



**IELTS™ =9**

# Essay

## Two Questions

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## What is a “Two-Question” Essay?

A “Two-Question” essay is an IELTS essay that has two separate questions that you are asked to answer.

### Example Task Activity 1:

Which of the three tasks below is a “Two-Question” Essay?

1:

In some cities, public transport is bad and needs to be improved. Some people believe the government should therefore focus more money on public transport than on roads. To what extent do you agree?

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

2:

In some cities, public transport is bad and needs to be improved. What are the characteristics of bad public transport, and what are the consequences to the city of bad public transport?

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

3:

In some cities, public transport is bad and needs to be improved. What are the advantages and disadvantages of allocating government money to improving public transport?

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

4:

In some cities, public transport is bad and needs to be improved. What are the advantages and disadvantages of allocating government money to improving public transport? Should the government prioritize spending in this area?

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

**Answer:**

Task Two and Task Four are examples. Task Two has two separate questions linked with “,and”. Task four has two separate questions in two separate sentences.

### *What are typical “Two Questions” combinations?*

The most “typical’ are

What are the causes and what are the solutions? (to a problem)

What are the consequences and what are the solutions? (to a problem)

However, IELTS does like to change things around with variations.

**MANY candidates who should get an 8/9 for TA get a 6 because they over-generalize a question in a “Two-Question” essay.**

### **Example Task Activity 2:**

Where is the variation in the following task?

Teenagers nowadays are more concerned about their appearance than before.

What are the negative consequences of this?

What can parents do to help?

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

**Answer:**

The “second” question does not ask for solutions in general, it asks specifically for what parents can do.

Sometimes the second or first question is quite “different”, and even both, from the two “typical” structures. What is the difference in the questions in the following task?

People nowadays are more concerned about their appearance than before. What are the reasons for this? Is this a positive trend?

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

Answer: The question question is a “typical” one, “What are the reasons for this?”, but the second question is quite different from the “typical” questions “Is this is positive trend?”

**Read the two questions carefully and answer these two questions and not others and you will maximise your TA mark.**

*What is the structure of a “Two Questions” essay?*

There is generally one structure:

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

Paragraph one = answer the first question

Paragraph two = answer the second question

Conclusion = summarize your answers to the two questions

While the above structure is mostly typically the one applied, it is possible to change the order of the two main body paragraphs or add another if you feel it is more suitable for the organisation of your ideas. As usual, the key is to have logically organised topics with a central topic in each paragraph.

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

#### **DO**

- state the purpose of the essay in the introduction
- use one body paragraph to address each question
- if the second is **solutions**, link the solutions in directly with the consequences or reasons asked for in the first body paragraph. **It should be clear how your solutions solve the problems.**
- summarize the answer to the two questions

#### **DON'T**

- include information that is not asked for. E.g. if the task does not ask for reasons, do not give reasons (unless this is to support what is actually asked for)
- give recommendations in the conclusion if this is not asked for

**MANY candidates who should get an 8/9 for TA get a 6 because they answer a question that is often in a two question essay, for example “what are the solutions” but it is not asked for in the exam task in question.**

## 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 are the two questions?**

People nowadays are more concerned about their appearance than before. What are the reasons for this? Is this a positive trend?

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

b) Read through the example answer's introduction, and two main body paragraphs, 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

Recent years have witnessed a sizeable growth in the concern people have for how they look. This essay will discuss the root causes of this tendency, and provide reasons supporting the argument that it can, overall, be considered a positive development.

As regards the sources of the trend, it can be argued that there are two main ones. The first is that unlike before, people in modern society are constantly bombarded by different images of fashion and appearance. Such exposure over such a period of time will inevitably result in people thinking more about the way they look and may even end up causing an unhealthy amount of concern in some. The second reason, which is connected with the first, is the availability of disposable income. More people now can spend money improving how they look, be it by wearing designer clothes or even having plastic surgery done. As those around an individual improve their style, the individual will also be inclined to focus on this aspect of their life.

