

**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

**Weiyan:** I'm just wishing I can pass this IELTS exam as soon as possible because I really need 7, you know, in all parts.

**Ben:** Oh, I thought you passed it already.

**Weiyan:** No, actually I get 6.5 with my last-- 6.5 for my speaking in my last attempt.

**Ben:** Oh, okay, but with your writing, what did you get?

**Weiyan:** With my writing, I got 7.5.

**Ben:** Right, got you. You got me scared there. Got you, okay. Cool. Right then. Well, let's-- before we jump into the writing, before we sort of like delve into what happened there, let's focus on the speaking. Well, actually before we focus even on the speaking because I'd like to help you with the speaking and I think the students would benefit listening-- the students listening to this would benefit also from maybe some of the advice I can give and then we'll talk about the writing and how you managed to improve your score. First, could you tell us where you're from and why you're studying for IELTS?

**Weiyan:** Okay. I'm from Beijing, China and I'm preparing-- I'm studying for IELTS because I'm trying to apply for immigration to Canada as well as Australia.

**Ben:** Right, I see. How have you been preparing so far? What have you been doing?

**Weiyan:** Basically, I've been-- I started preparing for my IELTS I think last year in April. I've been doing it by myself. I did not want to-- I did not go to any courses because I was quite confident with my English originally, but then you know I got repeated scores of 6.5 with my writing.

So, that's why-- that's when I started to question myself and decided I need some help, you know.

**Ben:** Right, I see. When you were preparing by yourself, how did you prepare? What were you doing?

**Weiyan:** I bought all those IELTS books, the official-- it's the official Cambridge English IELTS books. I bought all of them and I did all of the practices and I would mark them by myself. So, obviously, I was not marking them correctly with my writings.

**Ben:** Got you, got you. So, you--

**Weiyan:** That's it.

**Ben:** Sorry. So, you would look at the questions then write out answers and then review those answers afterward.

**Weiyan:** Yes.

**Ben:** I see, I see. Were you finding a lot of mistakes when you were doing that?

**Weiyan:** No. I would say I was overconfident with my English. I thought I was kind of perfect and I-- even though I would go back and do error check each time-- after I've done the writing, but I found little spelling mistakes. It was difficult for me to find any grammar mistakes. So, no. I got-- let me organize my language. After three attempts with IELTS and I was stagnating at 6.5, I decided there must be something wrong with my writings. So, I really need to find someone who is expert in this field.

**Ben:** Got you.

**Weiyan:** That brings me to you.

**Ben:** How did you find us? Were you listening to the podcasts or...

**Weiyan:** Actually, I was googling the word IELTS and the [ieltspodcast.com](http://ieltspodcast.com) showed up on the first page or on the second page. So, because I have been a frequent user of the podcast app, so I decided a podcast is a very convenient way for me to practice and to listen to because I can listen to the podcast program while I'm driving to work.

**Ben:** Got you, I see. You're writing up the essays and then you would self-check in-- by the way, don't beat yourself up for being overconfident and doing the self-checking, you know. This is perfectly normal. When I was writing in Spanish I used to do a lot of self-checking. It's a very important skill to develop.

I think the listeners know that when they submit an essay for correction at our service, we always encourage the student before they send us the next essay to self-check as well because this is a valuable skill you can use in the exam after you finish writing your essay.

You self-check it and you can pick up some extra points just by correcting little mistakes. The problem is when you over-- sort of like overly confident or you don't get sort of like a second pair of eyes to look at it and you're just using that specific skill. You need somebody else to look if-- because you're not going to be able to advance. So, you realized this by doing a few IELTS tests. May I ask how many IELTS tests you did?

**Weiyan:** So far I've done four IELTS tests; one last year and three this year.

**Ben:** Wow! Okay.

**Weiyan:** I have upcoming one in December, yes, that's next weekend actually.

**Ben:** Wow! That's pretty soon. That's pretty soon.

**Weiyan:** Yes.

**Ben:** I was talking about this subject with another student a week ago and I called it the IELTS casino. It's like a gambling addiction that we-- some students will keep on playing and submitting and submitting and submitting to do the exam without sort of like a big space of time between.

With that space of time it's like the time where you can focus on your skills and improve yourself. Improve your writing skills and get some feedback in all of this, but a lot of students prefer to play the casino like the roulette, IELTS roulette and submit straightaway afterward like

a couple of weeks afterward or maybe just a few days afterward hoping, gambling that the result is going to be different this time.

**Weiyan:** [unintelligible 00:08:07.09]

**Ben:** Yes.

**Weiyan:** But I really need to play this casino, you know, because I'm running out of time and money.

**Ben:** Exactly. This is it. This is it. I did exactly the same. When I was-- I think I've told the listeners about this before, but just for the new listeners, years ago when I was trying to pass my driving test, I just kept on resubmitting and resubmitting and I failed so many times I reached double figures and my friends found it hilarious.

I couldn't see the problem. I just thought, right, I'm going to resubmit straight away, give it another shot. Maybe this time it will be different. It was very similar to your situation. I wasn't running out of-- well, I was running out of time because I was going to change countries and in the end, I didn't get it. I didn't get a UK license; I had to take a Spanish one.

**Weiyan:** [unintelligible 00:09:04.19]

**Ben:** Yes, but it's valid anyway.

**Weiyan:** Sorry to hear that.

**Ben:** No worries. I think it's just as good. Anyway, back to you. So, you've got your test coming up and so, now you're currently at a 7.5 with the writing. Is that right?

