

**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 podcast listeners. In this episode, we're going to talk to Anna and Anna is going to share with us how she passed the IELTS, why she's taking the IELTS and where she's going to go to next. So, welcome to the show Anna. How are you today?

**Anna:** Fine, I'm great. And you?

**Ben:** I'm good, I'm good. Okay, as we just established, you're from Israel.

**Anna:** Right.

**Ben:** Could you tell us why you are taking the IELTS exam?

**Anna:** I think it's basically the same with every interview you do. The aims of immigration. We're hoping to immigrate to Canada later on and it was essential to pass the IELTS and get the highest score in order to get as much points as we can. So, I needed at least to get 8 in listening and 7 in all the rest of the parts. It was not so simple as I first thought.

**Ben:** What happened the first--

**Anna:** It was challenging.

**Ben:** What happened the first time you took the exam?

**Anna:** Basically, I started-- I didn't know anything about the exam and I started to prepare myself mentally by listening to podcasts and just out of nowhere I just found your podcast and I wasn't at the stage of preparation. It was just mentally preparing, getting to know what is IELTS.

I listened to other interviews and I started to realize what it's going to be about; that it's not just an English exam to evaluate your English knowledge, that you can come and demonstrate your English abilities, but it's an exam that you have to be prepared to because everyone-- most of the people who go to this exam, if they don't-- if they are not ready for it, they fail.

Even before registering for the exam, I realized that part and I started to prepare myself to do some tests, to read articles, to time myself and it wasn't easy. I honestly thought I'm not capable of getting a good score, not in reading, not in anything because I wasn't prepared for the times and the reading was too much to read and then to think about the questions because I didn't know any of the tips and the tricks. I later managed to-- I later learned on your-- using your-- you have this package of--

**Ben:** The courses.

**Anna:** Yes, how do you call it? The most challenging part was obviously, writing for me. I use-- you have a package of sending essays and the girls were checking it for me. It was extremely helpful because I paid money I felt that I must do-- even if I was a little bit lazy from time to time. I was receiving emails that I was told, "Keep in mind 24 hours and you have to submit the next article and don't be late." So, I was like-- it was a shame to be late. So, I try to do my best and my first exam--

**Ben:** Hang on a second,

**Anna:** --wasn't so good.

**Ben:** Hang on a second, Anna. I just want to mention a few things for the listeners because maybe they are at a similar stage to how you were when you started preparing because you mentioned some really valid points about the fact that you might have a good level of English, but that does not mean you are prepared for the exam.

**Anna:** Not at all.

**Ben:** Exactly. We said this before, the exam it's going to test your language skills and your IELTS exam skills. The specific skills you need to develop to pass the exam. This is just one thing that I repeated a few times, but it's still-- because I know for a fact that my sister who's now living in the UK and she's lived in the UK all her life, except for the five years when she lived in Australia, but if she took the exam tomorrow, she's going to fail even though she's a native English speaker.

She's going to fail because she doesn't have the specific exam skills. So, yes, thanks for bringing that up. The other thing I was going to say about the essay correction service and the feedback, you mentioned a point that really resonated with me. I was like okay, I know that sometimes I can be lazy, but I paid for this service. I know this about myself because when I get at a gym subscription or a pack of classes, I go for the unlimited one where it's just like a pack. Maybe it's yoga, so I'll buy a monthly subscription and I know that if I've paid for that I'm going to use it, you know? I think that's a similar situation for you plus the messages of encouragement, of moving fast, you know.

**Anna:** Plus the correction tips and the mistakes I repeated to doing them, but in the first I honestly felt that my essays weren't good at all and I felt that for the feedback. Even in the writing process, it took me forever, maybe an hour and a half for the task 2.

I always thought even in my native tongue, in Russian, if I was given to write an essay, I'm not so good in writing, generally. Not to speak in a foreign language. It was extremely uneasy for me so I abandoned that and my husband told me just go to the exam for the first time and see how it goes and the atmosphere and etc. and then you'll repeat that.

So, I abandoned the writing and I started to focus on my speaking because I didn't have anyone to speak to. I started to go to private lessons in speaking and then I got a nice score in speaking, 7.5 on my first attempt--

**Ben:** Excellent.

**Anna:** --6 on the writing because I abandoned that 10 essays, but I got the principles, the basics what I need, but it was just-- it seemed to me then that it's mission impossible. In my reading, I got 8 and in the listening, I got 7.5.

