; the safest choice.); the elderly (A polite group noun; some style guides prefer 'older people'.); senior citizens (Polite and often official; usually people over 60 or 65.); pensioners (Mainly British; people who receive a pension, so not all older people.)

Old people often find it difficult to use online banking. -> Older people often find it difficult to use online banking.

affect influence (Close in meaning here; especially common for effects on behaviour, ideas and choices.); have an impact on (Neutral; suggests a strong effect.); shape (A lasting effect on how something develops.)

Social media affects how teenagers see themselves. -> Social media influences how teenagers see themselves.

solve find a solution to (Neutral; the same meaning, a little wordier.); resolve (Slightly formal; to solve or end a problem or disagreement.); tackle (Start dealing with a problem seriously; it doesn't mean the problem is fully solved.); address (Common in formal writing: to deal with an issue or concern, not necessarily to solve it.); deal with (Neutral; means handle, not necessarily solve.)

Governments need to solve the problem of youth unemployment. -> Governments need to find a solution to the problem of youth unemployment.

cause lead to (Neutral; often a result that follows over time.); result in (Neutral; focuses on the outcome.); contribute to (Only one of several causes.); trigger (Starts something suddenly, often a reaction or event.)

Fast food can cause health problems such as obesity. -> Fast food can lead to health problems such as obesity.

Speaking

I think I'd say (Natural in speaking; gives an opinion just like 'I think'.); in my view (Slightly formal; works in speaking and writing.); personally (Stresses that it is your own opinion; often 'Personally, I think...'); I reckon (Informal, mainly British.)

I think young people spend too much time online. -> I'd say young people spend too much time online.

partly to some extent (Neutral; agreeing in part but not completely.); up to a point (Neutral; partial agreement, often 'I agree up to a point'.); in a way (Neutral but plain; means 'partly, from one point of view'.)

I partly agree with that idea. -> I agree with that idea to some extent.

it depends it all depends on (Same meaning with a little emphasis; like 'depend', it takes 'on' ('depends of' is wrong).); it really comes down to (Names the single deciding factor; common in speaking.); it's hard to say, because... (Use it when the answer changes with the situation, then explain why.); it varies (Use when the answer changes between people, places or times.)

It depends on the weather, really. -> It all depends on the weather, really.

I like I enjoy (Neutral; followed by -ing or a noun: I enjoy cooking.); I'm keen on (Mainly British; followed by a noun or -ing.); I'm into (Informal; usually hobbies, music or sports.); I'm a big fan of (Informal and enthusiastic; usually a type of thing, a team or a person.)

I like cooking at the weekend. -> I enjoy cooking at the weekend.

a lot of lots of (Informal; the same meaning as 'a lot of'.); plenty of (Means 'enough or more than enough', so it adds a positive sense.); a great deal of (Slightly formal; uncountable nouns only.); loads of (Informal; speaking only.)

There are a lot of parks in my city. -> There are lots of parks in my city.

very good great (Informal, which suits speaking; dictionaries define it as 'very good'.); excellent (Neutral; stronger: 'extremely good'.); fantastic (Informal; stronger and enthusiastic.); impressive (Admiring a skill, size or quality; not just 'pleasant'.)

The food at that restaurant is very good. -> The food at that restaurant is great.

I don't know I'm not sure, but (Admits doubt, then gives your best guess.); I've never really thought about it (Buys time; then give an answer.); That's a difficult question (Buys time; follow it with a real answer, not silence.)

I don't know, but I guess I'd choose a job in teaching. -> I'm not sure, but I guess I'd choose a job in teaching.