



DESCRIBING DATA

When describing data, or anything for that matter, it is important to include details and comments on what is significant, to show that you are aware of which features are critically important and require comment.

Descriptions are not very useful unless they are detailed. Details need also to be put into perspective – compared and contrasted with something (a shared standard or reference point); or located during or over a particular period of time. Making comments demonstrates that the significance of trends, or of what is being described, is appreciated. It also helps the reader to appreciate the importance of these trends.

In describing data there are several aspects to consider:

1. **Organisation of a good description of data** – how to construct a complete description.
2. **Language choices in descriptions of data** – language choice enables variety.
3. **Register** – formal and informal language choices.
4. **Prepositions of Time** – there are several prepositions (at, in, on, by, from, for, between, to, till, until), which are useful when describing data.

STUDY TIPS

Include data as evidence or examples to support your description, and make a comment to show you understand the significance of what you are describing.

Make your descriptions of data complete.

Also use a variety of language constructions, and make sure you use Prepositions of Time correctly.

1. Organisation of a good description of data

It is helpful to remember that there are three parts to a good description:

- | | |
|---------------------|--|
| 1. Statement | “DVD sales increased dramatically” |
| 2. Data | “between 2001 and 2004”, “from 2 to 3 million” |
| 3. Comment | “a rise of 50%”, “a significant growth” |

Between 2001 and 2004, DVD sales increased dramatically, from 2 to 3 million. This was a rise of 50%, quite a significant growth.

The order of these parts is not necessarily fixed or rigid. So, we can write:

Sales of DVDs showed significant growth, rising from 2 to 3 million between 2001 and 2004 – an increase of 50%.

Another example of a good description:

1. The number of candidates taking IELTS increased again
2. in 2003 from 355,000 to well over 475,000
3. – a rise of 34%.

The number of candidates taking IELTS increased again in 2003 from 355,000 to well over 475,000 – a rise of 34%.

Include data as evidence or examples to support your description, and make a comment to show you understand the significance of what you are describing.

So, follow these steps to construct a good description:

- | | |
|------------------------------|--|
| 1. Identify the trend | <i>Laptop production rose</i> |
| 2. Include evidence | <i>from 4 million to 5 million units</i> |
| 3. Include the period | <i>for the first 3 months of 2003</i> |
| 4. Include comment | <i>This is a growth of 25%.</i> |

2. Language choices in descriptions of data

There are always choices in language, and by exercising choices our writing will be more interesting. In descriptions it is possible to use **Adjectives and Nouns** to describe trends and significances, or **Verbs and Adverbs**.

Look at these examples:

Adjective + Noun construction

From 2001 till 2004, there was a gradual increase in DVD sales in Australia, from 2 to 3 million – a rise of 50%.

Verb + Adverb construction

From 2001 till 2004, DVD sales in Australia increased gradually from 2 to 3 million – a rise of 50%.

Vocabulary choices for descriptions of data:

ADJECTIVE	NOUN	VERB	ADVERB
fast quick sudden significant dramatic large major sharp steep	the rise the increase the growth the explosion	to go up (went/gone) to rise (rose/risen) to increase (-d) to grow (grew) to explode (-d) to skyrocket (-ed) to balloon (-ed) to soar (-ed)	fast quickly suddenly significantly dramatically sharply steeply
slow small slight insignificant minor	the fall the drop the decrease the plummeting the sinking	to go down (went/gone) to drop (-ped) to decrease (-d) to plummet (-ted) to sink (sank/sunk) to nose dive (-d)	slowly slightly insignificantly

Further examples:

There was <u>a dramatic growth</u> in the number of civilians who contracted the virus throughout the decade.	The number of civilians who contracted the virus <u>grew dramatically</u> throughout the decade.
Architecture and medicine experienced <u>a slight drop</u> in popularity this year, compared to the numbers who applied for these faculties in 2002.	Applications for architecture and medicine <u>dropped slightly</u> in popularity this year, compared to the numbers who applied for these faculties in 2002.
There was <u>a considerable fall</u> in applications for student visas from the beginning of 2001, due mainly to <u>the steep rise</u> in university fees.	Applications for student visas <u>fell considerably</u> from the beginning of 2001, due mainly to the fact that university fees <u>rose steeply</u> .

