



Linda: How's my audio? Is it okay? Is it acceptable?

Ben: It's perfect.

Linda: No pun intended.

Ben: It's accepted.

Linda: Okay, great.

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.

Linda: Hello, my name is Linda and I'm very happy to join Ben Worthington on the IELTS podcast today. I am the founder and CEO of Accepted. I've been an admissions consultant since 1994 and I'm happy to share my admissions insights and experience with IELTS podcast listeners.

Ben: Super. Welcome to the podcast, Linda. It's a pleasure to have you. Could you tell us, just before we jump into it, where you're from and how you got into this sort of like area, into this sector?

Linda: Okay. I'm from Los Angeles; born, raised, lived here almost all my life. I went to UCLA as an undergraduate student and also got my MBA at UCLA. At the time this was a long, long time ago, there was a lot of concern when I was an undergrad about the nefarious influence of



television. It sounds very innocent and quaint today, but the concern was that people were not writing as well as they used to in let's say the '50s. This was the '70s because they were spending their time watching television as opposed to reading books.

So, UCLA decided that they were going to increase the writing requirements for Poli Sci 1 and they hired people who wrote well and who had an English background and they offered me the position and I took it. I got great training, really outstanding training and I loved the work.

But at the time, again this was the 1970s the PC was not around yet. Writing was very tedious. Editing papers meant white out and little things that you stuck in a typewriter or just retyping the whole thing and I did not see myself making a living from writing or editing or anything like that. Fast forward about 15 years, my husband and I had six young children and--

Ben: Wow! That's a lot.

Linda: Yes, ranging in age from 3-12 at the time and we needed to make some money and basically I was the one to make it. He had a full-time job. You could say I had a full-time job too with the kids, but it was a little bit more flexible and I was looking for something that I could do that I would enjoy.

I'd been a real estate agent, but I was no longer enjoying it and it also was going to eat up that family time. I had friends who were writers and editors and I thought that given my background and how much I had enjoyed that work, I would try it. So, I tried it and I was asked and I



assumed I'd be asked to write-- edit rather, not write research papers and term papers and stuff like that.

I kept being asked to write personal statements for graduate school and that was just a whole lot more fun. So, I decided this was like the early mid-90s. Actually, it was right around '94, I decided to focus my business on admissions. At the time the idea of being a graduate school admissions consultant was bizarre to most people and my husband was very supportive because he saw that I was getting these requests, but he also thought I was nuts. I started focusing at that point on admissions.

In 1996, I put up Accepted. It was an experiment and if you want to see a really ugly website you can go look it up on the way back machine. It was an experiment that worked.

Ben: Wow! That's fantastic. What an awesome story. Wow! I do have questions in front of me, but just one that's popped into my mind now because I've looked at personal statements before and you have reminded me it is enjoyable because editing them and really sort of like pulling out nuggets and really getting the students to sort of like shine, so to speak.

When you're looking at them, at these letters are you-- do you find that maybe-- I mean this might be right, it might be wrong. This is not really my area of expertise, but do you find that the letter is all centered on the student and is that okay or should the letter be directed at the



university and what you are going to do for the university? I'm just wondering how they should write this.

Linda: Well, there are letters of recommendation and then there are application essays or personal statements or statements of purpose. They have slightly different names different nuances. I assume you are talking about the essays, not the letters of recommendation which are written by a third party. [unintelligible 00:05:22.10] Am I right there?

Ben: You are correct, yes.

Linda: Okay. So, I think you've actually hit the nail on the head. What the entire graduate application should do and I think this goes for undergraduate too, but certainly for graduate is show that the applicant both fits in at the target school and they can fit in in terms of academics, in terms of experience, in terms of goals, all kinds of different ways.

In terms of their educational needs, but also has something to add to the class they hope to join, to the program they hope to join, to the school's community and ultimately the larger world. So, that paradox of both fitting in and standing out is kind of at the heart of admissions and I frankly think it's not something that's really well understood.

Ben: Yes, that's really interesting. So, it has to be a balance of not just I can do this, I can do this, I did this, I will do that but I can bring this for you because I did this in the past and I will do this for you. Is that right? Is that the kind of balance we are looking for?



