

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 IELTS students. So, this is the second part of the interview we did with Weiyan. This is a small modification to the podcast because since she-- since we did this recording, Weiyan and myself, she took the exam and just yesterday-- the day before this was due to be published, she sent me a glorious picture of herself smiling holding her certificate.

Basically, what happened was we had the interview and she implemented all of the techniques that I shared in this podcast. She implemented them and she looked at the course she had access to, the Speaking Confidence course, and she thoroughly reviewed all of those modules as well as implemented a lot of the techniques and tips that I gave her in this podcast and she passed.

She got a 7 in the speaking and the writing as well, she got a 7, if I remember correctly. So, I think that's really important information if you are seriously considering preparing for your IELTS exam. The tips and techniques in this episode are valuable and useful, so listen to them. If you want to take it to the next level, then have a look at the course. Okay, all the best and take care.

So let's get you to Canada. Let's get you to Australia and I want to help you now with the speaking. What kind of challenges do you think you've been having with the speaking because you sound quite fluent and quite confident when we're speaking now?

Weiyan: Yes, I know. I think the biggest problem is my nervousness. Even now I'm talking to you, my hands are cold, but I know my English is good and I can be even better if I'm not so nervous. I'm trying to overcome this, but I don't know, I'll try my best to overcome it.

Ben: Got you.

Weiyan: Another thing I think the main thing stopping me from getting a 7 for my speaking is my nervousness actually. Actually, you know, I've just told you that I have a 4-- I have tried

IELTS for four times in the past. In these two years, I got two-- how should I say? I got 7 for two times--

Ben: For the speaking.

Weiyang: --with my speaking.

Ben: Right.

Weiyang: Yes. So, that's why I know that I am there. I have the ability to get 7. It's just sometimes-- and also there's one thing that is really annoying, you know. Some of the-- I found out that some of the examiners, they are not very-- how to say? I don't think they are very good examiners on that exam.

For the two times that I'm not getting 7, the examiners reaction and their feedback was really not that good on that exam day, really. I think that's another thing that's stopping me from getting there.

Ben: I see, okay. So, we've got two things to address there. One, your nervousness and two, the examiner. So, I'll deal with the second one first and then we'll talk about nervousness and confidence building techniques and strategies like that.

First, if you are between a 6.5 and a 7 and for example, you get a grumpy examiner and he gives you this 6.5 or she gives you this 6.5, then that says to me like your border line, you are like on the edge between 6.5 and a 7. So, depending on the day, you could either get, you know, very, very close to a 7. That's what I'm saying.

So, that's a very important point to take into consideration. So, now if you're border line, then I think a few strategies could help bump you up to a 7 because it sounds like you're very close already. Well, you are. You've got it before in the past.

So, what happens in the exam, Weiyang? What happens? Do you get nervous? Do you stutter? Do you carry on talking and talking and talking and talking or is there a lot of silent dead air? What usually happens in your experience?

Weiyan: I think I would most likely go off topic. Usually, I would be quite fluent and on occasion when I'm extremely nervous, I might make grammar mistakes and I would have stops, like you just heard "uh, uh". I would make a lot of like these. I would stop a little bit to think about proper words or sentences, how I should put this in English.

You know, sometimes I-- with some of the exam experience I was really good. I was not stopping and I was not stopping to look for a word or sentences. In other occasions, I might stop quite a lot and think about what I should say.

Ben: Right, well that reminds me because once or twice-- no, just once in this interview, you stopped and you said, "Let me just organize my thoughts." That reminded me, you know, and that was-- Yes, that was about 10 minutes ago or so.

I'll just give one piece of advice for that, which will be hopefully be beneficial to you and beneficial to the students. Then we'll talk about those successful interviews. So, in this case, Weiyan, when you are trying to organize your thoughts, what I tell my students is just to pause, take a breath and then start and start speaking.

A good technique is to start with a collocation like "that reminds me of", "that's interesting because" or just repeat the last few words that you heard from the other speaker, yes?

Weiyan: Okay.

Ben: So, what you're doing then with all those three techniques is sort of giving yourself a little bit of time, yes? So, we either pause, take a breath, then start speaking. Second, we sort of start with a collocation which is three or four words that we've kind of memorized and they sound good together and they get you started. So, it could be something like "that's interesting because" or "it's funny you should say that."

