



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 students. In this episode, we're going to be talking with a very successful student called Nilo. How do I pronounce that? Is it Nilo or Nilo?

Nilo: In my country, it is called Nilo but actually it's from the river.

Ben: I see, like the River Nile.

Nilo: Yes, that's correct.

Ben: Cool. Am I pronouncing it correct if I say Nilo?

Nilo: Yes, that's right.

Ben: Super. Welcome to the podcast, Nilo. Could you tell us why you are taking-- actually before you tell us why you are taking the exam can you tell us about your situation, where you live and what you do?

Nilo: Yes, actually I'm from the Dominican Republic. It is a country located in the Caribbean. I don't know if you have heard about Dominican Republic before?

Ben: Yes, yes. It's had a few incidents, but Donald Trump hasn't anything.



Nilo: Yes, a little bit. Actually, we all really want for our baseball players. We usually export players to the major league of baseball play. So actually, I'm from here. I have never lived in another country and yes, I think that's it.

Ben: Okay, are you a student or are you working?

Nilo: Yes, both. Actually, I finish my bachelor degree, but at the moment I am studying my master's degree and I am still working in the technology area.

Ben: Interesting. I've got a lot of respect for people who can do both at the same time. I did the same and I was in Manchester. I was working and studying and it takes a lot of energy and effort and concentration, so well done there. So, you're working in the technology sector. So, I guess you're taking IELTS because you want to work in Canada? Is that right?

Nilo: Yes, I want to migrate to Canada. We have the express entry program and I had to take the IELTS because I needed some points for my CIS for the express entry program in Canada.

Ben: I see. I see. How is that process going now? Is it-- when do you think you'll be in Canada? In 2019?

Nilo: No, actually 2020 because I did a master's degree, but it's not recognized by WES. It was an online program and I was a little bit disappointed. However, I enrolled in another program in



my country and I have heard that it is recognized by WES. I don't know if you are familiar with that process?

Ben: Yes, broadly familiar. It does seem kind of bureaucratic, like a bureaucratic barrier. Oh, we're not going to recognize any qualification from this place. It seems quite tedious.

Nilo: Yes, that's right. That's right. So, as soon as I finish this master's degree, by the end of this year, then I will submit my documents and apply for the express entry. So, next year I believe that I will be in Canada.

Ben: Excellent. That's very interesting. Now, can you tell us how you were-- how many times have you taken IELTS?

Nilo: Well, this was my first and only try. I passed my first time.

Ben: Excellent. Well done. Well done.

Nilo: Thank you.

Ben: How did you prepare for each module, for each section?

Nilo: Well, for the reading exam I was taking the general test. However, for the reading part, I started to take [unintelligible 00:04:50.13] test because it was harder and I wanted to improve that way my reading skills. Also, every single day I read papers regarding what I wanted. For



example, I used to read editorials from the Guardian [unintelligible 00:05:10.02] read whatever could make me have [fun? 00:05:16.05]. You know what I mean?

Ben: Got you.

Nilo: That way I improved my vocabulary and my reading skills at the same time.

Ben: So, you read the articles and editorials that were interesting to you personally.

Nilo: Yes, that's right.

Ben: And was there a specific process you did to improve your vocabulary? Did you write down new words or anything like that?

Nilo: Well, firstly I tried the AnkiApp. Basically, it is an app that you put in some [unintelligible 00:05:55.17] I believe it is called and that way you can have like flash cards every single day that they ask you about-- they give you a definition and they ask you about the word or the verb that has that meaning.

After a month doing that, I started just to read and listen to podcasts, your podcasts, BBC Learning English, The Guardian, whatever it took to improve my vocabulary. I also read the Barron book and I found some text to put in the AnkiApp so that way I could practice with the vocabulary that Baron suggested.



Ben: Excellent, that's interesting. Which-- this is a difficult question. It's highly subjective. However, which of these techniques do you think worked best for you? Was it the podcast, was it the articles or was it the flash cards?