Linda: I think it's a little bit exaggerated. I think if you apply to Harvard and you say I'm going to make Harvard a better place it might come off as a little bit arrogant, but if you say I want to contribute-- I hate I want to contribute, I'd love to work on this project at Harvard. I'd love to organize this event. You hear? It's not so much I'm going to-- you're going to benefit by being [unintelligible 00:07:04.14] and that you don't want to come across saying, but you can say I'd love to work on this.

Ben: Awesome. Right, now I got you. Okay. Thank you for that. That's a very detailed answer. Excellent. So, the next question I was going to ask you is maybe we've covered it a little bit, but what are the common challenges that a student faces when they're trying to get into university?

Linda: Well, I think one we've already kind of touched on is that there is this paradoxical element to the application. I think another challenge they face is just assessing where they should apply. How do their qualifications match up against the admitting class profile of the schools they are applying to and this is whether you're an undergraduate or graduate, medical school, business school, law school, it doesn't matter.

Then there is also they should be considering, especially for graduate school less so for undergraduate, what do they want to get out of the degree? Yes, undergraduate, college especially in the United States, I think abroad it can be different, you're expected to do a certain



amount of exploring and not necessarily know what you want to do for the rest of your life when you enter at 18.

But when you apply to graduate school and you are focusing now on medicine, law, chemical engineering, business, whatever it might be, you shouldn't be exploring at that point. You should know that that's your chosen field. You don't necessarily need to know what specialty you want to go into let's say in medicine or what kind of law you want to practice, but you should be able to have some experience that indicates familiarity with this particular specialty and perhaps some goals or directions beyond the graduate program that you are applying to.

Ben: Interesting. Interesting. Because you just mentioned like in the U.S. and the system we are talking about there it just reminded me that in our listeners I think maybe there will probably be about three Americans out of the thousands that we get. I was thinking, you just reminded me, I was thinking what would be the common challenges for a foreign student approaching this U.S. system and wanting to get into a U.S. university because I know lots of listeners who've got their sights on the U.S. and would love to study there. It's like a dream.

Linda: Well, lack of familiarity with the U.S. school system, educational system is certainly one challenge. Sometimes, lack of familiarity with English is another challenge and I think that probably one of the biggest challenges especially for people coming from Asia or two in



particular. One is some educational systems are very numbers focused. It's a grade, it's a test score and that's it.

The U.S. does take a more holistic approach to evaluating candidates. It's not all about the grades and test score. Yes, they do count. It's not like you can show up with poor grades and expect to get into an Ivy League school. Poor grades or poor test score and say well I have this great experience. Yes, they look at it holistic, but they don't ignore-- so that's I think one thing that's very hard for international students to grasp.

The other thing is in some cultures, Americans in particular are very comfortable saying I did x, y, and z. I think in some cultures, that's considered bragging. The line between demonstrating confidence and arrogance is a murky one and sometimes culturally defined.

Ben: Wow! That's a very accurate description of what I've encountered especially with regards to like the test score obsession. When you say looking-- the admissions offices is going to look at this holistically, they're not only going to take into account the test scores, but they'll also look at maybe extracurricular activities and what this student is doing outside of the school. Is that right?

Linda: Correct, correct and many fields right now are looking for both leadership and teamwork. So, if somebody's been doing-- again, some research fields, at this point most



research is done in teams also. So, unless you're a starving artist in a garage, you're probably working in teams.

Ben: Right, I see.

Linda: So, that's important.

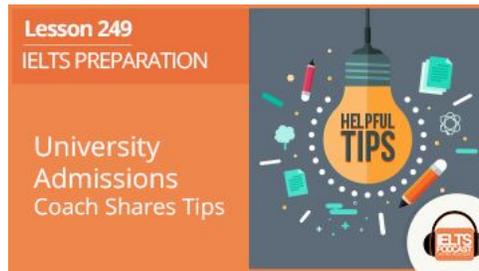
Ben: Could you give us an example of what this teamwork would be? Would it be-- I'm guessing here like a sports team that seems--

Linda: It could be.

Ben: What about other sort of like team events? Would it be something like scouts?

Linda: It could be-- well, it depends again. If it's college and you've been a scout through high school, then that could be highly relevant. If you were a scout in elementary school and you are now applying to graduate school, it doesn't pass, sorry.