Weiyan: Okay.

Ben: Obviously, you have to use this in context. What it will do is get the ball rolling and when the ball is rolling, then it sounds more fluent and we don't have this stopping and starting. The other technique where we just repeat the last couple of words. So, I would say something like,

tell me about a-- the examiner would say, tell me about-- no, let's go to part 3. The examiner might say something like, "Do you think social media is important in society?" and you might say, "Social media and society and its importance. That's an interesting question because... " and then you start your--

Weiyang: Okay, I got it.

Ben: --answer. It just gives you a few seconds to organize your answer, to organize your thoughts and then the final thing that I was going to say is when we're doing these especially the last two when we're starting with speaking, you can go slowly and you can speak slowly.

Weiyang: No, I don't.

Ben: And don't worry about speaking slowly because once we get momentum, as I said before, once we get this ball rolling, we'll probably fall into fluency and the words and the structure will fall into place, but first we need to get started, you know?

Weiyang: Yes, I'm trying to speak slowly because I have-- I have noticed that I have this tendency to speak faster and to become faster and faster and I will make mistakes.

Ben: That's interesting because I haven't heard you speed up that much during this interview--

Weiyang: Really?

Ben: Really, really, yes. I've heard some words pronounced in Australian English, some words pronounced in British English and some phrases pronounced in American English, but that's totally normal. Do not worry about that one bit, Weiyang because there's never a point when I did not understand what you were communicating.

The purpose of speaking and language is communication. So, the only yardstick as to whether-- the only yardstick-- the only way to measure spoken language ability is comprehension and communication and so far, those have been excellent.

I mean, it's not the only yardstick, but it's the main yardstick as well. You haven't used words incorrectly. You haven't used any vocabulary incorrectly and everything that you have expressed I have understood. So, that's like the main points there. Now,--

Weiyan: It's good to hear.

Ben: So, that brings me to-- those two are under control and you do sound at a good level. Maybe the task response might have been one of the issues and that reminded me of another thing you said when you said sometimes you might go off topic.

Weiyan: A lot of times

Ben: Okay, right, but don't worry about that. We'll come to that in a second because what I want you to do now is go back to the point where you said you've had a few good exams and in those exams you were shining, you were confident and you got the grade that you wanted, yes? You got the 7.

Weiyan: Yes.

Ben: Do you remember what happened in those interviews or do you remember why? Maybe you were confident. Is there anything that, you know, is there anything that happened those days?

Weiyan: If I look back at those exams, I believe I feel I would start to feel very relaxed a few minutes into the exam either because of the examiner or because of-- it was an easy topic. I'm not sure, but in those exams, I think I feel a lot more relaxed. I think that's the key thing that's really, you know-- because when I'm not relaxed I think my mind is not working that fast. When I am relaxed I can be-- they just burst out of my mouth without thinking really.

Ben: Absolutely. That makes complete sense. So, you said it was either the topic or the examiner.

Weiyan: Yes.

Ben: Okay. From what you were saying before, it sounds like the examiner was sort of like the issue because both times you seem to remember that it wasn't a very pleasant experience with the examiner.

Weiyan: Yes. You know, one of the examiner while I was talking to him he would not look at my eyes and he would look over to my shoulder. I don't know. I think it's not very polite and I think he-- and maybe he was trying to process what I'm saying, but I think that doesn't happen with other examiners. So, I really-- I was kind of bothered by his behavior.

Ben: I see, I see. Okay. I think one good strategy here would be to try and have the mentality of sort of like bulletproof, you know, Weiyan. You're going to go into the interview bullet proof and the examiner could have as much charisma as a brick wall, but you're going to keep smiling and looking at that brick wall in the eyes, you know.

You're going to go in there and just like okay, this is my exam and you and your terrible attitude is not going to have a single effect on me because this is my exam and I'm getting my family to Canada. You can be the grumpiest person in the world and I'm going to stay happy, positive, confident, and relaxed because this is my moment. I paid for this. I'm paying your salary, Mr. Examiner.

Weiyan: That makes the point.

