

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: Let's start again.

Sara: Take number three. Go.

Ben: Hello there IELTS students. In this episode, we're going to talk about Sara who recently took the IELTS exam and she's got a lot of interesting information to tell us. Sarah, could you tell us where you're from and why you are taking the IELTS exam, please?

Sara: I'm originally from Honduras and I decided recently that I want to move to Canada.

Ben: Right, got you. How were you preparing for the IELTS-- no, you said that you heard the podcast and you just wanted to take the exam once and pass it and get straight through. Is that-- yes?

Sara: Yes. So, I told you that I'm leaving in the States right now. So, whenever I first came here, I had to take the TOEFL. I had to take it a couple of times. I actually had to take it three times. So, I was about to-- I don't want to do the same with IELTS. I really want to pass the first time.

So, I found your podcast on Spotify. I use that app a lot. So, I found you there and I listen to the stories that your students were telling and just your tutorials in general. So, I decided to go for it because I did not want to do the same. I did not want to take it more than one time.

Ben: Got you, got you, yes. I think I mentioned this briefly before, but like this mentality and I've heard this mentality before when I was taking my driving test. I just took test after test after test and I wasted so, so much money and I should have just spent that--

Sara: Exactly.

Ben: Yes.

Sara: That's what I thought too. If I don't pass it the first time, then I have to pay this \$230, I don't remember how much it costs. So, I might as well just spend this \$150. I think that's what

your course-- or one thirty-something, I don't remember exactly how much. I was like I might as well just go for it and just try to pass it the first time.

Ben: Yes, yes, yes. Very good. So, what was your biggest challenge before joining the course?

Sara: I think generally speaking was the writing part the one that had me worried and the reading part a little bit too, but since-- I consider myself very lucky because I have been living in the States for a while now. So, I know that my speaking is okay. I know that I have an accent, but I actually love that.

I know that my speaking-- I mean you get nervous and that's it, but I know that I'm fine with my speaking. My listening I did practice every day just because sometimes you find these really random topics and they just-- yes. I tried to-- I did a listening every day for a month or more.

Ben: Genius. Wow! Very good. Very good.

Sara: Yes. As I said, I wanted to pass it the first time. I really, really didn't want to do that again, but then the writing part even though I have been here and I did my undergrad and my Masters here, I didn't because of my major, I'm a music major, I didn't really get to write a lot of papers and whenever I did, I had so much time to do it.

I had to write research papers [unintelligible 00:03:46.23] I had months to prepare for it. So, I had never had to write a paper in such a short amount of time, like in an hour. So, I thought it was super helpful the way-- the formula you pretty much give in your website. It was super helpful, yes.

Ben: Excellent. Well, just three things that I want to mention. When you said your accent and you're proud of it, this is a very important point that I want the listeners to be aware of. Okay, Sara's got an accent--

Sara: Like when my American friends make fun of me, it's like, "Can you speak another language?"

Ben: Exactly, yes. Exactly, you should-- yes. The accent should not be mocked. Someone's got an accent it's because they've learned the language and they've put the time in. The only real thing that matters with accents and with a language is that if you can be understood--

Sara: That's right. I got an 8.5. I was a little worried about it in the test, but even with my accent I got a really good score.

Ben: Exactly, yes.

Sara: So, I was very happy.

Ben: If two native English speakers are talking, maybe a Glaswegian from Scotland and a Texan, they're probably not going to understand each other and these two are native English speakers. So, the only way to qualify whether an accent is good or bad is whether the people can understand it

A Glaswegian-- he could fail the IELTS speaking if the examiner didn't understand him. He has to modify his accent and that's a native English speaker. Yes, I totally agree with you there with the accent and when I speak foreign languages, my accent [unintelligible 00:05:42.20] greatly as well.

Sara: Yes, you're still comfortable with it because-- you should be proud because you are able to speak more than one language. Not a lot of people can do that.

Ben: Super. Super point. The second point about doing a listening exam every day, that's just genius. I would strongly recommend the students to have the same mentality and take a reading test every day or a listening test whichever is your weakest area and focus on really working that.

The final thing that I want to say, Sara, when you said you don't want to take test after test after test then investing in something, in a course that's going to make sure that you get the pass first time, it kind of pays for itself rather than spending \$600 on three tests.

Buy a course-- and that's not even mentioning all the time wasted, all the time used up in studying again, in preparing again, in going to the test center, and the roller coaster emotional ride of sort of like the nerves, the fail. It's a quite a tough journey.