**Ben:** Excellent scores.

**Anna:** That was the first attempt and it wasn't good enough for the points I needed. Then I started just writing every day. I heard it in some podcast of yours I think. Someone said-- you asked him what he would give to others and he said, "You need to write an essay a day; one

essay or even two if you can a day." So, I started to write task 1, task 2 every day for, I don't know, month or two, maybe two months I think--

**Ben:** Excellent, good work.

**Anna:** About 40 essays and not all of them were checked by-- some of them were checked and some of them I just wrote to myself without corrections and just throw that away, but virtually I covered every subject.

They started to repeat-- topics started to repeat. So, I gained vocabulary-- specific vocabulary on virtually every subject a little bit. On the second exam, it was amazing because I abandoned my speaking, so I told myself I'm good in speaking. I got 7.5 in the first attempt, so I'll focus on my writing and I got 7.5 on the writing and I even got 5 minutes left. After the checking and everything, I had 5 minutes to spare--

**Ben:** No way!

**Anna:** --because the fluency of my-- I just wrote without any hesitation. It was just natural. Something-- easy topic-- I got an easy topic. I got presents or something like that, but it was just natural to me.

**Ben:** Wow! That's fantastic, Anna.

**Anna:** But because of my speaking, I neglected that part. I thought I was so superb in speaking and I got 6.5 in speaking and I needed 7. In the reading, I got 9; in the reading and both listening 9. So, I only needed 0.5 in speaking and I was devastated because of this 0.5, it ruined all the score for me and I went for the remark.

**Ben:** Before we talk about the remark, can we just rewind and go back to the writing because you said that you had five minutes to spare and that was even after checking.

**Anna:** Checking.

**Ben:** Yes, yes. So, you'd written both essays and you'd checked them both for mistakes that you made before and--

**Anna:** And I spent five minutes on each one making notes what I'm going to write, so the extra writing--

**Ben:** Sorry, you followed the sentence guide, the instructions from the course.

**Anna:** Yes.

**Ben:** Right, got you. Got you.

**Anna:** I followed all the tips, almost. I tried to make it more personal, to write in personal style, but the template was amazing. I used it a lot and it helped me. I knew exactly how to build my paragraphs and how long to write and I knew how to estimate my words so it won't be too short and not too long.

I controlled myself. I was totally prepared after this two months of writing every day. I honestly-- maybe if I got topic about philosophical something or political which I'm not familiar with the topics itself, but every other topic I felt like prepared. I can do this and it was thanks to your help. It was amazing.

**Ben:** Thank you. Thank you very much.

**Anna:** It seemed impossible for me at the beginning and then it seemed too easy. If I could do it-- I would just want to say if I could do it, and my English is not so perfect, anyone can do it--

**Ben:** Wow! That's great, Anna.

**Anna:** --with the right preparation and right guidance.

**Ben:** Look, I'd just like to mention there's two things before we talk about what happened when you asked for a remark for the speaking. Before we get into that, I just want to say two things to the listeners that one, the template and the strategy definitely helps.

What also obviously helps is doing an essay every single day. I would just like to explain what I think is happening and Anna probably agrees is that you use that system and that process that's taught in the course and the template you've used it so many times that it becomes natural--

**Anna:** Automatic.

**Ben:** Yes, and you're not even thinking about it anymore. Now you can just solely focus on your writing and start writing the work rather than start thinking about building paragraphs and ideas and construction. Now, that part becomes automatic so you can just focus on basically the topic which might be environmentalism, it might be, I don't know, gender equality. It might be education. It might be whatever.

Because you've done it so many times, it's automatic. You're not even thinking about it anymore. You've almost got the muscle memory because you've been doing it so often and then because you had the intelligence and the tenacity and the ambition to write an essay every single day like you said, you've covered all topics, left no stone unturned and you had vocabulary for this.

So, not only did you know the methodology for writing the essay, you're also broadly familiar with the topics and the vocabulary that comes with the topic and I think that's-- you probably agree it's like that's why you managed with five minutes to spare at the end.

**Anna:** Yes.

**Ben:** Yes, and what did you do for those five minutes? I'm kind of curious.

**Anna:** Actually, I'm embarrassed to tell you, but I went back to the task 1 and I realized that I had too much and I didn't cover the first bullet correctly and said something else, but I knew it was only five minutes and there is no time to rewrite it. So, I just left it at that. Who knows, maybe I could have got 8, but 7.0 is enough for me.

**Ben:** Yes, that's still a very good score. Well done there. Now, can you tell us what happened with your speaking remark?

**Anna:** Yes, I was devastated because I got speaking-- my cue card was about taxes. Tell me about a good tax in your country and I was totally blank. I couldn't-- I went too deep into that. I started to think about the taxes and names of the taxes. Tell me about good law. What did I say, good law in your country and I started to think about taxes and the tax system here.