Ben: Yes exactly. Just relax and okay-- he's sitting here because of my-- I'm paying his salary. So, at least I'm going to make him--

Weiyan: I'll remember that in my next exam.

Ben: Yes, really, you know. The key here like whichever attitude and whichever sort of visualization or thought you want to go in and I think the most important way is sort of like, okay. I'm going to be bullet proof of this examiner, you know, and I don't care what he throws at me.

I deserve a 7 or a 7.5. I deserve this and even if he's grumpy, I'm just going to keep my back straight. If I can't look him in the eye, I'm just going to forget that. That's his issue. Maybe he's

got stomach aches. Maybe he's got a terrible back. Maybe he's got a headache. That's his issue. I'm going to forget thinking about him and I'm just going to concentrate and enjoy this moment and relax into it and shine, you know. Because I think--

Weiyan: I will try my best.

Ben: You'll be able to do it, Weiyan. Trust me. You will be able to do it.

Weiyan: Thank you. Thank you.

Ben: Yes, because I can hear you've got the ability and yes, if you can get into this mindset, yes, just ignore-- I do this on a daily basis because where I live at the moment it's not exactly pleasant for customer service. It's nothing like America or the UK or western Europe. It's terrible for customer service. If I let-- really, because it's like--

Weiyan: They have even worse customer service here in China.

Ben: I was going to say even worse customer service in the IELTS exam.

Weiyan: No, no, in China.

Ben: Yes, but if you can-- what I'm saying is that if you let these-- the waiter or the, you know, the customer service agents or whoever, the shop assistant, if you let them affect you, then they have won and you've got a bad day.

So, I have to keep constantly reminding me, just saying okay, that person who just threw my order at me and got it wrong anyway, they are having a bad day and they've got a bad life. It's not my problem. Just move on. You know what I mean? And this is like-- yes, and I think this would help with the IELTS. So, let's do some part 3 questions, if this is okay.

Weiyan: Yes, it's okay. It's definitely okay.

Ben: Cool. What we'll do is I'll just give you a quick structure-- well, actually, let's do part 3. Imagine we've been talking about social media because that's a quite a frequent topic at the

moment, all right? I'm going to ask you these slightly more complex questions now. Let's just start off with one. So, what impact does social media have on society nowadays?

Weiyan: First of all, I think social media makes people become more closely connected to each other. I think it is very important that we know what is happening with our loved ones. For example, I wanted to know where my husband is-- I'm sorry, my mind went blank at the moment.

I think it's very important that we know the whereabouts of our loved ones and through social media we can-- through social media we can, you know, know updates about them. Also, there's one thing that social media has really made our work easier because we have--

Sorry, it's social media, right? You were asking about social media, right?

Ben: Yes.

Weiyan: Sorry, I wasn't in the exam condition today, really.

Ben: No worries.

Weiyan: I was-- this was a little bit of a set up.

Ben: Sorry. Okay, I'll just jump-- have you-- sorry, have you finished that?

Weiyan: Yes. I've finished it.

Ben: No worries. No worries. We're just warming up, so that's fine. That's fine. You did well, Weiyan. What I wanted to say would be if you kind of just repeated the last few words sort of like, "Hi, the impact of social media and society is very important nowadays because..." you know.

This would help you just to keep on topic and you kind of bounced around a little bit between your husband and then you kind of repeated it again by saying loved ones, you know. I think a useful technique would be if you kind of rephrase the question into your own words, you know,

just to keep you on track, just to remind yourself about what the topic is and also to give yourself a little bit more time to think of an idea, yes?

Then say this idea and then you can either follow this with because and this will sort of back up your idea or even better, you can just say for example. Then, "... for example, my husband finished late from work a few weeks ago and I needed to know where he was and he managed to contact me through social media. So, I think it's very important for society and it's becoming increasingly more important year on year," or something like that.

Weiyang: Okay, that's a good example, yes. I got it.

Ben: So, just to recap we can rephrase if we can, give a because and then give an example and that would probably be-- if you're feeling a little bit nervous, you could possibly even summarize as well just to signal to the examiner that you've finished. That's optional. Okay, next question.

Weiyang: Okay.