Sara: That's exactly what I wanted to avoid. I was like one of the ones I want to go through that roller coaster, getting nervous, all of these. I had to commute three hours from where I live to take it too which is not a lot, but it's just like it was such a long day. I had to travel the day before, I had to pay for a hotel.

Ben: Wow!

Sara: I had to do all these extra stuff. So, I just don't want to have to do that again. It's so much money.

Ben: Exactly, exactly and it's not just the money that you spend on the hotel or the trip to the exam center. It's the time you've lost as well. It's like a good--

Sara: [unintelligible 00:07:38.18]

Ben: Okay.

Sara: --but I had to cancel my lessons because I am a teacher. I had to cancel my lessons the day before because I had to travel and get there early and just relax the night before and try to get a good night of sleep.

Ben: Absolutely, yes. Absolutely. It's a whole day's worth of income that you lost.

Sara: Yes.

Ben: All right. So, well, you said-- we had a talk before so I remember because there was a misunderstanding. I thought you'd signed up for speaking classes and I was like this student's really good. Why does she want speaking—

Anyway, Sara's telling us-- was telling me beforehand that she's getting her essays corrected and she said that-- Could you tell us why you wanted your essays corrected by an expert rather than-- why didn't you give your essays to your friends?

Sara: Like I said before, I consider myself lucky because I'm actually live in the States right now. So, I could have told one of my American friends to look over my essays, but since I have experience before taking this type of test, I really wanted someone-- because I know that there is some particular format that they are looking for or words that you are not allowed to use.

While in my first essays I was using the word kids a lot and Ellen told me that word was too informal for IELTS tests. So, even if one of my friends was to read this, they wouldn't have been like this word is too informal for this IELTS essay because they don't really know.

So, I just wanted someone who knows what they are doing, who makes their living doing this. So, I wanted a professional to help me out because I think my English is in a pretty good level, but I wanted-- just as I said, I wanted to get it out of the way. I just wanted to do it once. So, I just ran for it.

Ben: Super. What happened on your test day?

Sara: I was nervous, of course, but I felt very good about my listening. I got an 8.5. It got a little tense. There was another girl there in the writing part-- you really need to practice. You really need to practice your timing because it got a little awkward because I feel like she didn't have time to pass her answers to the sheet.

She was really trying to make this person that was collecting the test. She was like, "I'm not done yet." Everyone was so [unintelligible 00:10:24.12]. So, she was trying to get extra time and she was, "No, you need to give me your test right now."

I just feel like you don't know, this is a really expensive test for whoever is taking it. Whenever I tried to do a reading test the first time, I really struggled because you don't have time to read it.

Ben: This is so true.

Sara: You literally need to come out with ways. It's pretty much a word search. Especially the reading part I would encourage everyone to practice it because it's so much text in such a short amount of time. An hour is not enough for 3 different types of test.

So, just make sure you have time at the end to pass your answers because-- I think that she actually finished, but she just didn't pass the answers. So, I was feeling bad. It was just awkward.

Ben: For sure, yes. So, make sure you transfer those answers in time or you might have to fight with the invigilator like the girl did in the-- "No, no..."

Sara: Yes, it was awkward because they were being loud, they were kind of fighting. She didn't want to give the test back.

Ben: Wow!

Sara: It was very awkward.

Ben: All right. What happened on your speaking exam? Can you tell us what--

Sara: I was actually very impressed because most of the people that are using your podcast they were like-- they were so dead in the face, no expression at all, but I was very lucky. The person-- it was a girl. I think she was-- she looked young. She was thirty-something maybe. She was smiling all the time, so I felt good about my speaking. I don't know if it was because I was doing good or she was just very nice.

Ben: This reminds me. I was talking with my friends the other night and we were saying some of the differences between the Americans and British people and I was like yes, Americans they smile all the time and they are so enthusiastic.

It kind of just made me think now that I guess taking it in America you're going to have obviously, an American examiner and for the speaking, having somebody smiling and enthusiastic in front of you--

Sara: Yes, that was very helpful.

Ben: --it's going to boost your confidence rather than a sad, depressed, morbid British guy.

Sara: Yes, I was prepared for the worst. I saw of like [unintelligible 00:13:12.05] mock tests and they are so dead. It's just like you're talking to the wall. Well, I know I was very lucky in that she was very nice. She was very helpful. We had a really-- we didn't talk, we had a small talk at the beginning just like, "Hey, how are you?" She was fine--

Ben: That's excellent.

Sara: Yes.

Ben: So, can you tell us-- you scored what was it, 8.5 for the reading did you say?