It could be playing in a band, being part of a theatre production. It could be a charitable organization, serving on a board. It could be being part of an alumni organization. It could be being on a team at work depending upon again, what kind of program that you are going for. It could be-- if someone is applying to college and you are part of this student council or student club in your high school or you're part of again a governing body in a college organization or an event that you plan.



The possibilities are so broad to show these kinds of qualities, but what sometimes happens is that the international applicant doesn't realize that they are valued.

Ben: That reminds me of an admissions coach I spoke to and he said that the institutions are a little bit flexible. He was referring to Australia and the UK. So, maybe if the student got a band 7, but the university insisted on paper that they needed a band 7.5 to get into this program. Is it the same in the U.S.? Is there a little bit more-- is there a little bit of flexibility there? Is it still worth a student applying even if they don't meet the exact criteria?

Linda: It really depends on the school and the program. If a school is a competitive school and says this is our minimum, then they probably mean it. The applicant can certainly call the school and say listen, is there any exception? But in all likelihood they mean it.

If the school isn't such a competitive school, in other words, it's struggling to fill up its class, then they might be more lenient. The other thing is with most tests, you can always retake the test. So, let's say you say there was a jackhammer going outside the room and that's why I scored poorly or I was getting sick or you know whatever it is, the common reaction of the school is well, that's okay. Then just retake it. And again, the flexibility of the school is probably going to be dependent upon how many applications they are receiving.

Ben: Right, excellent. We're going to jump into sort of like the interview because I know that quite a few students can get nervous. In the IELTS exam, there is a face-to-face interview with



an examiner and I've seen students-- it's so saddening. It's so sad because they fall to bits in front of the examiner whereas minutes before we were just having a free flow conversation and then in front of the examiner they tense up and they are like showing, I don't know, maybe 70% or 60% of their natural ability. I'm sure-- has this happened to some of your students or some of your...

Linda: Yes.

Ben: Yes?

Linda: Yes, you're talking now about admissions interviews or specifically IELTS... yes

Ben: Well, it's a bit of an overlap. You know what I mean. It's like basically--

Linda: Of course these overlap, but I'll let you advise on the IELTS interview specifically. For an application interview, whether this is for business school or medical school interview, I strongly encourage our clients to review their application, to really comb the school's website, if possible talk with current students and recent alumni. That would be number three and number four and this is really important; prepare to tie your experiences to the school's programs and values.

Ben: Beautiful.



Linda: You can even set up a spreadsheet. School values: a, b, c, d. and I have these experiences that show that I share these values or I have these qualities. And then you can do it another way. You can say I'm really proud of this experience. I participated in this sorority and I increased membership by 50%. I worked in a team and I did this and this and this. Then list the qualities that you employed in that role.

Was it leadership? Was it teamwork? Was it great listening? Was it organizational skills? And list them so that if you are asked you can go either way. You can talk about the experiences you really want them to know about as well as tie to values that they hold dear. So, that's kind of point number four.

Point number five which I think is very relevant whether you are going into an IELTS interview or an admissions interview is to-- before you go in, don't talk to the people just as nervous as you in the waiting room. Talk to yourself and use positive imagery before the interview.

Visualize yourself doing something you know you are good at. If you are a great tennis player, just imagine that fantastic serve. If you are a great musician, you are performing on stage and you're just doing great. Visualize that. Then visualize yourself excelling in the interview, just acing it.

And then try positive self-talk. Affirmations. "I'm going to ace this interview today. I'm going to wow them." You don't have to say it out loud especially if you are shy, but we all have these



conversations going on in our head and unfortunately, sometimes they are negative. They are not healthy. They are negative. Make the ones that you are having with yourself before you go in positive.

Ben: Yes, this is beautiful. Absolutely beautiful. It's so-- it's kind of ironic because a few episodes ago, I was talking about visualizing and just visualizing the most successful interview. You sat there, back straight, you're smiling. You're looking at the examiner and it's going well and yes, very similar to what you were saying. That's fantastic advice--

Linda: I think also there's a few mechanical things you can do. Go to the place of the interview the day before so that you know where you are going and you can't get lost. And then allow an extra half hour or hour or whatever for traffic or parking problems or whatever so you're not going to be there at the last minute. Just things like-- those are kinds of mechanical ones, but I think-- I'm thrilled to hear that you were talking about this just a couple of weeks ago also.