Ben: Do you think some people can be addicted to social media and the internet?

Weiyang: Actually, I think a lot of people are addicted to social media or the internet. Actually, a lot of people who are close to me I think they are addicted. I think it is a worrying trend, really. For example, one of my best friends, she would never let her cellphone out of her sight and she was constantly looking at the updates from her friends and updates from, I don't know, maybe celebrities.

I think-- and she-- the problem with this is people are missing out the face to face interaction which is actually-- which I believe is the most important elements in human interactions. You need to talk to somebody face to face. For example, we're doing this Skype thing. I'm not seeing you face to face, which is I think one of the most nervous moment I have because actually I found out in the real life situation while I'm talking to someone fact to face, it's much more relaxed.

I think I'm kind of off topic now. Anyway, going back to your question, I think people are-- the social networkings are making some people addicted to them and I think it's really worrisome. Yes, that's my answer.

Ben: Good, very good. Okay, Weiyan. You did a few things very well there. We gave an example. We gave a few examples. We did kind of wander off topic, but you recovered. You said, "Sorry, I'm getting off topic. Going back to your question..." Then you just gave me a quick summary and we were done. So, that's really good. That's good.

Weiyan: That's one of the techniques I learned from your speaking tutorials; how to get back to your topic. I think that's very useful for me.

Ben: Yes, it's important that we recognize as well that we're going off topic, but you did well there. You got an example and you put in a little collocation there, you know, "... she never let her cellphone out of her sight. She was always checking for updates..." Good work, Weiyan. Good work.

Weiyan: Thank you. Thank you.

Ben: Let's try one more question.

Weiyan: Okay.

Ben: Is social media an important aspect of society in your country?

Weiyan: Yes. I believe social media is one of the most important tools, let's say, in our society. I say this because it allows instant and free transmitting of information and knowledge. Especially in terms of transmitting of information, it's very important because a lot of news are highly censored here in China, but through social media sometimes people would just send out those important--

For example, if there is an emergency that breaks out or if there is a terrorist attack that breaks out, sometimes we get our very first hand revelation of this news through social media instead

of from official news agency. So, this is-- I think in this sense, I think it is very important here in China in our society. That's my answer to your question.

Ben: Super. Very good, very good. Just one last thing just to make you crystal clear, we could-- actually, no. You did say-- I was going to say you could summarize the question again, but you did. So, no need to comment there. Excellent.

So, what you did well there, Weiyan, is you gave your answer-- you repeated the question which gave yourself a little time. Also, you transitioned into the example, yes, by talking about the terrorist attacks and people getting updates and you summarized it as well. So, well done there.

Weiyan: Thank you.

Ben: You're welcome. What I would recommend is you practice these parts 3 more often and find a tutor online. You can even go to IELTS podcast and you can take classes with one of our tutors, but either way, whatever you do, find a tutor and if you don't go through us, what you need to do with this other tutor is say, "Look, all I want to do is part 3 questions for one hour," okay? One hour and you'll be able--

Weiyan: That's going to kill me.

Ben: If you've got the structure in front of you that I just mentioned-- and it's not the bible. We don't have to follow this exact structure from beginning to end. I give an example in every single question. It's just useful to follow that structure, you know?

I think the more time you do practice it, the easier it will get. That would be my suggestion there and also keep on working through those tutorials on the Speaking Confidence course that I think you've got access to.

There are lots of tips there for boosting your confidence and boosting the fluency and it also shares the techniques for part 2 and I think it breaks down part 3 in more detail and offers more techniques for handling those types of questions as well.

Weiyan: Okay, thank you very much.

Ben: You're welcome. You've got your exam coming up in a week or two. Is that right?

Weiyan: Yes, I think it's in next Saturday. In the 8th December, next Saturday.

Ben: Right, keep us updated on how-- on what happens and hopefully, fingers crossed, we'll be able to push past the 7. I think in your case, Weiyan, most important thing is bullet proof. Go in there and you know, if the examiner is about as responsive as a horse, still smile. Still smile, yes, it's your ticket to Canada or Australia.

Weiyan: I'll try and do that.

Ben: Do you have any advice for the students before we finish up because we're going to have to finish soon?

