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Ellen: Hi everybody. This is Ellen with another podcast day. The podcast today will focus on writing, like many of my podcasts do. However, this one will focus with a very specific area of the writing test. It will focus on task 2, whether that's for general or academic and even more specifically than that, it's going to focus on task achievement.

The reason why I decided to do that is because, as some of you might know, I've been involved with IELTS preparation for a really long time and I have seen some students who are really excellent writers with a beautiful command of the language, great vocabulary, great grammar, really just stunning language abilities, but guess what happens?

They don't get the score that they truly deserve because they have a problem with task achievement. Okay, it's just so typical that I can't even explain to you why. So, what I decided to do in preparation for this podcast is familiarize you with something you absolutely should know and love and know like the back of your hand, really.

It is the public version of the band descriptors. There is one for task 1, there is one for task 2 and there is also one for speaking. As I mentioned, this is the public version. Examiners have a slightly different version. It's a little more detailed, but for our purposes, this is really more than adequate.

So, we can absolutely get a feel for what the examiners are grading our essays on when they look at them. Okay, so, I said that we are going to talk about task response or rather task achievement because it's kind of elusive. I mean, you know, how do you know if something is well developed or not? How do you know something is on topic or not?

So, that's what I really want to focus on. Alright, so what happens here? Let's look at the 7. "Addresses all parts of the task" and that's the first thing I want to look at. "All parts of the task." The folks over at IELTS are really, really specific as to what that means.

All parts means, well, all parts. So, let me show you what I mean by example. If you see an "and" or if you see an "s" somewhere, you have to really take those into consideration. So, let me show you an example. Okay, this is a nice example of what we mean by all parts of the task. So, check this out.

"Would you prefer to stay in one company or change companies at one point in your career life? What are the advantages and disadvantages for both scenarios?" So, essentially in order to even approach a band 7, you have to address each question.

So, both these, which do you prefer? That's the first question. You also have to address the advantages and disadvantages for both. So, one of the problems that some IELTS students come across is, well, they miss one of those areas. So, what they do is they analyze that they would prefer to stay in one company and they don't even analyze this at all or in the other paragraph they analyze just the advantages or the disadvantages.

The point is that they skip something. You really can't, okay? What's the best way to do this? There are a few different ways. One way I would probably choose to do this is to, say for example, analyze the advantages and disadvantages of staying in one company. I would do that in one paragraph and then in my next paragraph, I would write about the advantages and disadvantages of changing companies.

Assuming that this was the side that I supported more, I would say, yes, this is what I prefer. I would put the second and I would include the fact that yes, this is the option that suits me, my personality and my career goals better. So, in doing that you cover all parts of the topic.

Okay, so now I'm moving on to another topic. I think that what I'm going to say is rather controversial and I think a lot of IELTS tutors will disagree with me or maybe not a lot, but some will. So, I'm going to say it anyway. Let's look at this topic.

“Many countries now face an economic downturn, so it is better for each country to focus on its own problems rather than helping other countries. To what extent do you agree or disagree?” Now, a lot of IELTS tutors will tell you agree and yes, we should only focus on our own problems, this is the only thing we should do and basically just develop your essay around supporting this statement and that's it.

I'm going to disagree. I think that if they wanted you just to do that, then they wouldn't have made this comparison here with the helping other countries. So, they do expect you especially at a higher band, they do expect you to address it. At least analyze it at least even if it's just to say why we shouldn't do it. You've at least acknowledged it and you've developed it to say that no, this is a bad idea.

Again, this is what we mean by answering all parts of the task. Even if you think that yes, we should focus on our own problems, you are still addressing this other element of the question even if you say I 100% disagree with this. It's okay to do that, but you should at least tell the reader or, in your case, the examiner why you completely disagree with it. Then go on to support what you think is better, which is why countries should focus on their own problems.

Okay, so, these questions have appeared on the site just recently. They are new, October 2018 questions, so let's look at them in terms, again, of answering all parts of the task, okay? The first one, "Most people get married and give birth in their 30s rather than when they are younger. Is it a positive or negative development?"

Again, it's a good idea to talk about both sides of this issue. Let's say for example that you are really in favor of this: marriage and birth in your 30s. You should still discuss both sides of this and at a higher band you're also going to discuss both sides of this. Otherwise, they wouldn't have written it, okay?

They would have just said, "Most people decide to get married and give birth in their 30s. Is this positive or negative?" Then you just talk about the positives and negatives of that, but they've really clearly put this out there. So, you are expected at a higher band score to address it, okay?

Again, we have the same sort of language in this. "Should shops give preference in selling local food rather than imported food? Do you agree or disagree?" There is again a comparison here stated, not really implicitly, but rather directly.

So, we do need to talk about this preference for local food or preference for imported food, okay? Even if you say, and this is really tricky because-- look at the word preference. That's really important. They're not saying that you shouldn't sell imported food at all, but they're saying should you give a preference to imported food, okay?

