



**IELTS™ =9**

# **Essay**

## **Discuss Both Sides and Give your Opinion**

Contents:

General Structure:	2
DOs and DONTs	3
Example Answer One:	4
Language for strengthening and weakening	8
Useful Structures	11

## *What is the overall structure of a “Discuss both sides” essay?*

### **Format 1**

Introduction = introduce the two sides and outline the purpose of the essay

Paragraph one\* = discuss the side you do not agree with

Paragraph two\* = discuss the side you agree with

Conclusion = summarize while giving your opinion<sup>^</sup>

\* you can discuss the side you agree with first. The reason why it is usually recommended to discuss the side you agree with second is that this naturally flows into your conclusion in which you present your opinion

<sup>^</sup> Your opinion does not have to match either of the two given opinions. It is usually shorter and easier if it does match one, at least to some extent

### **Format 2**

Introduction = introduce the two sides and outline the purpose of the essay

Paragraph one = discuss the opposite side

Paragraph two = discuss your side

Paragraph three = give your opinion

*Conclusion = summarize both sides and your opinion*

## *Which one should I choose?*

If your opinion closely matches one of the side, then the format one is a good idea, as you will be summarizing ideas you have already given in the body when discussing the side you agree with. If you do not agree with either side, you will need to present and support new ideas, which is not good in the conclusion, so format 2 is probably better.

## *How many arguments should I include for each side*

*Generally speaking two arguments for each side. If there is one argument, but it is a complex one, that is possible, and if there are three but one is closely connected with another that is possible.*

**MANY candidates who should get an 8/9 for TA get a 6 because they introduce an argument but do not support it.**

**If you include an argument, support it with reasons and/or examples**

What should I do and what should I not do in a “*Discuss both sides*” essay?

**DO**

- show in the introduction that the essay will discuss both sides and present a conclusion
- paraphrase the words in the statement (advantages / benefits )
- connect the language of your introduction to the specific question
- present each side as a discussion. i.e. “People believe that...” **not** as your opinion “I believe that”. When giving your position you can then use “I believe that”
- use language to make the side you agree with “stronger” and the side you disagree with “weaker”

**DON'T**

- give advice on how to make things better (unless this is in the task)
- present everything from a personal point of view. (in an “Do you agree essay?” you could do this, but not in a “discuss both sides” essay)

**POSSIBLE**

- give your direct opinion: You can do this, but it is not necessary in this type of essay, and may take up too much room.

## Example Answer 1:

a) Read the exam task, think of your ideas and answer these questions

- What are the different parts of the task?
- What position is it asking your essay to take?

Some people say that violence shown in movies and on the news should be restricted since it can increase crime rates, whereas others believe that this is not the case, and such restrictions are not necessary to reduce crime.

Discuss both sides and give your opinion

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

b) Read through the example answer, how well has it achieved the task?

9 = Fully answers / talks about (=addresses) all parts of the task

8 = Sufficiently addresses (= answers / talks about) all parts of the task

7 = Addresses all parts of the task

6 = Addresses all parts of the task or though some parts may be more covered than others

5 = Addresses the task only partially

*The extent to which TV influences our behaviour has long been debated, particularly concerning violence. Some want to restrict images of violent behaviour, while others argue that it is natural to broadcast such images. In this essay, both sides will be discussed before a conclusion is drawn.*

*Proponents of the restrictions often support their arguments by citing correlations between exposure to violent scenes and a person's likelihood of committing a crime. According to their viewpoint, the more a person sees violent acts in the news, the more likely they are to do the same. If a person sees a riot in the news, they will walk out the door and throw a brick through a window or knife the first passer-by they see. Those sitting in prisons for violent crimes are ostensibly there as a result of watching violence in news programs.*

*Others, however, are rightly sceptical of such ideas. Such violence, they concede, can affect a person's overall outlook on life, but it is other factors such as lack of education or poverty that are far more likely to be the cause of crime than exposure to acts of violence on the screen. For this reason it is highly unlikely that restricting violence on TV will help with crime, as the other root causes need to be addressed.*

*In conclusion, I would side with those who believe that, while restrictions on the showing of violence exist and should exist, the motivating factor for placing such restrictions should not be to reduce crime rates. The reason is there are far greater sources of crime than the one of TV screen*

violence.

**Answer:**

This is difficult to say. One part of the task is about violence shown in movies, but movies is not mentioned anywhere in the essay. Theoretically, the writing could get a 5 (addresses the task only partially). This part, however, is only minor. The writer does fully address the idea of violence on the screen when talking about the news. For this reason the TA will more likely be a 6 (covers some parts more than others), possibly a 7 if the examiner believes there is no real difference in this case between violence on the news and violence in movies. A 7 is unlikely, however. So, most likely a 6.