3. Register – formal and informal language choices

In all languages there are levels of formality. Certain language choices, certain words and certain structures, are more formal than others and are reserved for more formal situations. Being rarer and less common, formal choices are acquired later. Less formal choices are more common, and are learned earlier.

Shorter words and common verbs are learned first. Longer words are mastered later.

<u>VERBS</u>		
Formal ↑ ↓ Informal	<p>increase rise go up</p>	<p>decrease drop do down</p>

In English, Phrasal Verbs (ie Verb + Preposition eg “*go up*”) are less formal than longer more complicated Verbs with several syllables, such as “*increase*”.

<u>NOUNS</u>		
Formal ↑ ↓ Informal	<p>expansion increase rise</p>	<p>contraction decrease drop</p>

Shorter nouns are less formal than longer nouns – “*rise*” is less formal than “*contraction*”.

It is possible to use more colourful words to make descriptions more interesting:

to dive	to fall straight, <u>like a person</u> , diving into a swimming pool
to nose dive	to fall, <u>like a plane</u> dropping out of the sky, nose first
to plummet	to fall straight to the ground, <u>like a bird</u> dropping out of the sky
to collapse	to fall to the ground, <u>like a person</u> fainting in hot weather

to soar	to rise quickly, moving very high, like a bird, flying high in the sky
to rocket	to rise quickly and sharply, like a rocket shooting straight up into the sky
to balloon	to increase, like a balloon expanding and growing bigger and bigger

4. Using Prepositions of Time when describing Data

There are several Prepositions (at, in, on, by, from, for, between, to, till, until), which are useful when describing data:

<u>at</u> a particular point in time	<u>in</u> during a period of time	<u>on</u> a day
At the beginning or end of the day, week, month, season, year, decade, century, millennium	During a day, week, month, season, year, decade, century, millennium	On Monday On the eve of the festival On the day I was born On the morning of the wedding
At the beginning of the season At the end of the financial year	In the 19 th century In summer	On the anniversary of the battle On the weekend
At night	In the evening In the morning, afternoon	
At New Year		On New Year's Day

NB: In English we say "at night" but "in the evening".
We say "at Christmas" meaning the season of Christmas, but "on Christmas Day" (25th December).

NB: We say "At the beginning of the story" to mean "exactly when the story started"; but we say "In the beginning, ..." to mean sometime during the beginning period.

"At last" means "After waiting expectedly for a long time"

"At last" is NOT the opposite of "at first". The opposite of "at first" is "lastly".

<u>by</u> to measure the size of a rise or fall	<u>for</u> to measure length of time	<u>from</u> to establish when the measure starts from	<u>to, till, until</u> reach, arrive at
Enrolments fell by 30%	To continue for a few hours, a whole day, for three weeks, for months, for the whole winter.	From the beginning of 2003	The trend continued to/till/until November.

NB: Spelling of *till* – "double l"; whereas the spelling of *until* – "single l".

NB: The temperature fell by 15 degrees in a few hours, from 39 degrees to 24, when the Southerly Buster finally arrived, bringing cool breezes till later that evening, when the storm finally broke. Heavy rain fell for several hours, until just before dawn.

Example:

I planned to arrive in summer, at New Year. I actually arrived on New Year's Day, at 7.00 am. At that tie in the morning on the 1st of January, there were no empty taxis. Everyone was going home from New Year's Eve parties. After waiting for almost an hour, at last I managed to hail a vacant taxi. The trip took 25 minutes. I was told it would take between 20 and 30 minutes depending on the traffic. I did not arrive at my hotel until 10.00.

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