

Female Voice: You are now listening to the IELTS podcast. Learn from tutors and ex-examiners who are masters of IELTS preparation. Your host, Ben Worthington.

Ben: Hello there, IELTS students. This episode, we're going to be talking to Amit and he's got some interesting information to share with us for the first part and then for the second part, we're going to be focusing on strategies to pass the speaking exam. So, Amit, could you tell us about your situation, where you live and why you are taking IELTS.

Amit: Okay, so, I just completed my Masters in the United States and I have my work permit for two years and then again I have to apply for a work permit in the United States. So, I don't want to go through all that immigration process and for me, the best thing or best option is to apply for Express Entry in Canada. So, that's why I was opting for writing IELTS.

Ben: I see, okay. Had you taken the exam before?

Amit: Yes, I have taken it probably in 2014 when I was applying for my Master's degree in the United States.

Ben: I see. What scores did you get in 2014?

Amit: Oh, it was an academic module and I-- yes, it was 6.5 bands in IELTS at that time.

Ben: Right, okay and then how were you preparing for the IELTS then?

Amit: At that time, I was working simultaneously and I was also preparing for IELTS. So, it was kind of messy, but I had to give it my shot in 10 days. So, it wasn't bad in 10 or 15 days of preparation.

Ben: Got you, got you. So, you wanted to give it your best shot, but--

Amit: Yes, and even they were expecting scores of 6, only 6 bands. So, I was like it's not a hard task to achieve 6 in IELTS.

Ben: Right, I see and then this time you wanted-- because you're doing the Express Entry program, you needed to get higher grades.

Amit: Yes, 7 bands.

Ben: Got you, got you. Okay, so you decided to join the online course. Is that right?

Amit: Yes.

Ben: Super, super. Then what happened with your-- what happened on test day for the writing? Was it comfortable? Was it difficult?

Amit: It wasn't difficult, but I was out of time pretty soon. I handled both of the tasks, but I didn't have enough time to go through it again.

Ben: I see. So, you wanted more time to--

Amit: Yes, probably five--

Ben: --review your answers.

Amit: Five minutes will do it for me. I just wanted to go through it one more time.

Ben: I see, but you'd already gone through it at least once.

Amit: Yes.

Ben: Okay then and that first review that you did, did you catch your mistakes? Did you manage to spot them?

Amit: Yes, I managed to spot them and one little strategy I applied was whenever I was done with one paragraph, I just went over it for just a little time so that I can at least make sure like if something goes bad in the end, so I have already gone through the paragraphs. So, I don't have to worry about those little things.

Ben: That's a very interesting strategy. I can totally see the idea behind that because if you find that you maybe are off topic when it comes to the final review, then you've got a lot of rebuilding to do.

Amit: Yes.

Ben: Plus if you do find that maybe one paragraph you've tilted your argument towards one idea, then yes, you can reflect that later in your conclusion. So, that's quite a good tip there, Amit. Thank you. I might put that into the next revision of the course if you don't mind if you can license it to me. Okay, now then, you took the course and what do you think helped you from the course to help you get the score you wanted on-- when you finally got it?

Amit: Before taking the course, I was stumbling around in the essay like I didn't know what should be the exact paragraph structure for a full paragraph. I didn't know what should be there in each of the paragraphs, what should I write in each of the paragraphs, whether it should be an example I should include or whether I should conclude the sentences in each paragraph, but after going through your course I got a detailed explanation how I should write my paragraphs and how that essay structure should be.

Ben: Excellent, excellent. How did that help you on the exam day?

Amit: I followed your strategy. Every day I used to write at least two essays, two writing tasks, two essays and I used to just stick to your essay structure. So, no matter what I used to write those sentences every day so that whenever I am in exam, at least I get fast in writing those sentences. So, I have to just add some of my stuff to make that essay.

Ben: Absolutely. I think we've mentioned this or something similar before. Another student I had was writing out the essays using the structure day in day out. Writing essays and self-checking them also sending them in for feedback to improve faster. I think the general idea that we're trying to communicate here is that by constantly writing out essays and using the structure that's in the course, it almost becomes like muscle memory.

