

Academic Writing

Lesson 3 Comparing and Contrasting

Describing graphs

- ◉ When discussing data, you can focus on
 - A) the data (x / y axes) and what it is doing
 - B) the observers of the data and what they notice
 - C) the graphic and what it is showing
- ◉ Different groups of verbs are used for each of these aspects

Describing graphs

A) The data (x / y axes) and what it is doing

- A wide range of terms are used to describe the ups and downs reflected in the data
- The range allows us to express
 - The amount of change
 - The speed of the change
 - The momentum (energy) behind the trend
- ◉ In addition to these, there is a set of verbs which approximately translate the Italian 'subire':
 - undergo; withstand; also: experience; sustain; tolerate

Describing graphs

(i) The amount of change is expressed along the up-down axis

MINOR	MODERATE	MAJOR
recover	climb; rise; increase	boom
slip	Fall; decrease	drop

Describing graphs

(ii) The speed of the change is expressed along the L-R axis

SLOW	MODERATE	FAST
crawl; creep	move, go	race; career
level out; stay/remains stable/steady/constant		

Describing graphs

(iii) The permanence of the change is determined from the information on the X and Y axes taken together

	UP	DOWN
Temporary	blip	dip
Long-term	boom	slump; bottom out

Describing graphs

B) The observers and what they notice

- Here, one set of verbs relates to seeing
note, notice, observe, see
- Another set relates to discovering
detect, discern, discover, find, learn
- A further set refers to confirming
ascertain, confirm, determine, establish

Describing graphs

C) The graphic and what it is showing

- This time, the verbs fall into two main groups:
what information the data reveals
demonstrate, indicate, reveal, prove, show
- ...and what happens as you look along the x and y axes
come about, develop, occur, result, take place

Describing graphs

◎ TASK 1: Describing movement on a graph

- A – Find the different kinds of movement on one of the two graphs provided.
- B – Use the terms and write complete sentences to describe what the graph is showing
- When describing the data (what it refers to, not its movement), bear in mind:
 1. What the categories are and how to refer to them
 2. That categories can be talked about together (merged) or separately (finer divisions/ distinctions)

Describing data in a chart

◎ TASK 2: Describing data in a chart

- Write a 150-word report describing the information shown in the graph.
- Talk about the categories using appropriate terminology
the #-# age-group, the #-#s, #-# year-olds,
the #-# cohort, those in their #s to #s, ...
- Interpret the findings wherever you can.

Projecting into the future

◎ Data is not always factual – it can also be projected (i.e. hypothetical)

- Projected data is discussed using modal forms, as it is not factual and not known
- 1. Use future forms with will + INF and adverbs of probability (probably, likely, certainly)
- 2. Use BE likely/expected/probable...
...plus to-INF with a genuine subject
...plus THAT-clause with a dummy subject (it is ~)

◎ TASK 3: data projection

Report writing

◎ TASK 4: reporting data

- Write up a complete data description
- 1. Using the data provided (DEFRA 2007) write a data report (250 – 400 words) in which you compare and contrast the categories and social grades.