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Ben: Making notes on cue cards. Hello there. My name is Ben Worthington. In this tutorial, we are going to specifically focus on your IELTS speaking part 2 cue card strategy. Let's jump straight into it. Now, a lot of IELTS teachers say to their students write as much as possible.

I've seen from my own eyes that this can be quite a disastrous strategy because we have to bear in mind that it's about the quality of your words, not the quantity. Now, in a recent episode where I was appearing as a guest for another podcast, there was a student who sent in a question and the question kept on talking about, well not kept on, it just mentioned that this student descended into rumbling especially in the part 2 and the part 3.

They descended into rumbling because they kept on going and going and going and going and this is disastrous. I also have a student who took advantage of the intensive speaking course and I was working with her just yesterday, actually. She had a similar sort of like not illness, but a similar issue. Yes, she just kept on going and going and going.

She needs to pass IELTS pretty soon because she wants to take her whole family out of Saudi Arabia and take them to Australia and the clock is ticking. That means there's a count down there and there's a cutoff point regarding the age and unless she passes the IELTS pretty soon, then she's going to miss this window of opportunity.

I'll tell you later on how we managed to solve this because she'd already taken IELTS numerous times, but with the speaking it was really holding her back. In a few minutes, I'll tell you the strategy I gave to her. So, the key points, what I'm going to cover in this podcast are how to understand the cue card, how to develop your ideas and how to expand your questions and answers.

Then I will share the strategy that I gave to Safinas about how she can start basically limiting her answers instead of going on and on and on and creating more grammatical mistakes and in her case, going off topic in a few cases because she kept on talking.

Right then, 1) Understand the cue card that you are given. So, look at the structure and you'll see it's probably divided into three or four parts, okay? So, "Talk about an older person you admire." You should say who this person is, how long you have known him or her, what qualities he or she has and why you admire him or her.

So, part 1: the topic. What is the topic here? Well, in this case, it's an older person you admire. Other topics could be a book, a film, a meal, a place, a memory. Most of these topics, well not most; a lot of them are connected to people. So, it's very important that we know some good vocabulary regarding describing people, okay?

Also, remember that it's not going to be-- it's not always going to be a general topic or an academic topic because and it's not really a test of your knowledge. It's usually going to be something personal to you. Something you have done, someone you know, or somewhere you have been, okay? So, it's quite personal.

Now, part 2: describing the topic. Who this person is-- let's just review those three questions, the three bullet points. Who this person is, how long you've known him or her, what qualities he or she has. So, in this part of the question, they're going to be usually asking what, when, who, or where and they require you to give detailed information about this, these points.

Now, what I see-- what is a very common mistake is that students might just simply answer these questions and after about 30 seconds, they run dry. There is nothing else to say, yes? And the other extreme-- this is what was happening with Safinas before-- yes, is that they just keep on talking and talking and talking and eventually get way off topic.

Usually, what I find with this type of student is that they know that they've kind of gone over, but they don't really know when to stop because there's no real indication. So, we can solve that in a few minutes.

Now, as I said before, if we just do the 30-second one, who this person is. "This person is my uncle. I've known him since I was about 3 years old, I think. The qualities he has are that he is very kind, he's very sociable, he's very athletic, and he's very close to me."

What a disaster! What an absolute disaster! It's all over, range rover in a matter of 30 seconds. So, we definitely don't want to do that. Now, let's have a look at part 3 of our tutorial. Answering the how and the why question. Now, this is the-- this is often the hardest part because explaining is usually more difficult than describing.

So, you have to explain why you admire him or her. So, this part gives you the opportunity to say more and the explanations are usually longer than descriptions and of course they are probably a little bit harder. So, how are we going to achieve a high band score? So, you understand the cue card. What's the next step, okay?

The next step is-- what a lot of students do is that they write their answer out one by one, okay? They write it out word by word. This is not good because then you are going to basically read it as though it's a script. This is terrible, okay, because one, you're not only going to sound unnatural, two, once your script runs out and it probably will run out, it's going to be difficult to like freestyle-- to start freelancing so to speak, to start inventing on the spot.