You know, when you're doing a sport-- when you're playing a sport you're not thinking about how you're kicking the ball. It just comes naturally because you've done it so many times that-- and it frees your mental resources to think about other stuff like ideas or vocabulary.

Amit: It's like for every sentence you have at least two or three choices which is already built up in your mind. So, you just have to put that in the paper and so it will become really, really easy for us to write the essay.

Ben: I like that. I like that analogy. It's set already, isn't it? The structure, it's already written in a sense, so you're just like dropping your ideas, putting them in and thinking of the extra sentences that you need because obviously, we can't memorize the whole entire essay and just-- but we can memorize the structure, a high scoring structure. That's for sure.

The methodology I think is probably what we're getting at here. We can memorize the methodology and the strategy. Okay then. So, in the end, you got your results back. What happened with your writing score? What result did you get?

Amit: I was so happy because somehow I was scared I did-- I was like I didn't do very well on the writing and I wouldn't get a band of 7, but when I saw my score, I was really happy to get 7 bands in writing. So, I was just dancing here and there. I was telling my friend hey, I got 7 in writing. You know nobody gets 7 in the first time, but for me, I got 7 in the first time. They were happy, but...

Ben: That's awesome. You have to send me a video of this dance, the band 7 dance we'll call it. Unfortunately, it's not all singing and dancing.

Amit: That's another story for me yet.

Ben: We can't close this IELTS chapter yet because unfortunately, there's still the speaking, correct?

Amit: Yes.

Ben: Right, I see. So, what happened in your speaking exam?

Amit: I would say I was a little overconfident about speaking because since I live in English speaking country and I speak English every other day, so I was like I will be able to handle it. So, I didn't practice speaking a lot. That was my huge mistake which I did.

I was able to handle speaking part 1 and part 3, but in part 2, I was completed with my answer in really less time and at that time I was lack of confidence and I lost my ideas and I was unable to express my ideas. So, that's what I guess it costed me 0.5 bands.

Ben: I see, I see. It's so sad--

Amit: Yes.

Ben:--because I can hear that you're possibly around a 7. So, it's sad that it kind of fell apart for part 2. It's such a shame because that's-- usually for students the difficult part might be part 3 and it also seems like with some preparation you could have nailed-- you could have done really well with this part 2.

But there are two things I want to mention here that one-- that one mistake would be overconfidence. So, I don't want-- because I imagine you're going to take the exam again, correct?

Amit: Yes.

Ben: Yes? Let's not make this overconfidence mistake again with the writing, you know, because I don't want you to go into the writing and think I got a 7 last time--

Amit: No, no, no. I know it's still a scaling factor and at this time, I'm preparing my strategies already and I'm thinking to write-- do one writing module and one speaking module every day. Apart from that, for listening and for reading, I'm every day going through some of the articles and reading to news podcasts every day. So, yes, it's helping me out somewhere.

Ben: That's fantastic. Yes, that's fantastic because what I hear a lot is that students will focus on the writing because that's where they are losing points and then just abandon the other ones. The other areas just slip and they end up losing points and have to take the test again. It just makes it into a nightmare scenario. So, it's good to hear that you're going to keep-- stay on the ball even for all the other areas. That's really smart, Amit.

Amit: I think in IELTS the four components are tied to each other. If you're listening to something, then you'll be able to catch those words and you'll be good at speaking and when you are reading something which will help you in your writing. So, those four components are really tied together.

Ben: Yes, totally. I totally agree there. Also, just one other thing while we're talking about improving all the areas simultaneously. I find that transcribing is a fantastic technique. Obviously, I don't do that because I'm a native English speaker, so I don't have to improve my English, but for the other languages that I'm learning, which is basically Spanish and now Polish, transcribing in Spanish is wonderful.

It's boosting my vocabulary and learning the perfect pronunciation first time. I'm improving my grammar structure. I'm hearing the word, I'm seeing the word, I'm producing the word. It ticks all the boxes and it's insanely cheap. You just have to find the transcripts.