**Weiyan:** Yes.

**Ben:** That's fantastic. Good work, good work and before you took--

**Weiyan:** Thank you.

**Ben:** Before you took the online course at our website, what were you at?

**Weiyan:** I was at 6.5.

**Ben:** Wow! So, you jumped a whole--

**Weiyan:** --for writing.

**Ben:** You jumped a whole band score.

**Weiyan:** Yes, that's definitely out of my expectation I would say.

**Ben:** That's fantastic. Well done. Well done to you. Great work.

**Weiyan:** Thank you. Thank you for your help. Without your help, I wouldn't achieve that because it was only after I've done several essay corrections with your essay correction service I realized I was actually making a lot of mistakes or I had many misconceptions about this exam really.

**Ben:** Okay, before you tell us about the misconceptions, can you tell us about some of the mistakes you were making and then how-- what you learned to correct those mistakes.

**Weiyan:** First of all, I think because I have never been to any IELTS preparation course so, I was really not aware that I have to write academically, you know. So, I was really casual with my style and with the-- and also, I was really casual with the structure of the essays. I would even joke about some things in those essays. I only found out that might be not a good way to put it in the--

**Ben:** Got you. Do you remember any of the jokes that you told in your essays?

**Weiyan:** No.

**Ben:** Oh, okay. That would have been good, but then don't worry about it.

**Weiyan:** I don't think I can remember anything specific, but you know, I was just trying to make it sound funny or I thought that would be interesting, but I didn't know I was expected to be academic. I didn't know that.

**Ben:** Wow! Okay, got you. Yes, it's surprising coming from a-- native English speakers make the same mistake, Weiyan, don't worry about it. And like really, I've heard of native English speakers applying for the immigration PR process in Australia because they can pick a lot of points with the IELTS certificate under their belt, as we all know.

So, they take it and they just think it's a walk in the park, just a stroll into the exam. "Hey, I'm native English. How difficult can this be?" and then they sit down and they're getting like a 6 or 7 for the writing and they are like, "Hey, but it's perfect English." Fair enough.

It might be perfect English and it might be very high standard, but if it's not in this academic fashion, if it's not in this academic style, then it's going to be-- it's not going to cut the mustard. It's not going to make the grades, so to speak.

**Weiyan:** Yes, that's exactly the problem. I also have other problems with the essays. For example, my essay structure as I have said before I was too casual and I was not strict to the intro and part 1 and part 2 and conclusion structure. Sometimes I would write a big part 2 for example, with a very thin part 1.

**Ben:** I see. I see.

**Weiyan:** Yes, that's-- I was making a lot of mistakes.

**Ben:** So, how did the online course help you?

**Weiyan:** I think the most helpful thing is the correction service, the essay correction service. It's only through the correction I found out that I still have many spelling errors. There was one thing about letters because I assume letters are quite easy, but actually, they are not. I have a lot of problem with letterforms.

I was not clear about what are formal letters and what are informal letters. So, I would-- how do you say? mix-- I would mix those formal and informal. I thought it was-- if you wanted to start with 'Dear Mr. Robinson,' for example, that I would start like this. I didn't know there was a difference between formal and informal because I have been self-taught.

**Ben:** Got you. I see. It's quite interesting all these different nuances that-- it's more of a cultural thing than an actual language thing.

**Weiyang:** Yes, you know, that's exactly what I've been thinking today. I think why it is important for me to listen to your tutorials and find such enlightenment is because I found you as a native English speaker, you would-- how do you say? Address the questions in a slightly different way than I would have in the past as a Chinese-- as someone from Chinese background. I think it's slightly different really.

**Ben:** Absolutely and just to-- there is a phrase that I remember. It's "Behind every language is an army," I think some general said this a while ago, a long time ago, but it's a clear example of three things. One is that learning the language is not sufficient to pass the exam. We also need to learn the little nuances about the culture like you just demonstrated in form of formal letter writing. That's I would say--

**Weiyang:** Definitely.

**Ben:** Yes, that's a very high component-- that's a very cultural aspect to the whole process. The second thing is like the exam skills, which kind of comes into this part of the culture, but it's more specific about the kind of language we are going to use and the ability to write it in 20 minutes for task 1.

**Weiyang:** Exactly.

**Ben:** Yes, so we would-- we've got those kind of three aspects: the language, the culture, and the exam skills. So, yes, and I think it just demonstrates the importance of getting help and getting feedback in order to take you to the next level. So, yes. All right.

Now, then would you-- could you just say have you got anything else you would like to add to-- because you've mentioned once or twice that you were preparing by yourself and to be self-taught takes a lot of motivation. How did you motivate yourself? How did you keep pushing through?

**Weiyan:** Well, for one thing, I have really-- I really like to study English and I have been a very-- I have always been the top of my class since Middle School, so I really enjoy learning English. That's one thing. Another thing which is the biggest motivation behind these two years preparation is I wanted to immigrate to Canada or Australia because I think this would have-- this would benefit my family a great deal especially I have a young boy, a young little kid. So, I wanted him to-- I want him to receive better education, you know when he grows up. I think it's very important. So, I'm very motivated.

**Ben:** Right, I see. Just like Veera, another student we were talking to a few weeks ago. Her motivation was to get her family to Canada as well.

**Weiyan:** My baby boy is my biggest motivator.

**Ben:** Absolutely and I totally commend you for that. That's very-- yes, that's awesome. So, let's get you to Canada. Let's get you to Australia. I want to help you now with the speaking.

**Female Voice:** Thanks for listening to [ieltspodcast.com](http://ieltspodcast.com)

