

Arts or Science

My reflections were prompted by a brief excerpt from a dialogue between a history professor from Peking University and a well-known literary writer and antique collector based in Beijing. While their discussion was highly philosophical, making it largely inaccessible to IELTS students, I find it unnecessary to delve into their specific arguments. Moreover, I personally question the literary author's capacity for rigorous academic discourse. It is suspected that despite an apparent breadth of reading, his intellectual engagement remains confined largely to literature, with limited exposure to other disciplines.

What I find more pressing, however, is the way IELTS Writing Task 2 often frames the tension between choosing the humanities and arts versus science and engineering. Beyond merely assisting students in crafting responses to such prompts, I see this as an opportunity to encourage young learners—and, crucially, their parents—to cultivate extensive and discerning reading habits. In an age of information overload, where digital content is often unfiltered and unreliable, the guiding principles should be breadth and credibility.

Assuming children have acquired foundational reading skills and general knowledge by the end of primary school, their extracurricular reading should extend across disciplines, encompassing the natural sciences, engineering, social sciences, history, biographies, and select literary works. Striking a balance is essential. While literature has its place, an overemphasis on it at the expense of other fields may limit intellectual development.



Furthermore, if students, regardless of their grade level — be it eighth or eleventh—exhibit a genuine interest in philosophy, anthropology, sociology, or political science, such curiosity should not only be recognized but actively nurtured.

Here is a curated list of 10 books that introduce young learners to foundational ideas across various disciplines. Each book is written by a distinguished scholar and offers insights that encourage critical thinking and intellectual curiosity.

Interdisciplinary Reading List for Teenagers

1. Natural Sciences & Environmental Studies

- ◆ *Silent Spring* – Rachel Carson

A groundbreaking work that raised awareness of environmental issues and the dangers of pesticides, making it a must-read for young learners interested in science and sustainability.

2. Physics & Cosmology

- ◆ *A Brief History of Time* – Stephen Hawking

An accessible introduction to the universe, black holes, and time, written by one of the greatest physicists of the modern era.

3. Engineering & Technology

- ◆ *Structures: Or Why Things Don't Fall Down* –

J.E. Gordon

An engaging book that explains the fundamental principles of engineering and materials science in a way that is both educational and entertaining.

4. Biology & Evolution

- ◆ *The Selfish Gene* – Richard Dawkins

A fascinating introduction to genetics and evolution, providing a fresh perspective on how natural selection operates at the level of genes.

5. History

- ◆ *Guns, Germs, and Steel* – Jared Diamond

A compelling explanation of why civilizations developed differently across the world, based on geography, biology, and social structures.

6. Philosophy & Ethics

- ◆ *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?* – Michael Sandel

A thought-provoking exploration of moral philosophy and ethical dilemmas, written in an engaging style that invites young readers to think critically about justice and fairness.

7. Social Sciences & Anthropology

- ◆ *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* – Yuval Noah Harari

A fascinating journey through human history, exploring the cognitive and societal revolutions that shaped the world.

8. Political Science & Economics

- ◆ *Why Nations Fail* – Daron Acemoglu & James A. Robinson

A compelling analysis of why some nations prosper while others struggle, offering key insights into political and economic institutions.

9. Literature & Literary Criticism

- ◆ *How to Read Literature Like a Professor* – Thomas C. Foster

A guide to deeper literary analysis, helping young readers appreciate hidden meanings in classic and contemporary works.

10. Psychology & Cognitive Science

- ◆ *Thinking, Fast and Slow* – Daniel Kahneman

A brilliant introduction to how the human mind works, exploring cognitive biases and decision-making processes in everyday life.

This selection provides a balanced exposure to various disciplines, encouraging young learners to read widely and develop a well-rounded intellectual foundation.

Here are the Chinese titles for the 10 recommended books:

1. **Silent Spring** – Rachel Carson
 - Chinese Title: 《寂静的春天》
2. **A Brief History of Time** – Stephen Hawking
 - Chinese Title: 《时间简史》
3. **Structures: Or Why Things Don't Fall Down** – J.E. Gordon
 - Chinese Title: 《结构: 万事万物为什么不会倒塌》
4. **The Selfish Gene** – Richard Dawkins
 - Chinese Title: 《自私的基因》
5. **Guns, Germs, and Steel** – Jared Diamond
 - Chinese Title: 《枪炮、病菌与钢铁》