Nilo: Well, it's really difficult because that really depends on what works for you. In my case since I have some certification from the technology sector, I am really used to listen to podcasts. So, while I am working-- in my country there is always a traffic jam, I used to listen to podcasts and get-- listen to a couple of podcasts and try to figure out what they were talking about and get the most out of my time.

Ben: Got you, yes. It's utilizing that dead time that you'd possibly just spend twiddling your thumbs or doing nothing. If you can transform it into productive time then-- especially like you did. If you are on your commute and spend maybe an hour a day--

Nilo: Yes, something like that.

Ben: Yes, and then if you do it every day, that's going to be five hours a week that's twenty hours a month. That's an extra twenty hours that somebody can find and utilize to learn English. In this case, you were listening to podcasts and I guess actively and passively listening like going in and out of the podcast while it was playing I imagine.

Nilo: Yes, that's right.



Ben: Got you. Excellent. So, this is what you did to improve your vocabulary for your reading and obviously listening to the podcast would help with the listening. Did you do practice exams for the listening also?

Nilo: Yes. For the listening, I was a bit scared because when I started to take the exams I was getting like 5.5 and 6 and I was like okay, I won't make it. So, I said let me take two or three exams per day and see if that will work for me. I took every single day test from the Cambridge book. I went from the number one to the thirteen like twice. That worked for me. At the end, I got 8.5 and I believe-- I just took test after test. That was the only way that I improved my listening skills.

Ben: Exactly. This is why we don't really have a listening course at the online-- on my site. We focus on the writing and the speaking because that's where we can see the real results. We do have a reading module there as well, but we focus our energy on the writing and the speaking especially the writing because that's where we can get the feedback from. With the listening, it's usually a case of I recommend a student I say look, we don't have the course because the best way to do this is to get some practice listening exams and do them test after test after test after test. So, you were doing three a day?

Nilo: Yes, two to three tests per day.

Ben: Excellent, wow! Then you got your grade up from 5 to 8.5 when you finally took the test.



Nilo: That's correct.

Ben: Excellent. Well done there, Nilo. Well done. That's fantastic.

Nilo: Thank you.

Ben: What about for the speaking? How did you practice for the speaking?

Nilo: In the speaking, as you can see I don't have a good-- I don't know pronunciation--

Ben: No, I think that's fine. I haven't had a single problem understanding a word that you said.

Nilo: Thank you.

Ben: [unintelligible 00:11:13.02] is excellent.

Nilo: Thank you. At the end, I got a 7. I believe that I didn't practice enough. The question that the examiner asked me, I didn't have many ideas for that, but the structure I just followed the reading structure that you gave me for the writing part. This is because, for example, that worked for me. I didn't have a partner to practice with and the courses that I found on the internet for the speaking part were a little bit expensive for me. So, I just focused on the listening and the writing part.

Ben: Interesting. Yes, and it's funny you should mention it because I think next week a podcast will be released where I'm saying look, what I teach in the writing you can also roughly apply it



to the speaking. Obviously, we're not going to follow the same formal structure very rigidly, but we're going to answer, we're going to give a reason, then we're going to give-- we're going to build up the answer like that; just exactly like you said.

This way you can answer a lot more fully and you've got a framework to follow which I think takes-- just like the writing, it takes the stress out of organizing your ideas. You just drop them into this framework. You can express a reasonably full answer to the examiner. So, with the examiner did you have any challenges understanding what they were saying to you?

Nilo: Well, I believe it was-- there was too much noise in the room and like two or three times I had to tell him could you please repeat that, did you mean this? I believe that it wasn't a listening problem. It was just that there was too much noise and he knew that. So, I don't believe-- I didn't have too many problems [unintelligible 00:13:45.01] just that I didn't listen correctly because of the noise.

Ben: Because of all the distractions going on.

Nilo: Yes.

Ben: Got you. That's happening to me right now.

Nilo: Sorry about that.



Ben: No worries, no worries. For me, it's obviously a slightly more relaxed situation. It's not an exam. So, in your situation it was like a big room I guess and thin walls or something like that? Why was there so much noise in your exam?