I do think we have these negative conversations and I think if we can be more positive about ourselves or just think positively, then we're going to do better.

Ben: Absolutely. It's like half the battle. Also, it can just as-- it makes such an impact as well with your preparation. If you've got this negative self-talk saying you're not going to succeed then you're not going to be-- it's going to make it ten times harder to sit down and start preparing for it whereas if you are like okay let me give this my best shot. I deserve a band 7. I



deserve to get into an Ivy League university. If you can just channel the conversation and make it positive. I completely agree with you there.

Linda: Yes, we're on the same page.

Ben: Absolutely yes. So, we're coming to an end and well, just two more questions. First one is why will a coach help a-- not why. How can a coach help a student get into university?

Linda: There's lots of ways. We can help the applicant choose the best schools where it's going to be easiest for them to show fit and where they have the greatest likelihood of achieving their goals or meeting their educational needs.

We can guide them to write the essays and the resumes that help them show they both fit in as we discussed at the beginning of the interview and stand-- fit in at the target schools and stand out in the applicant pool in a positive way. You don't want to stand out in a negative way obviously.

We can provide mock interviews which help both in terms of the content of their responses and helps them feel more confident and comfortable when they go into the interview. We can help them mitigate weaknesses. Sometimes, people have a poor first year in college or maybe they had a bad semester. Maybe there was family illness. Maybe there was a problem. We can help them mitigate that, show that they really have the ability to succeed in whatever program they are applying to.



We can help them handle wait lists, respond to multiple offers and sometimes negotiate scholarships and grants. So those are--

Ben: Super. There are plenty of ways there.

Linda: Absolutely.

Ben: One last question. Success stories; do you have any stories that come to mind of like a student, maybe an international student who's like-- maybe you've helped and now is like excelling or you helped get in who maybe, I don't know, you thought possibly couldn't do it when they started?

Linda: Sure. We had-- I remember there was one client applying to-- well a couple of stories. We had one client this past year who was applying to top business schools and he actually had worked with another consultant first and then he came to get us. He wasn't-- he just wasn't 100% happy with his essays.

He came to us. Turns out he also had a GMAT score that was distinctly below average for the schools he was aiming for. Like 50 points or more and-- 60 points or more. He worked with our consultant. He worked hard with our consultant and he got into the top business schools in the world.

Ben: Wow! Oh, my word. That's fantastic. Well done.



Linda: That was one. Then there was another story. This was from years and years ago. It was actually from 2001-2002. It was a fellow that we worked with and he was from the Middle East. He was applying to Ivy League schools and after 9/11 he was concerned that he should just stop.

He talked to his consultant, his consultant talked to me and we said no, we think you should definitely proceed. The reports of anti-Muslim filling in the United States were exaggerated. We thought he would get a fair shake and again he got into his dream school. And he was over the moon, overjoyed.

Ben: Wow! That's fantastic. That's fantastic. It just goes to say like what we were saying before like this self-talk. If you're not controlling the conversation going on in your mind, somebody else possibly can or will. Like you just said with the media especially the media it can exaggerate things so much, blow it out of proportion to the point where it starts influencing behavior and it can be quite sad in some cases just like you talked about with the Middle Eastern guy.

Linda: He actually-- in that case, it wasn't even so much the self-talk, it was the rumor mill.

Ben: Exactly.

Linda: And that's-- sometimes the weakness of hanging out in various applicant forums as opposed to going to somebody who's knowledgeable it can be the blind leading the blind.



Ben: Excellent point there. Well, thank you very much, Linda. Do you have anything-- well, before we finish if you've got anything else to add you could tell us now. If not, tell us where students can find you.

Linda: Sure. Just go to www.accepted.com. I think our name pretty much tells about our benefit. We help you get accepted and we love to help IELTS podcast listeners. We do work with applicants from around the world: India, China, Indonesia, the Middle East, South America, Africa. You name it; we've probably worked with them. Mongolia.

Ben: Awesome. Fantastic.

Linda: Thank you so much, Ben, for having me. I really enjoyed talking to you.

Female Voice: Thanks for listening to ieltspodcast.com