**MANY candidates who should get an 8/9 for TA get a 6 or even 5 because they miss a part of the exam task.**

Underline the word “and” in the task so that you do not “miss” part of the “and” sentence.

c) Use the checklist to analyse the introduction:

Does the introduction...

- ◆ introduce all parts of the specific exam task or only some?
- ◆ avoid introducing ideas that are not in the specific exam task ?
- ◆ show a clear position in answer to the exam task? (HERE = show the essay will discuss and conclude )
- ◆ avoid referring directly to the exam task
- ◆ make up **about** \*12% - 20% of the total essay size (CC)
- ◆ use paraphrasing where possible / reasonable WITHOUT changing meaning

*The extent to which TV influences our behaviour has long been debated, particularly concerning violence. Some want to restrict images of violent behaviour, while others argue that it is natural to broadcast such images. In this essay, both sides will be discussed before a conclusion is drawn.*

**Answer:**

It does well in all areas except “Does the introduction introduce all parts of the specific exam task or only some?”. As mentioned for the whole essay, it misses the “and” in “on movies and in the news”, so it only introduces the idea of movies. It does not introduce the idea of “increase crime rates” either. This is not a big problem because the writer talks about this in the main body, but .....

It is safer for you to introduce all parts in the introduction so that you focus on “developing all

the parts” (=TA 9) in all your essay.

d) Now use the main body paragraph checklist to check the first main body paragraph

- ◆ Does the topic sentence (TS) clearly signal the central topic of the paragraph?
- ◆ Is the TS connected as clearly as possible / reasonable with a specific part of the task ?
- ◆ Are the ideas in the paragraph supported with reasons and/or examples?
- ◆ Do the ideas in the paragraph address the relevant parts of the task?
- ◆ Does the position in the paragraph clearly match the position for the whole essay?

*Proponents of the restrictions often support their arguments by citing correlations between exposure to violent scenes and a person’s likelihood of committing a crime. According to their viewpoint, the more a person sees violent acts in the news, the more likely they are to do the same. if a person sees a riot in the news, they will walk out the door and throw a brick through a window or knife the first passer-by they see. Those sitting in prisons for violent crimes are ostensibly there as a result of watching violence in news programs.*

Does the topic sentence (TS) <u>clearly</u> signal the central topic of the paragraph?	Yes, it is clear about the proponents (supporters) of the first side.
Is the TS connected as clearly as possible / reasonable with a specific part of the task ?	Yes. The writer mentions ideas directly related to the task “ <i>restrictions</i> ”, “ <i>violent scenes</i> ”, “ <i>likelihood of committing a crime</i> ”
Are the ideas in the paragraph supported with reasons and/or examples?	Yes, “The more... the more” / “if” are used to extend the ideas.
Do the ideas in the paragraph address the relevant parts of the task?	Yes.
Does the position in the paragraph clearly match the position for the whole essay?	Yes. The author does discuss this side, but at the same time indirectly weakens it*

\* this will be covered in the next section

e) Do the same again for the next paragraph:

- ◆ Does the topic sentence (TS) clearly signal the central topic of the paragraph?
- ◆ Is the TS connected as clearly as possible / reasonable with a specific part of the task ?
- ◆ Are the ideas in the paragraph supported with reasons and/or examples?
- ◆ Do the ideas in the paragraph address the relevant parts of the task?
- ◆ Does the position in the paragraph clearly match the position for the whole essay?

*Others, however, are rightly sceptical of such ideas. Such violence, they concede, can affect a person’s overall outlook on life, but it is other factors such as lack of education or poverty that are far more likely to be the cause of crime than exposure to acts of violence on the screen. For this*

reason it is highly unlikely that restricting violence on TV will help with crime, as the other root causes need to be addressed.

**Answer:**

Does the topic sentence (TS) <u>clearly</u> signal the central topic of the paragraph?	Yes. It introduces a discussion of the other side, which is the central topic of the paragraph.
Is the TS connected as clearly as possible / reasonable with a specific part of the task ?	Yes. The task has a contrast “others believe that <b>this is not</b> the case.” This is matched in the topic sentence “Others, however, are sceptical of <b>such ideas</b> ” *
Are the ideas in the paragraph supported with reasons and/or examples?	Yes, the writer introduces the other factors and relates this to crime.
Do the ideas in the paragraph address the relevant parts of the task?	Yes. The task states “it (restricting) is not necessary” and does not ask for solutions to crime. The paragraph focuses on how it is not necessary and does not introduce irrelevant ideas.
Does the position in the paragraph clearly match the position for the whole essay?	Yes. The author strengthens the side they agree with.**

\* Note: In some tasks the second statement is NOT so clearly in disagreement with the first.