Although it may be tempting to say that the concern created is a negative trend, I believe in most cases such concern is relatively harmless, and can actually serve as a positive motivator. If the people in television or billboard advertisements are in good shape and wearing stylish clothes, those who see them will try and emulate them by eating well, working out more and dressing stylishly. Regarding the fact that people have more money to spend on this, I regard such wealth as anything but negative. Some may argue that money spent on improving appearance maybe better spent on other things, but there is nothing wrong about having and spending money to make yourself look

better.

**Answer:**

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c) Which conclusion is better for TA:

1. In conclusion, there are two main reasons for the trend, namely increased advertising and income for spending on appearance. Such a tendency, I believe, is definitely a good one.
2. In conclusion, in a world where we are constantly exposed to images from screens, we will inevitably become concerned about how our appearance matches up to what we see. Thankfully, images we see nowadays by and large have the positive effect of encouraging people to look and feel good.
3. In conclusion, in a world where we are constantly exposed to images from screens, we will inevitably become concerned about how our appearance matches up to what we see. People should really take pride in how they look.

**Answer:**

All conclusions are appropriate as they address the aspects of the task. The first conclusion is simpler, so this will create a lesser impression in terms of coherence and cohesion (organisation) as it requires less skill) and lexical resource / grammar (smaller range). But it does “summarize the answers” to both questions.

The second conclusion is better in terms of the skill for coherence and cohesion and range of lexical resource / grammar.

The third conclusion is ok, but the second sentence is “dangerous”. It does not directly answer the question “Is this a positive trend?”. Sure, the examiner can see that the candidate's advice “people should really take pride in how they look” indirectly answers the question “Is this a positive trend?”, i.e. the advice shows the candidate believes it is a positive trend, but it is best not to leave the examiner “guessing” your position.

## Example Answer 2:

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

- What are the different aspects / parts of the task?
- What are the two questions?

In many countries nowadays the percentage of elderly people in the population is growing. What are the negative effects of this for society and what can the government do?

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

b) Both of the paragraphs below are ok, but one of the focuses more on the specific exam task. Which one?

1. The primary implication to a society with a growing proportion of old people is an increased burden on the medical system. The elderly inevitably require a higher level of medical care, the bill for which is often footed by the taxpayer. Consequently other areas supported by the government, such as roads or education, may be affected in a way detrimental to society. The second problem is closely interrelated to the first. Those of a pension age are typically retired, which means they no longer contribute taxes to the government coffers. The greater the percentage of such people in a society, the less the money the government has, which leads to shortages in funding for other areas society benefits from as mentioned.
2. The primary implication of a growing proportion of old people is an increased burden on the medical system. The elderly inevitably require a higher level of medical care, the bill for which is often footed by the taxpayer. Consequently other areas supported by the government, such as roads or education, may be affected in a detrimental way. The second problem is closely interrelated to the first. Those of a pension age are typically retired, which means they no longer contribute taxes to the government coffers. The greater the percentage of such people in a society, the less the money the government has, which leads to shortages in funding for other areas as mentioned.

**Answer:**

The first paragraph is more focused, as it refers to the “for society” aspect in the task:  
The primary implication to a society  
detrimental to society.  
other areas society benefits from

c) Read another possible first body paragraph. Is it better than number 1 in activity “a”.

An ageing population leads to greater healthcare costs and a lower percentage of taxpayers, the consequences of which can be quite dramatic. In countries such as Australia, one of the implications has been that the government has cut funding for universities, as a result of which less people can afford to go, and those that do are saddled with large debts. Debt-ridden or lowly educated young people are not in a strong position to help develop the society they live in. Another consequence is the rise in the cost of transport and the government privatises the system. People within the society consequently have less money, and a lower standard of living.

**Answer:** This last paragraph is clearly better for the specific exam task. The task does not ask for the reasons, only the consequences. About half of the “a” 1 paragraph is reasons, which is not too bad as the consequences are addressed, and the reasons help give context for the solutions provided later. However, it is obvious that the paragraph is “c” provides greater detail of the consequences, which is what the specific task asks for.

d) An important part if there is a “solutions” question is how good / clear your solutions are in terms of actually minimizing / addressing the problems. Read through the essay below. Is it reasonably clear how the solutions will minimize or fix the problems?

