

Lesson Plan: Describing charts and graphs

Level	Intermediate (B1–B2)
Time	60–75 minutes
Skills	Writing, vocabulary, speaking
Focus	Chart types; opening sentences; key features; proportion vocabulary; IELTS Task 1

OBJECTIVES

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- Write an accurate, well-organised description of a graph or chart
- Use appropriate vocabulary for trends, comparisons, and proportions
- Write a strong opening sentence without copying the rubric
- Avoid common errors in graph description writing

TARGET LANGUAGE & EXAMPLES

Chart types and their vocabulary

- line graph — shows changes over time: trend, rise, fall, fluctuate
- bar chart — compares categories: the highest / lowest / compared to
- pie chart — shows proportions: accounts for, represents, makes up, constitutes
- table — shows precise data: figures, statistics, data points

Opening sentences

- The graph shows / illustrates / presents / provides data on...
- The chart compares / contrasts / displays...
- The data relates to the period from 2010 to 2020.
- Never copy the question rubric word for word — paraphrase it.

Key features to describe

- Overall trend: Overall, there was a steady increase in... / The most striking feature is...
- Peak and trough: Sales reached a peak of X in 2018. / The figures hit a low in 2020.
- Comparison: Country A had significantly higher rates than Country B.
- Proportion: Women accounted for 60% of participants. / Just over a quarter...

Meaning & Nuance

Common error	Corrected version	Why
The graph shows informations about...	The graph shows information about...	information is uncountable
Sales were increase in 2019.	Sales increased in 2019.	increase is a verb here — not 'were increase'
The pie chart is showing...	The pie chart shows...	present simple for chart descriptions

The number of people is 50%.	50% of people...	numbers vs. percentages need different structures
In 2015, there was a rise of sales.	...a rise in sales.	rise/increase in — not 'of'

LESSON PROCEDURE

1. Warm-up: Chart type identification (5 min)

Task: Show 4 different chart types. Students name them and say what each is used for.

→ *Builds awareness before vocabulary input.*

2. Vocabulary presentation (15 min)

Task: Chart-specific vocabulary by type. Opening sentence paraphrasing technique.

- Key features: overall trend, peak, comparison, proportion.
- Show how to avoid repeating the same verb throughout.

3. Guided description task (20 min)

Task: Students describe a graph in two stages: notes only, then full sentences.

- Step 1: What's the overall trend? Step 2: What's most significant?
- Step 3: Compare two items. Step 4: Write a 100-word description.

→ *Scaffolded approach builds confidence step by step.*

4. Peer review (15 min)

Task: Students swap descriptions and check for errors using the error table.

- Flag: uncountable nouns, wrong verb forms, 'rise of' vs. 'rise in'.

TEACHER NOTES

- This is the most-searched ESL writing topic online — huge overlap with IELTS Academic Task 1.
- Line graphs and pie charts are most common in exams — prioritise vocabulary for these.
- Paraphrasing the opening is a specific IELTS skill worth dedicated practice.

EXTENSION / HOMEWORK

Choose one or more:

1. Find a chart or graph online and write a 120-word description using this lesson's vocabulary.
2. Write sentences describing 3 different statistics from a topic you're interested in.
3. Compare two bar charts and write a paragraph highlighting the key differences.