\* this will be covered in the next section

f) Use this checklist for the conclusion. Does the conclusion

- ◆ summarize clearly your position (answer) for **all** parts of the specific exam task
- ◆ avoid including new information / ideas not covered in the body
- ◆ make up 10%-20% of the total essay
- ◆ link the ideas in your conclusion with parts of the main body to show flexibility

In conclusion, I would side with those who believe that, while restrictions on the showing of violence exist and should exist, the motivating factor for placing such restrictions should not be to reduce crime rates. The main reason this is unnecessary is there are far greater sources of crime than the one of TV screen violence.

**Answer:**

Yes to all parts.

To get maximum TA, use strengthening / weakening language in your body, so your conclusion flows naturally.

*What is some language that I can use to strengthen one side and weaken another / the other?*

Let's look at the example answer to see how.

**Exercise:**

For the two paragraphs below

- **highlight** the language or ideas that weaken
- choose which paragraph is more appropriate for a formal IELTS essay

Proponents of the restrictions often support their arguments by citing correlations between exposure to violent scenes and a person's likelihood of committing a crime. According to their viewpoint, the more a person sees violent acts in the news, the more likely they are to do the same. If a person sees a riot in the news, they will walk out the door and throw a brick through a window or knife the first passer-by they see. Those sitting in prisons for violent crimes are ostensibly there as a result of watching violence in news programs.

Misguided proponents of the restrictions often support their weak arguments by citing correlations between exposure to violent scenes and a person's likelihood of committing a crime. According to their mistaken viewpoint, the more a person sees violent acts in the news, the more likely they are to do the same crazy thing. Apparently, if a person sees a riot in the news, they will walk out the door and throw a brick through a window or knife the first passer-by they see. Those sitting in prisons for violent crimes are ostensibly there as a result of watching violence in news programs.

**Answer:**

Proponents of the restrictions often support their arguments by citing correlations between exposure to violent scenes and a person's likelihood of committing a crime. According to their viewpoint, the more a person sees violent acts in the news, the more likely they are to do the same. If a person sees a riot in the news, **they will\* walk out the door and throw a brick through a window or knife the first passer-by they see.** Those sitting **in prisons\*\*** for violent crimes are **ostensibly** there **as a result of watching violence\*\*** in news programs.

\*Note how the writer changed from a weaker form in the previous sentence "likely" to a strong form "will". This presents the result of "walk out the door and throw a brick through a window" as a 100% fact, which makes the idea look silly. i.e. "weak". This presenting of an obviously wrong conclusion is done in the next sentence.

\*\* In this paragraph this technique has been used safely. The initial language is quite formal, and the "silly" conclusion is not too silly / exaggerated. The use of "ostensibly" helps maintain a formal tone.

**Misguided** proponents of the restrictions **may** support their **weak** arguments by citing correlations between exposure to violent scenes and a person's likelihood of committing a crime. According to their **mistaken** viewpoint, the more a person sees violent acts in the news, the more likely they are to do the same **crazy** thing. **Apparently**, if a person sees a riot in the news, they will walk out the door and **try and kill everyone then blow up the world.** Those sitting in prisons for

**their whole life** are there **just** because they saw a **five-minute fight** on the news.

This paragraph is obviously too exaggerated to be considered a formal style. “Kill everyone”, “blow up the world” and so on are too emotional and exaggerated for an IELTS essay. Words like “misguided” / “weak arguments” / “mistaken viewpoint” are also too strong in a discussion in this paragraph. Note, they can be used, but if “softened”, and preferably when extending. For example, in the extract below:

*Proponents of the restrictions often support their arguments by citing correlations between exposure to violent scenes and a person’s likelihood of committing a crime. According to their viewpoint, **which to others may seem mistaken**,\* the more a person sees violent acts in the news, the more likely they are to do the same thing.*

This immediately introduces the idea of “this side being discussed now is wrong”, but in a formal way.

Let's look at the next paragraph to find examples of indirectly strengthening:

g) For the paragraph below

- **highlight** the language or ideas that weaken

Others, however, are rightly sceptical of such ideas. Such violence, they concede, can affect a person’s overall outlook on life, but it is other factors such as lack of education or poverty that are far more likely to be the cause of crime than exposure to acts of violence on the screen. For this reason it is highly unlikely that restricting violence on TV will help with crime, as the other root causes need to be addressed.

**Answer:**

Others, however, are **rightly** sceptical of such ideas. Such violence, they **concede**, **can** affect a person’s overall outlook on life, **but it is other factors such as** lack of education or poverty that are **far** more likely to be the cause of crime than exposure to acts of violence on the screen. For this reason it is **highly** unlikely that restricting violence on TV will help with crime, as the other root causes need to be addressed.