6. **Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?** –

Michael Sandel

- Chinese Title: 《公正：该如何做是好？》

7. **Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind**

– Yuval Noah Harari

- Chinese Title: 《人类简史》

8. **Why Nations Fail** – Daron Acemoglu &

James A. Robinson

- Chinese Title: 《国家为什么会失败：权力、繁荣与贫穷的根源》

9. **How to Read Literature Like a Professor**

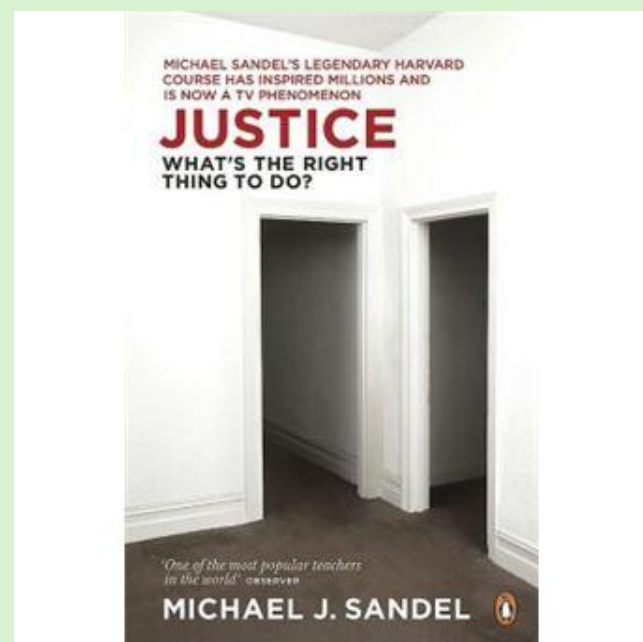
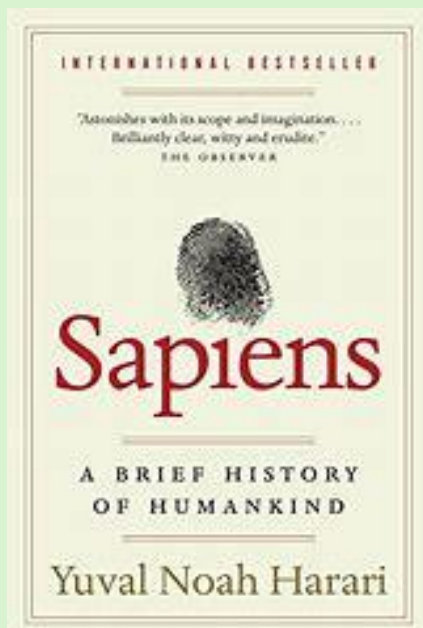
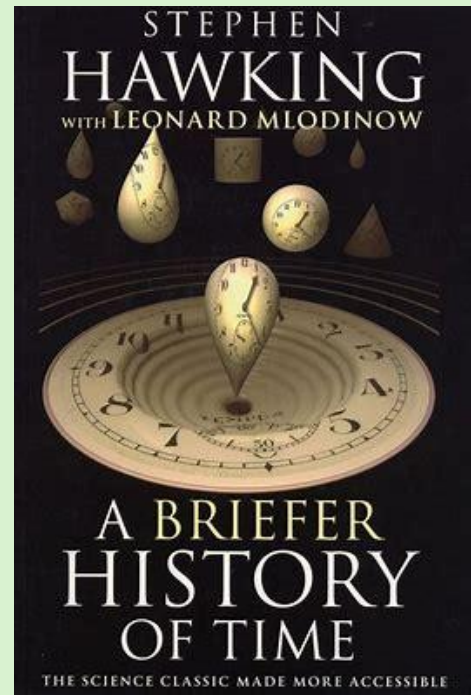
– Thomas C. Foster

- Chinese Title: 《如何像教授一样阅读文学》

10. **Thinking, Fast and Slow** – Daniel

Kahneman

- Chinese Title: 《思考，快与慢》



Supporting Humanities & Arts

1. Encourages Creativity & Critical Thinking

- Subjects like literature, history, and philosophy help people think deeply and creatively.
- They improve problem-solving and decision-making skills.

2. Helps Understand Society & Culture

- Humanities teach us about human history, culture, and values.
- They help people become more empathetic and understanding of others.

3. Important for Communication & Expression

- Language, literature, and the arts improve communication skills.
- Good communication is essential for all careers, even in science and business.