Nilo: I believe it was because of the air conditioner. It was a school and they had a big room and they had a big air conditioner.

Ben: Wow! That's interesting. Okay then, let's move on to the writing. What happened with the writing? What were the biggest challenges you had with the writing?

Nilo: Well, first I didn't know how to improve my writing skills. I don't know if I am allowed to mention this. However, I was taking online classes with another tutor. It didn't work for me. I was paying her like \$24 per hour and she told me, okay if you want to improve your writing skills, you have to take classes weekly and it could take even a year to improve your writing skills because the essays that you're writing are 5.5 and it will take more time to improve your skills.

I didn't have the money or the time that she told me that it would require to improve my skills in the writing. Also, the thing is that she didn't give me like a sentence guide or any structure to follow. She told me okay, do an essay and she will correct that for me. She would say the introduction is not good. Go to YouTube and watch some videos and come back with a new essay. It was like trial and error.



I didn't want that. I just wanted a structure to follow and a guide to put my ideas and focus on the thing that I needed to pass the exam and the ideas, cohesion and those topics. I didn't want to spend money and time in things that were unnecessary I believe.

Ben: I completely see your point there. I think it's remarkable that some of these tutors, the online ones and even the local ones that they will put Business English, English for teenagers, IELTS English and all this and then a student will come up and they will say hey, how do I write an essay and that tutor's possibly not even read an essay recently and even then they probably didn't do it under exam conditions.

I think it's unacceptable that they say go to YouTube. It's like hey, you're sending me to YouTube. What am I paying you for? Okay, I'm going to send you the essays in and I'll send you them and you correct them while we have an online class. So, you just sat there silent while she's looking at your work or he's looking at your work. I think the whole system is flawed. I can totally see-- I think it's a frustrating process especially at \$25 per hour that's quite steep. That's quite steep.

Nilo: Yes, and my friends also-- I have a couple of friends that took classes with her and they didn't pass in the first exam. They had to take it like twice or something like that. Yes, I know about a couple of them that pass in the first exam, but it took like five, six months and I don't



believe that they only followed her advice. They had to go to YouTube and read books and do extra work. You know what I mean?

Ben: Yes. I totally understand. It's sad. This is what it is when a tutor just decides to put IELTS on their CV or on their resume and maybe they are a native English speaker, but that doesn't mean that they can write out a high scoring essay or they've got the structure or a guide to help a student write a high scoring essay under exam conditions. So, yes if it's taking five or six months, that's a long time. Obviously-- it's good that they took just one exam. That's fantastic, but five or six months is a long time. How long did you spend, Nilo?

Nilo: Well, I spent roughly three to four months. However, I didn't take your course from month zero. I started to practice with your course after two to three months. The thing is that I first took the course and I did like eight essays and I thought that it wasn't enough and I requested an extra pack of essays, but at the end, I didn't finish them. I just did like three or two because I didn't have time since I didn't start from month zero. You know what I mean?

Ben: I see. I got you. I understand, yes. Right, how was it on the exam-- how long did you spend on the course then? Like a month roughly?

Nilo: Yes, roughly. The thing is that I didn't-- I had too many things at the same time going on and I didn't put all my energy in your course. So, that's why I took too much-- yes, like 30 days or something like that.



So, I believe that if I had put all my energy, I could even pass the course in a week or two weeks or something like that and even pass the exam. If you focus just two to three weeks in the course, follow the assignments and do the tasks that you ask in the course, I believe that it is now clear to pass the exam.

Ben: Yes, good points there. Good points. I think as well if the student can-- I mean from my personal experience if the student can just-- if they can focus all their energy, I know it's a lot to ask, but if they can take two weeks off work and then just work through the course and also in the meantime practice with the reading and stuff like that, what I find is if a student works fast through the course, and not just blazing through doing everything to the bare minimum, but working fast and dedicating time to improve on their mistakes and really paying attention to the feedback and working at a fast pace, I find that the results, the improvement is obviously a lot quicker, but it's also-- it's more likely that you are going to remember mistakes that you've made in the past because instead of seeing them two weeks ago, you're revisiting it from two days ago if you get what I'm saying.