Now, why am I pointing out the word preference to you? Because this is another area of IELTS writing that people tend to neglect. They-- and it's funny because as you all know, IELTS doesn't test vocabulary anywhere directly. So, there's no vocabulary section, but understanding the nuance behind the word preference here is in fact checking your understanding of English and your level of English.

So, let's look at this question again to see how it's actually a tricky question. "Shops should give preference in selling local food rather than imported." Okay? So, what they are suggesting is that they should prefer to sell local food rather than preferring to sell imported food. So, when you look at it like that, it's not saying don't sell imported food.

It's saying preference. You should prefer imported food. So, when you look at the question like this, it actually will change how you frame it. From my experience, a lot of students would then write an essay, not really understanding the nuance of this word preference and they would write essays saying that we should absolutely sell local food for this and this reason.

We should not sell imported food for this and this reason, okay, and that's not what it said. It said preference, okay? So, this shows-- this is kind of what separates the higher bands from just like, you know, a lower band for example: understanding that we are not talking about selling or not selling. We're talking about preferring to sell, okay? There's a difference there.

All right, moving on. Let's look at this one as well. "Growing population is a big problem in developing countries. Should the government provide new homes in the cities or countryside?" So, this is a really interesting question for a lot of reasons.

Number one, it is telling you outright that a solution to this problem is the government's involvement in providing new homes, okay? So, you have to take that as a given. They are not asking you to analyze it or suggest that maybe there is a different solution to this growing population or maybe there should be input from the private sector, no.

They are telling you very specifically, should the government provide homes in the cities or in the countryside. So, if you work with this given basically, you then have to analyze essentially the benefits and the drawbacks of both scenarios and come with a conclusion saying that after having analyzed both perspectives, on the whole, I believe that x is the stand that the government should take towards the growing population, okay?

Another thing that you have to do when you answer a question like this is not-- how can I say this? Not focus too narrowly on the government providing new homes in the cities or the countryside. You have to remember to frame your answer that this is a solution to this, okay?

So, what do I mean? I mean that it would be completely off topic for you to start saying that the government should create new homes because the old homes are no longer energy efficient or the old homes that are currently in existence are run down and so forth and so forth.

No, nobody is talking about old homes. We're talking about the growing population and the fact that we have more people in our countries, in developing countries too. This is another element of the question that we didn't really talk about. Think about what developing countries are, okay?

So, what do I mean by that? I mean that it would be incorrect to provide examples that refer to developed countries. So, no examples about the US, no examples about England, no examples about most of Europe, actually. Okay, so, think about what developing countries are and use them as your examples and use them as your frame, okay?

So, you can see that this too really is not as simple as it first appears. You do have to answer this: cities, countryside, weighing the pros and cons of them. You have to remember to keep it within the framework of growing population, this is our problem, but more specifically in these types of countries.

Okay, let's look now at number six. Questions like these are also problematic in terms of task response, so let's look at why. There's a lot of language here and this is where sometimes people get confused because they see so many words, they focus on one area and because of stress or because of they are worried they're not going to have enough time, they just start writing without really, really focusing on what the question is saying.

So, let's look at the question. "In some countries an increasing number of people are suffering from health problems as a result of eating too much fast food." Okay, that's the first thing you want to underline. "It is therefore necessary for governments to impose a high tax on this kind of food. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this option? You should use your own ideas etc., etc., etc."

Okay, so, it's not talking about all junk food, okay? It's talking about a specific type of junk food, specifically fast food. So, that means that right away you have to not think about candies or chocolates or chips. You have to think about fast food and depending on what country you live in, how that fast food takes shape and what kind of form it has really could differ.

Maybe with things like burgers, maybe it's things like hotdogs, maybe it's a kebab from a street vendor. So, you have to think about those things and what are they saying? Are they saying that it should be illegal? No. What they are asking is if it should have a higher tax.

So, let's say, for example, the tax on food in your country is 10%, should the tax on this specific kind of food be 20% or 30% or 50%? So, this is what is being suggested, so you have to absolutely understand the question and what they are asking you to discuss.

Here is the other thing that I really want to point out in a question like this: it is therefore necessary. This is a really important word. Again, this is when we talk about nuance and how

this is really where they are checking to see if you are a 7 or an 8. Your understanding of this particular word, "...it is necessary for governments to impose a higher tax..."

Let's say that I agree with this measure. On the whole, let's say, for example, that I think yes, you know there should be a higher tax on, I don't know, fast food burgers, whatever. Let's say I agree with it. However, I might agree with it that it's a good measure, but do I think it's necessary, okay?

This is where you can really add a layer of sophistication to your response. So, a good way then to present your opinion here is, "While I do believe that it is an important measure and it would be an effective measure, I don't believe that it is necessary to impose a higher tax."