So, what I am going to suggest is that you start making notes, okay, and start going for-- let's see, start going for phrases, phrases that come to mind when you are describing this person or explaining why you admire this person. So, if we are looking for phrases, okay-- and be careful. I'm saying phrases, not words.

Students who write 'happy', for example, they are describing a person, explaining why they like them. "Happy, nice, fun, generous." That's not terrible, but we're not going to get the high point. We're not going to be scoring around band 7 with those kinds of phrases whereas if we use phrases such as a born leader, entrepreneurial skill, determined, charismatic, charming, well respected, inspirational, a positive role model. Can you see?

These phrases are almost collocations and you know from listening to past episodes that collocations are very, very useful because they help you sound more natural. So, I would encourage you to start using more detailed notes.

Another reason why we should just not write down words and we should go for more detailed phrases is because if we go back to the cue card and it says how long you've known him, your

answer is, "I've known him for nine years, for twelve years," whatever it is. We're not going to really impress the examiner.

However, if we use discourse markers, which is another podcast that will be released soon, if we use discourse markers we can say something like, "I'm not entirely sure when we first met. It could have been about seven years ago. Yes, I think that's right. It was seven years ago when we were both playing football for the school team."

This is much more longer. It contains complex language, which you need for a 6.5 or above, and it's much more detailed. There's almost a little story in there. So, your notes, if that was the kind of answer, you could have said, going back to your cue card notes, you could have said, "I'm not entirely sure. It could have been... We were both playing football." Yes?

That's just like a very brief overview, but from that now you've got like a springboard to give a very full, complete, rich answer. Just a side note here that the IELTS speaking is not a test of knowledge. It's your opportunity to communicate. As I said on another podcast as a guest, if you can go in there charismatic, confident, then all of this is going to be easier.

We don't want to go in with the level of communication we use with our friends. We want to be thinking of this as a job interview and we want to be confident. We want to be clear and we want to be speaking almost the same way you would in your native language, okay?

When you're talking with somebody and they ask how long you've known him, for example, you wouldn't say, "I've known him for 6 years." No, you'd go deeper. You'd go wider. Give the context, some details in there. The football team. Tell them if you're not sure how long you've known them, yes?

So, this is how you will-- this is one step you can take to start sounding more natural. As you probably heard, there is a reason question. This might be-- you can identify this because it will start with how or why. This is probably the most difficult part. Going back to our cue card, we have the why you admire him or her.

Now, the strategy, what I'm going to give you is that if we go back to the notes that we have written down, the notes we had, we had like well respected, charismatic, entrepreneurial skill, born leader, extremely generous, all these lovely collocations. What we're going to do is probably expand on these a little bit more, okay?

So, I'll give you a quick overview of how I would answer this. Right. "Well, the person that I'm going to talk about today is my friend Mike. He's a very close friend of mine and someone I admire greatly." Can you see? I'm adding some extra detail, yes? I've told the person-- I've told the examiner he's a close friend. I admire him greatly. Moving on.

"I'm not entirely sure when we met. It could have been about seven years ago. Yes, that's right. It was when we were both playing football for the school team." Once again, as I mentioned before, we are going into more detail. I'm not saying I've known him for six years because I am a robot. No, I'm telling the examiner a bit of back story there. Next one.

"We are both mad about football. So, it was this shared love for the sport that got us talking." (I'm just adding some extra detail about our friendship.) Next one. "Since leaving school, Mike has set up his own company and has become a very wealthy man. He's a born leader." (Now, I'm going to start talking about the qualities and notice I'm using these collocations of born leader.) Back to the topic, back to my presentation.

"You could see this when he was younger. He was the captain of the football team and head boy in our year." (I'm still adding more detail here.) "So, it's hardly surprising that he's now running his own company. Another reason though, is his entrepreneurial skill." I'm talking about his additional qualities. I'm adding more detail and I'm using collocations to explain this extra detail.