Nilo: Yes, I agree.

Ben: Okay, then. So, final questions: what results then did you get the first time you took IELTS?

Nilo: The results you mean that I got?



Ben: Yes.

Nilo: I got in the writing part a 7 even though I finished-- it took me like 50 minutes just to do the task 1 and the task 2. So, I finished before the time run out. In the speaking, I got a 7 and in the listening, I got an 8.5 and in the reading exam, I got a 9.

Ben: Wow! That is awesome. Wow! Well done. Fantastic results there. Fantastic. Just one thing with the writing, once you'd finished, did you go back and check your work?

Nilo: Yes, I had enough time to double check my vocabulary and my grammar and I even asked for an extra page, paper because I didn't have enough space in my page to finish my task 2. I was really confident my structure was the correct one.

Also, even though I didn't get the same question that I used to practice with you I got the same type of vocabulary needed for that task 2. I don't know if you are getting me. It was about entertainment and I practiced a lot about that topic with you. So, I was very confident about my vocabulary and my grammar that part.

Ben: That's fantastic. Yes. Well, a couple-- I think it was last year actually. What we started to do was change the questions. Each month on the course we would change them-- I think it's each quarter and update them with questions that have been seen by other students on the



exam. This way we keep it really fresh and we keep it up to date-- we keep the topics up to date.

So, just like exactly what happened with you if you've got experience with the topic, you can transfer all your knowledge and vocabulary on that topic and put it into another question. It might not be exactly the same as you see. but it's still going to be similar so you can use that vocabulary. So--

Nilo: Yes, that's correct.

Ben: Nilo, do you have anything else to add? Any tips for students?

Nilo: Yes, well actually that you didn't correct my essays. However, the one that was correcting my essays I believe it was Ellen she was really correcting the essays. She did an awesome job and she didn't improve this, go to YouTube, no. She just told me this is wrong, she explained why it was wrong and she was explaining me in a way that she didn't care about-- let me see how can I say this, in a way that okay you paid your money let me treat you well.

No, no, if that was wrong, she told me this is wrong. You have to improve it this way that way. It was really awesome because I needed where I should work and where I should improve my skills in the writing part. That worked for me. It was awesome.



Ben: Fantastic. Well, I will pass on what you said to Ellen. She'll be more than happy to hear that. You're right. I used to do the corrections. Occasionally, I do them, but most of the time it's either Ellen or another tutor and Ellen she is excellent. She's one of the best we've ever had and she will just get to the issue and she will tell you look, if you need to do an introduction you do it like this and exactly like you say. I wouldn't hire a tutor who says go to YouTube. If I needed someone to do that I could send the link and say go to YouTube.

Nilo: Yes, I know you.

Ben: I think that's everything. Thank you very much, Nilo.

Nilo: Thank you for an awesome course and a really great price because like I told you-- hello, are you following me?

Ben: Yes.

Nilo: Sorry, I was really-- I couldn't hear anything. Yes, it was a really good price and I learned a lot not even for the exam but I improve also my English skills overall. I learned a lot and I believe that in my professional life, I could also apply that you know sending emails, speaking to a native speaker that lives in Canada, for example. Thank you for everything.

Ben: You're welcome, Nilo. That's very kind and thank you. I'd just like to add that the skills that you can get once you learn how to write a clear coherent essay they are absolutely



transferrable to your professional life especially as Nilo mentioned for writing emails, for writing your CV, just for communicating in general. They are really good.

In fact, just about a week ago, I was giving a presentation and I was talking about how to write clearly and I even mentioned-- I said look, once you master the skill of being able to write clearly and coherently, you probably find an improvement in your thinking processes as well because that becomes clearer and more streamlined as well. Of course, everybody is different, but that's what I found personally.

Thank you so much, Nilo of joining us. I hope you have a fantastic day and good luck with your application for Canada.

Nilo: Thank you. Have an excellent day too.

Female Voice: Thanks for listening to ieltspodcast.com