Weiyan: Yes, my advice would be listen to IELTS podcast tutorials. They are immensely helpful, really. They could help you to find out mistakes you didn't know you have always been making in the past. So, listen to those tutorials or buy those courses.

Ben: Super, okay, thank you. All right then, Weiyan. Do you have any questions for me before we finish? Anything related to IELTS.

Weiyan: No, no, I don't have any further questions, but I do really appreciate your help really. They helped me. You don't know how much you have helped me. I really appreciate everything you did.

Ben: Fantastic. Thank you very much for those kind words. I'll pass them on to the essay correction team as well.

Weiyan: Definitely, please do that.

Ben: I will. Appreciate. Okay then, Weiyan .Thank you.

Weiyan: Thank you. Thank you.

Ben: Just one more last thing, Weiyan, before we finish. Sorry, I should have said this in the beginning, but anyway. I was going to say I've been recording this the whole time. I guess you knew that was going to happen anyway, didn't you?

Weiyan: Yes.

Ben: Got you. Are you okay with me using this for marketing purposes online? Is that fine?

Weiyan: Sure, no problem.

Ben: Excellent. Have you sent in a photo with you holding your certificate?

Weiyan: No, I haven't done that. I will do it after we have this interview or maybe what about let's wait for two weeks if I get my new score from my latest test. Then maybe I'll send you a new photo.

Ben: Fantastic.

Weiyan: Is that okay?

Ben: Yes, that works for me. That works for me. Weiyan, how are you practicing your speaking at the moment?

Weiyan: I'm just-- I will search for some sample questions and I would talk to myself in the mirror. Basically, I would talk to myself.

Ben: Right, okay. Because what I was going to suggest was, as you heard me say, you can either go with myself or one of the tutors we have or which might be more useful in your case with the exam coming up is to jump online and find a Filipino tutor or a Ukrainian tutor or a Polish tutor.

I'm saying those because they're quite economical, you know. A native English speaker is going to cost you maybe upwards of \$20 and then to get a decent, decent IELTS tutor you're talking 30, 40, 50, 60 dollars.

Weiyan: Wow!

Ben: Yes. So this is why I'm saying like a Polish, Ukrainian, Eastern European or a Filipino in my experience--

Weiyan: Okay, I haven't looked at those.

Ben: I can send you a link as well that will give you some credit for your first class. What I'm saying that is if you find one of those and just go for an hour, just book an hour and say, "Look, I want to do part 3 questions. Here are the questions."

I can give you-- I think you'll be able to find some online and just say, "Look, can you ask me these questions and tell me about my grammar mistakes after each three questions?" or something like that.

I'm saying like use this technique because if you don't take control of the class, they might take control, which is okay if the teacher has a lot of experience and knowledge, but sometimes they don't. Sometimes they'll just waste your time. Like, oh, tell me about your weekend, tell me about your favorite animal...

Weiyan: That's why I have always been self-taught. I really don't like them.

Ben: Exactly, exactly, but this will be useful because it will get you speaking but it will also-- if you go in there with a structure and sort of like a plan for the class, it will stop the teacher going into default idiot mode, as I like to say, into default mode of "tell me about your weekend," and all this rubbish, you know, which is not going to be very helpful.

You need specific part 3 and possibly even part 2. After each question or after each couple of questions, just say, "Please write down the mistakes I'm making and tell me the correct way to say it." You might also want to consider recording your classes with the tutor as well.

Weiyan: Okay, okay,

Ben: I'll send you a recording of this straight away so you can listen to it and you'll be able to pick up on one or two grammar mistakes as well.

Weiyan: Okay, that's fabulous.

Ben: Okay then Weiyan, thank you very much for doing the call with me. It's been fantastic and we'll probably publish this in a week or two once you get your results.

Weiyan: Okay, let me know.

Ben: Will do, will do. I'll give you a heads up.

Weiyan: Okay, thank you very much.

Ben: Thank you, Weiyan. It's been a pleasure.

Weiyan: I'll update you with my latest results, fingers crossed.

Ben: Yes, fingers crossed totally. Okay have a fantastic evening and good luck.

Weiyan: Okay, okay. Bye.

Ben: Bye bye.