"He set up an online company with very little money. He doesn't have a billionaire father like Donald Trump and at first, he faced a lot of difficulties, but he was very determined." Another quality there. "His determination paid off and now he has an incredibly successful company." Now, what I just did there was I added another word from the same word family to show the examiner my flexible use of language. So, I'll just go back and say that again.

"At first he faced a lot of difficulties, but he was very determined and his determination paid off because now he has an incredibly successful company." So, how could you expand your collocations or your word list using words from the same family, from the same word family to show your examiner that you have flexible use of the language? Just to plant a seed there.

Okay, now, before we finish let me finish my talk and then I'll tell you about what Safinas says. So, "In addition to his skills, he has great qualities such as charisma and charm." More qualities. "He is the most charming and charismatic." Once again, I've used words from the same word family. Charisma, charm, no, yes. Charisma, charm, charming and charismatic. You see? I'm expanding them. Let's go.

So, "He's the most charming and charismatic man I've ever met. Why do I admire him? Well, there are a number of reasons." So, what I just did there is I'm focusing back on the cue card, okay? So, I'm reminding myself and I am asking-- I am reminding myself to keep on topic and I'm giving myself some extra thinking time.

So, it's a useful way to remind yourself and keep yourself on topic. So, back, let's rewind. "Why do I admire him? Firstly, he's a well-respected businessman and he's gained the respect of his employees. Moreover, setting up a business in a recession is also inspirational and the fact that he never gave up despite some difficulties in the early period."

So, let me just go back. There are a few points there that I think will help you. First, I used firstly, okay? This will help me with cohesion and coherence, okay? Some sequence in it. Firstly, yes? Also, later on in the next sentence, I used moreover. Perhaps it might be a little bit too formal, but I'm only using it once and I'm not jumbling it with a load of other very formal words, okay?

So, but it does help with my cohesion and coherence score. So, let's go back to this. "Moreover, setting up a business in a recession is also inspirational and the fact that he never gave up despite some difficulties in the early period makes him such a positive role model. I'm not sure if I'd be able to achieve what he had in such a short time, but he has inspired me to try. So, you can see why I have so much admiration for him."

So, hopefully, you will have heard and picked out those useful phrases that I had in my notes. We can expand these and we can use words from the same word family to show flexibility and also we avoid sounding like a robot because we've got our words in front of us and we're going to use these as our guide.

Also, if we find ourselves rumbling or going off topic, we're going to go back to the question and we could even just ask the question out loud just to keep us on topic and give us some thinking time.

Now, just going back to my student Safinas who is doing the intensive speaking with me. Whenever I asked her a part 3 question, she would always go on and on and on, okay, and we needed a way to contain these answers because if not, as I mentioned, it would be on and on and on and dangerously we would go off topic.

Obviously, the more time you are speaking, the more chance you will commit a mistake. So the quick strategy I gave to her was 1) identify the tense, reflect that back in the answer. 2) Explain why. Give a reason why. Sorry, explain your points then explain why and then finish. No, then give an example and then finish.

So, let me just go over that again. 1) Reflect the answer, not exactly word for word, but identify the tense, reflect it back and elaborate on it a little bit with a discourse marker. 2) Give a point. 3) Back that point up with a because and then possibly give an example and then round it up and finish.

Just following that structure helps-- helped her significantly deliver more controlled answers. So, that's it from me today. Now, the next step, if you want to take it further, is to go to ieltspodcast.com and sign up to our newsletter. We send tutorials, new publications, sometimes competitions, sometimes discount course and it's a lot of fun.

So, you can go there, sign up and if you're in a bit of a rush and you need to pass soon, have a look at the online courses. Now, one last thing that I think which would be very helpful for you to do if you've enjoyed this podcast, perhaps leave us a review on iTunes.

Also, if you've enjoyed this, please think of a person who you think would benefit from listening to these types of tutorials and help and guidance and motivation and then perhaps send them a link and get them on board and you can help us help-- we can help more people pass IELTS. Okay, have a great day and thank you for listening.

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