Now, if you do that, you can talk about why it's a good measure in one paragraph. Then in your second paragraph, you can talk about why it's not necessary. Why the government could certainly choose other options that could be necessary. Okay, so, like I said, paying attention to the language that they use, okay, and really focusing on some of these-- I like to call them tricky words. They are kind of sneaky, words like necessary.

It'll definitely help you providing a more sophisticated answer and also all parts of the task. They didn't say if they should do it. They didn't say if it's a good idea. Is this necessary? Again, this is what really separates a good essay from a great essay.

Okay, one more that I want to talk about is this one here, number 8. "In most parts of the world people are living longer. What are the possible causes of this situation? Is this a negative or positive development?" This might seem rather basic to you. There's not a lot of words. It's pretty clear what you have to do.

However, there are so many essays where I notice people completely ignore this question, completely ignore it. What they then do is they just treat it a discuss both views and give your opinion essay. So, they talk about the positive aspects of people living longer, they talk about the negative aspects of people living longer. They give their conclusion and then they are done, okay?

So, that's a problem. So, clearly what you need to do is in order to answer all parts of the task, you need to devote one paragraph to this. What are the causes for this situation? Why are people living longer? Well, they are living longer because of the strides in medicine, okay? People are being more proactive with their health, they are more careful with their diet, we have better food available, we have better health services available, etc., etc., etc.

Remember don't make it a list though. It has to be a well-developed paragraph where each time you explain one of the courses, you have to explain why it's a cause, you have to develop it. Again, this is part of answering all parts of the task.

And then of course once you do that you will spend a paragraph talking about the second question, saying whether you think it's positive or negative. It's possible you could even say both in a paragraph. There are ways to do that. Okay, let's go to one more there. I want us to go look at number 17.

"It has been said that reading for pleasure is better in developing imagination and language skills than watching TV. To what extent do you agree or disagree?" I think that one place a lot of people would trip up with an essay like this is with this and. Some people would simply talk about developing imagination.

So, yes, I agree. No, I don't agree and then be done. Remember that you have to talk about both, okay, because there is that 'and' there, which means you absolutely have to discuss both. Can reading better develop imagination? Can reading better develop language skills?

Remember comparison here is with television, so you have to link all of that together in order to say that you have, again, answered all parts of the task. Now, what I have seen from a lot of students when they write this kind of essay is they analyze imagination and language skills of reading, but they don't go talk about television at all.

So, you really have to ask yourself, what role does television play in developing imagination and language skills? Does it play any role? You could even argue that. You could say absolutely not.

TV has no value at all in promoting or developing either of these skills. It is a useless box-- I mean, do you understand what I'm saying? So you could argue it.

It is important to remember that it is a comparison being made here. Reading for pleasure and watching TV. Now, let's take a look at what I just said. I said reading for pleasure. So, this is also another element that a really good answer would exploit.

We're not talking about university students who have to read for their studies. We're not talking about professionals who are reading for work. We're talking about leisure time reading, okay? Something you do in your free time to relax because you enjoy it. So, it's also-- when we talk about developing your essay, it's also an added element, again, that would separate the good from the great, okay?

All right, so, I've talked quite a bit about-- let's refer back to this, okay? Since I've talked about-- I keep saying separating a good essay from a great essay, let me tell you why. Because at 7 we have addresses all parts of the task. Okay, you've addressed them, great. Look at this: sufficiently addresses all parts of the task and because I don't think-- here we go.

So, addresses all parts of the task is at 7, sufficiently addresses all parts of the task is at 8 and then-- let me just lift this a little bit. Can I? If you look at the 9, it says fully addresses all parts of the task. That's what I mean when I say paying attention to some of these words that-- and the nuances of those words, okay?

That's what we're looking at here. We're looking at fully addresses compared to sufficiently addresses and just addresses all parts of the task. So, keep in mind maybe you're not a native speaker. Maybe you're not proficient, but if you do pay attention to some of these elements of the topic, of the task, you could potentially give an answer that, as far as task achievement goes, could get you a 9.

This is another reason why I always tell students: spend time reading the task. It is so important. Don't just like really just gloss through it and just start running with your writing. It's such a disservice. You really have to pay attention, spend a couple of minutes looking at it

making sure you get those areas of nuance, get those layers of the question so that you have not missed anything. Your score in task achievement will thank you for it, okay?

So, that was the area of task achievement that I wanted to talk about today. It's about addressing all parts of the task, how you can do this more successfully. I hope you've found this helpful. I hope to come in upcoming days and weeks with more podcasts on the rest of task achievement.

Stay tuned. They will follow shortly and of course the essay topics that I talked about today in this podcast, they come from the IELTS podcast website. Do check it out. Do also see how you can sign up to be a part of Sentence Guide to learn everything you need to know about writing for IELTS and more speaking as well.

Check it out to see if you might be interested in some of our essay corrections that we offer. So, with that, that's the end of this podcast. Wishing all of you best of luck in your IELTS preparation. Good luck to you all.

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