4. Drives Social Change & Ethics

- Many political and social movements started with ideas from philosophy and literature.
- Ethical discussions in humanities help guide scientific advancements.

5. Jobs & Career Opportunities

- Many careers require strong humanities skills (e.g., law, journalism, education, marketing).
- Creativity-based industries like film, design, and advertising are growing.

Supporting Science & Engineering

1. Drives Technological & Medical Progress

- Science and engineering create new inventions and medical breakthroughs.
- These fields improve people's health and quality of life.

2. Higher Employment & Economic Growth

- Science and technology drive economies, creating jobs and wealth.
- Many high-paying careers require a science background (e.g., doctors, engineers, IT specialists).

3. Solves Global Challenges

- Science helps tackle problems like climate change, disease, and food shortages.
- Engineering creates better infrastructure, transportation, and energy solutions.

4. More Objective & Evidence-Based

- Science relies on facts and data, reducing bias and misinformation.
- It offers practical solutions rather than abstract ideas.

5. Essential for National Development

- Countries that invest in science and technology tend to be more developed.
- Innovation in science leads to stronger economies and better living standards.

Balanced Conclusion

- Both **humanities and science** are essential for society.
- Science improves life with technology, but humanities guide how we use it ethically.
- A well-rounded education should include **both fields** for a better future.

IELTS Model Essay

IELTS Writing Task 2 Essay (Band 7 Sample – 265 Words)

Question: Some people believe that studying humanities, such as literature and history, is more important than studying science and engineering. Others think that science and

technology are more valuable for society. Discuss both views and give your own opinion.

Essay:

The debate over whether humanities or science contributes more to society remains a significant issue. While scientific and technological advancements drive economic growth and solve global challenges, humanities shape ethical values, critical thinking, and cultural understanding. A balanced approach that integrates both fields is essential for meaningful progress.

On the one hand, humanities play a crucial role in shaping individuals and societies. Subjects like literature and history help people understand human experiences, traditions, and ethical values. By studying humanities, students develop critical thinking, effective communication, and problem-solving skills, which are highly valuable in fields such as law, journalism, and education. Furthermore, creativity and emotional intelligence, which humanities nurture, are essential for leadership and diplomacy. Another key benefit is their role in guiding technological and scientific advancements. Without ethical considerations, progress in artificial intelligence, genetic engineering, and environmental science could lead to serious consequences, including privacy violations and ecological harm.

On the other hand, science and engineering are fundamental to innovation and economic development. Medical breakthroughs, renewable energy, and digital technology have greatly improved living standards. Scientific

research provides solutions to global problems such as climate change and pandemics. Additionally, careers in science and technology often offer higher salaries and job security, making them more attractive for many students. Governments worldwide prioritize investment in these fields to enhance national development and global competitiveness.

In conclusion, while science provides practical solutions, humanities ensure that advancements remain ethical and culturally meaningful. A society that values both will achieve not only technological success but also social responsibility. Thus, integrating both disciplines is the key to a well-rounded, progressive future.

关于人文学科与科学哪个对社会贡献更大的辩论仍然是一个重要的问题。虽然科学和技术的进步推动了经济增长并解决全球挑战，但人文学科则塑造了伦理价值观、批判性思维和文化理解。整合这两个领域的平衡方法对实现有意义的进步至关重要。

一方面，人文学科在塑造个人和社会方面发挥着至关重要的作用。文学和历史等学科帮助人们理解人类经验、传统和伦理价值观。通过学习人文学科，学生能够发展批判性思维、有效沟通和解决问题的能力，这在法律、新闻和教育等领域尤为重要。此外，人文学科所培养的创造力和情商对于领导力和外交也至关重要。另一个关键好处是它们在引导科技和科学进步方面的作用。如果没有伦理考量，人工智能、基因工程和环境科学等领域的进展可能会导致严重后果，包括侵犯隐私和生态损害。

另一方面，科学和工程是创新和经济发展的基

础。医学突破、可再生能源和数字技术极大地改善了生活水平。科学研究为气候变化和流行病等全球问题提供了解决方案。此外，科学和技术领域的职业通常提供更高的薪资和工作保障，使其对许多学生更具吸引力。全球各国政府优先投资于这些领域，以增强国家发展和全球竞争力。

总之，虽然科学提供了实际的解决方案，但人文学科确保了进步仍然具有伦理性和文化意义。一个重视这两者的社会，将不仅实现技术上的成功，还会承担社会责任。因此，整合这两个学科是实现全面、进步未来的关键。