So, let's focus on giving you some value now with the speaking. I know that you've upgraded to the Speaking Confidence course. Have you been working through that course yet?

Amit: No. I have booked my IELTS on April 27th, so I was thinking to start preparation maybe today or tomorrow because I was a little busy in my work. So, I haven't started my preparation yet, but I'm just coping up with my English skills by looking at the news articles and news podcasts every day. So, I don't lose that grip on my English.

Ben: Absolutely. That's a smart idea. That's a smart decision there. Just one thing that's popped into my mind now is that while-- you're in Canada now or the U.S.?

Amit: I'm in the United States.

Ben: Right, okay. Well, if you've got time maybe you can even do interviews or even phone interviews just to get familiar with the type of English that you need. They might ask you questions and you can just treat it like an IELTS part 2.

Like job interview questions or something like that. It's just an idea, but I think it would be a shame to-- not to take advantage of the fact that you're living in an English speaking country you know.

Amit: Yes.

Ben: Of course, you don't have to do it like-- just a suggestion there. So, anyway, let me just give you some quick tips for part 2 because I know that you have to go soon and I know that you struggled in part 2 before and the listeners will probably be interested in learning some quick strategies for part 2.

I mean, what I've been sharing in the course and on other podcasts, but mainly on the course, is that when you see this cue card-- in fact, I did a podcast a while ago about making notes on the cue card, really pay attention to what they are asking. If it asks you about describing a childhood memory, make sure that you describe that childhood memory and you go into details and you expand the answer using because then giving examples.

Just the other day, I was talking with one student and I gave her this cue card of childhood memory, for example, and she told me I think about four or five different mini childhood memories. I was like oh no, oh no, but it's good that she did it on the call with me rather than in the exam because it's much better just to focus on one and then develop that entirely.

Amit: Yes. Speaking part 2 I think is about telling story which I liked.

Ben: That's super.

Amit: I can tell that stories. I take my part of writing on the cue card. I had my hands, but the thing is I couldn't express my words in the form of story because, in story you give your examples, you tell them how you are attracted to it and stuff. That's the part I lack.

Ben: Awesome, awesome. You've just-- because I've been looking into the mechanics and the structure of telling stories. Because you enjoy telling stories, you probably know this already,

but in an implicit way. So, if I can just share this with you, it's sort of like a more explicit way like the actual structure we can use to telling stories.

Of course, we've got the bare bones. The structure is sort of like the beginning, the middle, and the end, but if we want to take it to the next level, just knowing that there's a beginning, a middle and an end helps you sort of like gives you an overview of what part you are in when you are telling a story.

To make the story interesting, there is usually a twist in the middle part, a reason why you are telling the story. There's one story which is, "I got up in the morning. I made a cup of tea and I sat down and I opened-- I started messing around with my phone," you know? That's a mini story. However, if we add this idea of a twist or why it's important, it suddenly becomes more interesting, you know? Like, "I got up in the morning and made a cup of tea and suddenly--

Amit: Something happened.

Ben: Yes. "Suddenly, something popped out of the tea bag," and now it's interesting. Now, there's a reason. I do have some material about this, Amit. So, I'll send this over today and it's another point that I could probably add to the course. There are lots of licensing ideas you're going to get from this call, Amit.

Amit: Yes, I'm jotting them down already.

Ben: You can send me the invoice after the call. Actually, what I'm going to do is I'll research this and I'm going to write it into the written sort of like version of this podcast, yes, just to-- because I can't remember all the details. It would be definitely a useful point to mention for students especially if they like telling stories like yourself.

I really appreciate your doing this call with us. If you've got any questions, just shoot me a message and hopefully, we will be having another call and you'll be able to tell us, "Hey, Ben. I nailed the IELTS speaking 2--"

Amit: Yes, for sure. I'm confident this time.

Ben: Yes, I want you to say something like, "Ben, I nailed the writing. I got a 7.5 this time and I nailed the speaking and yes, thank you very much and you owe me a lot of money from using my ideas in your online course." That last part's optional, but hey, something to look for.

Amit: If I pass it, I'll give you a little gift from my side.

Ben: A gift and an invoice.

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