I overthought about it. Never mind, it was stressful for me. So, I chanced a lot and I didn't speak fluently as I could have-- as I should have. To be honest with you, that mark I got was totally justified in my opinion, but I said what the hell? I'll try to go for the remark because honestly I was exhausted to start preparing over again for the test. It was two intensive months.

I started to prepare, but then I got the result. It was quick because they were New Years and all that-- two weeks. They say on their rules that it might take up to eight weeks, but I got the notice after two weeks that they checked it again and they highered my score from 6.5 to 7 in speaking and it was enough for me. Now, I'm so much relieved because this IELTS, this horrible IELTS-- it's a horrible test honestly.

**Ben:** Okay, that's that. Thank you for your honesty there. Anna, can I just--

**Anna:** Sorry, it's my little daughter.

**Ben:** No, no worries, no problem.

**Anna:** She's watching stripe and she's--

**Ben:** Okay, no worries. So, Anna, your initial motivation to go and get a remark was that you couldn't-- you didn't want to do the whole test again. So, you just thought, right, I'm just going to go for a remark.

**Anna:** Yes.

**Ben:** Okay, but you didn't actually feel that you deserved a 6.5?

**Anna:** No, I did feel because-- that I had the ability to speak better because it was a proven fact that in the first exam I got 7.5 in speaking. So, I honestly felt that my speaking generally wasn't that bad. That I can speak in the level of 7, but in this specific test I did do not so good. I spoke

abruptly and with pauses and I searched for words. So, in my opinion, I deserved what I got, but I'm glad they had the mercy on me and raised my score.

**Ben:** That's excellent. By the way, when you apply for the remark, do you have the opportunity to write why you are applying for the remark or why they should up your score?

**Anna:** It was British-- there are two IELTS, right, IDP and the BC. I applied for the BC because that's what my test was and no, you just circle the part or parts that you want them to be remarked. It's the same price if you want for all the parts or just one of the parts, the same price, but if the score changes, they return your money for the remark process because it costs as nearly as the exam.

**Ben:** Yes, it's quite risky, isn't it? It's quite risky. I'm guessing that in your situation that they probably saw that in the past you have got a 7.5 and you are capable of a 7.5 level. So, to bump it up from a 6.5 to a 7 isn't going to be a major risk from their side, I imagine.

**Anna:** Maybe and I also got 9 in both the reading and listening, so maybe someone nice-- after Christmas in a good mood.

**Ben:** Exactly, that's a good tip. Apply for remarks in the holiday season.

**Anna:** In this time of the year, right. No, I have no tips at all. If someone has the money and can afford themselves-- in the worst case, they just lose their money.

**Ben:** Yes, that's a fair point. Okay then Anna. Well, I think we're coming towards the end of the interview now. Do you have anything you'd like to share with the students? Any tips or anything you'd like to add?

**Anna:** Never neglect any part. Be prepared for both four parts simultaneously. Even though many struggle with the writing and speaking, it is essential to practice all four parts towards the exam and not focusing on any one of them.

Maybe to focus more on something that they are weaker at, but if someone thinks I'm good in reading, don't think that because the tips that you give on reading are essential, are crucial to

manage to read in time. We have only one hour and in this hour you also have to write the answers in the answer sheet. It's not so easy even the reading, so don't neglect any part.

**Ben:** Excellent tips there. Excellent tips. I remember I was speaking with an ex-IELTS examiner once who had turned into being like an IELTS coach and she said exactly the same as you just said. Never neglect a section and keep them all sort of like up to a high level by practicing them all and giving them all equal amounts of time. So excellent point there, Anna.

**Anna:** Thank you a lot, Ben. Thanks.

**Ben:** You're welcome

**Anna:** I'll definitely recommend the-- if I have friends that are in the same process, I'll definitely recommend you.

**Ben:** Thank you very much, but also well done to you, Anna and well done for being so tenacious and so determined. I love it when-- I love hearing stories about IELTS students who are just absolutely convinced and prepared and doing whatever it takes to get the exam and just get it out of the way just even out--

**Anna:** Yes, there are students that do exam after exam and take them forever, like for a year, but if you are focused you can totally do it in two months, intensive months of studying and the fact that I did it and I repeat my English is not so perfect, the fact that I did it, anyone in this level and around it can do it.

**Ben:** Excellent. Excellent point there, excellent point, Anna. All right. Well, thank you very much.

**Anna:** Thanks a lot.

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