For various reasons, including longer life expectancy, certain populations are ageing. While living longer is positive for the individual, there are downsides for the society as a whole. This essay will discuss such negatives and outline steps the government can take to mitigate them.

An ageing population leads to greater healthcare costs and a lower percentage of taxpayers, the implications of which can be quite dramatic. In countries such as Australia, a primary consequence has been that the government has cut funding for universities, as a result of which less people can afford to go, and those that do are saddled with large debts. Debt-ridden or lowly educated young people are not in a strong position to help develop the society they live in. Another consequence is the rise in the cost of transport and the government privatises the system. People within the society



consequently have less money, and a lower standard of living.

In order to minimize the impact of the aforementioned consequences, the government should take two steps. It firstly needs to encourage people to take out private health insurance by giving them tax breaks if they do, thereby alleviating the burden on the public healthcare system and freeing up funds for education and roads. The second measure would be to make the pension age later. Sad as it may sound, this would force more older people to continue to work, which would then buffer the fall in the overall percentage of taxpayers.

To conclude, although this proposed two-prong action plan may seem harsh, it would most certainly help in preventing a situation whereby an ageing population would drain resources from other areas vital to society.

**Answer:**

It is clear how the solutions will address

e) Read through the example answer above again and take out useful structures. The introduction below has been done. As you do this, highlight in bold the structures connected with “cause and result”.

For various reasons, including \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_. While \_\_\_\_\_ is positive for \_\_\_\_\_, there are downsides for \_\_\_\_\_. This essay will discuss such negatives and outline steps the government can take to mitigate them.

**Answer:**

\_\_\_\_\_ leads to \_\_\_\_\_, **the implications of which can be** quite dramatic. In countries such as \_\_\_\_\_, **a primary consequence has been that** \_\_\_\_\_, **as a result of which** \_\_\_\_\_. **Another consequence is** the \_\_\_\_\_. People within the society **consequently** \_\_\_\_\_.

In order to minimize the impact of the aforementioned consequences, the government should take two steps. It firstly needs to encourage people to \_\_\_\_\_ by \_\_\_\_\_, **thereby** \_\_\_\_\_. The second measure would be to \_\_\_\_\_. Sad as it may sound, this would \_\_\_\_\_, **which would then** \_\_\_\_\_.

To conclude, although this proposed two-prong action plan may seem harsh, **it would most certainly help in** preventing a situation whereby \_\_\_\_\_.

e) If you are asked to writing about “solutions”, often it can be connected with the government. Also in speaking part 3 you may need to talk about what the government should do. For these reasons it is worth learning some Actor + action combinations with “the government” as the actor. It is also worth learning to talk about taxes.

Go through the answer again and put in bold the actions connected with the actor “the government”, and underline items connected with taxpayers.

**Answer:**

For various reasons, including longer life expectancy, certain populations are ageing. While living longer is positive for the individual, there are downsides for the society as a whole. This essay will discuss such negatives and outline **steps the government can take to mitigate** them.

An ageing population leads to greater healthcare costs and a lower percentage of taxpayers, the implications of which can be quite dramatic. In countries such as Australia, a primary consequence has been that **the government has cut funding for** universities, as a result of which less people can afford to go, and those that do are saddled with large debts. Debt-ridden or lowly educated young people are not in a strong position to help develop the society they live in. Another consequence is the rise in the cost of transport and **the government privatises the system**. People within the society consequently have less money, and a lower standard of living.

In order **to minimize the impact of** the aforementioned consequences, **the government should take two steps**. It firstly **needs to encourage people to** take out private health insurance **by giving** them tax breaks if they do, **thereby alleviating the burden on** the public healthcare system and **freeing up funds for** education and roads. The second measure would be **to make** the pension age later. Sad as it may sound, this would force more older people to continue to work, which would then buffer the fall in the overall percentage of taxpayers.

To conclude, although this proposed two-prong action plan may seem harsh, it would most certainly help in preventing a situation whereby an ageing population would drain resources from other areas vital to society.