Sara: No. Writing and reading were 7 and speaking and listening were 8.5. It was an overall of 8.

Ben: Wow! That's fantastic. Excellent. What would you say to somebody who's thinking about joining the online course at ieltspodcast.com?

Sara: I would tell them go for it because as I said, you don't really want to be paying a lot for taking tests and stuff. You might as well just do it and-- you're going to spend less at the end even though you're thinking about it, but if you have to do the test again you're going to be spending double. Especially in the writing part, it's extremely helpful.

Ben: What did you find helpful with the writing part?

Sara: It's just having someone telling you-- you have a format there. I think it was super helpful for me just come and come out with ideas. Like you said in some of your podcasts, everything is going to be related to money. That always helped me.

Every topic I was thinking about I was just going to okay, what's the monetary part of this that I can talk about? Just coming with ideas and things like that. It was very helpful. That's the first step in your course. You just give a lot of topics you have to come up with ideas.

So, I did a lot of reading because there was stuff that I wasn't familiar with, but yes, and just having someone that's helping you and correcting you. It was extremely helpful.

Ben: Yes, getting the feedback--

Sara: Yes. Another thing that I found helpful you said in one of your podcasts. I know that my speaking is in good shape, but whenever you're-- I feel like my English fails me in the worst moments. You speak a second language you know what I'm talking about.

Ben: Absolutely.

Sara: Whenever you have to--

Ben: Whenever you need it, it just disappears.

Sara: Exactly. It's just like, no. You don't know English at all.

Ben: Yes, exactly. You're just like, I thought you could speak.

Sara: Exactly. So, you said in one of your podcasts because I still did hearing. I have been doing a lot of job interviews, but I don't really decided I will move. I had to stop doing job interviews, but you said in your podcast you might as well practice.

The week before my IELTS, I had this job interview and the lady was extremely intense. She was like-- she threw at me really personal questions and stuff. She called me one day. I didn't know. I had applied like two weeks ago, or something and I call her back because she left a voice mail and she was like-- I told her I was interested and she was like, "First of all, tell me why you didn't answer me the first time." I was like, okay lady. Calm down.

She had me just so-- she was so intense, but I-- she made me nervous. I thought that it was super helpful. It was a week before the IELTS. I was like, okay, I feel prepared now. This lady asked me about everything she could, every mind-- She asked me about my parents. She asked me about boyfriends. She asked me a lot of questions.

Ben: Wow! I love that tip though. Did you do this on purpose?

Sara: Yes, I did on purpose because I knew that--

Ben: So, you applied for lots of jobs you had no idea.

Sara: In other circumstances after she being so intense I wouldn't have kept going with the interview because I was like I wouldn't want to work for you, but because I kind of needed the stress of it, I just kept going. I let her ask me whatever she wanted.

Ben: That's super. Did you apply for lots of jobs beforehand to get this interview practice or was it just kind of like a coincidence? I will apply, but I'm going to talk with her anyway because she's called me.

Sara: It was a coincidence. I wasn't-- yes.

Ben: Okay, okay, but still I think I may have talked to students before. You want to get that interview practice? Go for those job interviews. Just take advantage.

Sara: Yes, I think the week before my IELTS. I just returned calls because I had done it before. I had applied before, but that week I returned calls just to get the--

Ben: I love that. I love it.

Sara: She got me very nervous.

Ben: Maybe we can share her number and the job advert.

Sara: I feel like somehow she will be happy to. She was so intense about it, so she'd probably enjoy making people nervous.

Ben: Super, okay. But just for the record for those listening. Although I would love to put her number on the site it's not going to happen, but the message is there.

Sara: Go to their Facebook page. I'm just going to go and casually-- just kidding. Casually leave her phone in the wall.

Ben: By the way, this woman is really good at interviews, by the way... All right. Okay, Sara. We're going to come to an end, coming to an end of the podcast now. It's been a pleasure talking to you. Do you have any tips for students or anything else that you would like to add for students who are preparing for the exam at the moment?

Sara: Just make sure that you have-- you're practicing, you have enough time to pass your answers to your sheet. I found they are not giving questions in the writing test particularly hard. So, I download some book in Amazon that is just like this type of questions. So, just practice whatever your weakness is the most.

Ben: Super, super. Okay. Well, thank you very much, Sara. It's been a pleasure talking to you.

Sara: Thank you, Ben.

Female Voice: Thanks for listening to ieltspodcast.com

Ben: Okay, we can finish--

Sara: And say Ellen I say thank you too. I found her help very helpful. So, thank you both.

Ben: Okay, yes, definitely. I'll send the message on.