“Rightly” immediately signals to the reader that the writer supports this side. This helps signal the writer's position, which is directly introduced later in the conclusion of the essay, When talking about what way the other side is correct (using “concede”), the author uses “can” to weaken it. Note, that the author concedes a point “a person;s overall outlook on life” which is not directly linked to the exam task. This is to indirectly say that there are other reasons to support limiting violence, but not to reduce crime. The author then uses “strong” grammar structures: “it is other.... That”, “far more” and vocabulary “highly unlikely”

*Are there any rules for how to use this language?*

Below are general language rules

Weakening	Strengthening
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“can / may / might / possibly” ( <b>less likely</b> )	Is / was / will be + definitely / likely (fact / more likely)
“small / minor / not so important” ( <b>smaller</b> )	«large / major / important / significant ” (bigger)
“sometimes / rarely / some / occasional / occasionally” ( <b>low frequency</b> )	«always / almost always / inevitably” ( <b>high frequency</b> )
“initially / on the surface / at first glance” ( <b>not deep / solid argument</b> )	«on closer inspection” / “when looking at it more closely” ( <b>deeper / more solid argument</b> )
“wrongly / incorrectly / mistakenly” ( <b>show incorrectness</b> )	«rightly / justifiably / correctly” ( <b>show correctness</b> )
showing obviously incorrect conclusions when developing	showing obviously correct conclusions when developing
<u>far</u> worse / <u>very</u> unsuccessful / <u>easily</u> the slowest ( <b>make a negative point worse</b> )	<u>far</u> better / <u>very</u> successful / <u>easily</u> the fastest ( <b>make a positive point better</b> )

Note: clauses of contrast are often useful when arguing a point:

“While this may seem true initially, on further analysis it is clear that...”

“ Although in some cases this happens, mostly ...”

**h) The second sentence below is a weakened version of the first. Is it appropriate to the exam?**

1. People believe that exercise is important.
2. Some rare and mistaken people may occasionally believe at first glance that exercise is kind of important.

**Answer:**

No, it is too emotional.

**If you are too emotional (wrong style) or you use the language mechanically you can get a 6.**

*How can I get better at strengthening and weakening?*

Read argumentative essays and debates and make a note of how such language is used

**Practice makes perfect!**

## What are some useful structures for this writing type?

### i) As before, take out the topic related language to get generally useful structures.

The extent to which \_\_\_\_\_ has long been debated, particularly concerning \_\_\_\_\_. Some want to \_\_\_\_\_, while others argue that \_\_\_\_\_. In this essay, both sides will be discussed before a conclusion is drawn.

Proponents of \_\_\_\_\_ often support their arguments by citing correlations between exposure to violent scenes and a person's likelihood of committing a crime. According to their viewpoint, the more a person sees violent acts in the news, the more likely they are to do the same. If a person sees a riot in the news, they will walk out the door and throw a brick through a window or knife the first passer-by they see. Those sitting in prisons for violent crimes are ostensibly there as a result of watching violence in news programs.

Others, however, are rightly sceptical of such ideas. Such violence, they concede, can affect a person's overall outlook on life, but it is other factors such as lack of education or poverty that are far more likely to be the cause of crime than exposure to acts of violence on the screen. For this reason it is highly unlikely that restricting violence on TV will help with crime, as the other root causes need to be addressed.

In conclusion, I would side with those who believe that, while restrictions on the showing of violence exist and should exist, the motivating factor for placing such restrictions should not be to reduce crime rates. The reason is there are far greater sources of crime than the one of TV screen violence.

### Answer:

The extent to which \_\_\_\_\_ has long been debated, particularly concerning \_\_\_\_\_. Some want to \_\_\_\_\_, while others argue that \_\_\_\_\_. In this essay, both sides will be discussed before a conclusion is drawn.

Proponents of \_\_\_\_\_ often support their arguments by citing (correlations between \_\_\_\_\_ and) \_\_\_\_\_. According to their viewpoint, (the more .. the more) \_\_\_\_\_. (If) \_\_\_\_\_ (will) \_\_\_\_\_. \_\_\_\_\_ ostensibly \_\_\_\_\_.

Others, however, are rightly sceptical of such ideas. Such \_\_\_\_\_, they concede, can \_\_\_\_\_, but it is other factors such as \_\_\_\_\_ that \_\_\_\_\_. For this reason \_\_\_\_\_.

In conclusion, I would side with those who believe that, \_\_\_\_\_. The reason is \_\_\_\_\_.