



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 are going to talk with Olly Richards from iwillteachyoualanguage.com. Actually no, it's iwtyal.com which stands for I Will Teach You a Language. So, welcome to the show, Olly. How are you doing?

Olly: Hey, Ben. Thanks for the invitation. It's really great to be here and yes, I'm doing really well, thanks.

Ben: Awesome. Okay. Well, Olly has learned about eight languages and this is like the foundation of his project helping other students learn languages and he also used to be an IELTS examiner. So, in this tutorial-- well, in this episode, we're going to look at Olly's days as an IELTS examiner and his current successful project which is the iwtyal.com website. So, Olly can you give us a bit of an introduction? Tell us a bit about yourself before we jump into your examiner days.

Olly: Absolutely, yes. So, I guess I mostly-- I'm most well-known for I Will Teach You a Language, which is my website. Funny iwtyal, the acronym, it does actually work as you type it into Google, but it's-- the name itself is I Will Teach You a Language because obviously iwtyal is-- it doesn't stick in the memory all that well.



So, I-- about me-- I have had a kind of long journey with languages. I began learning languages as an adult. I got interested in languages as an adult and I learned French when I was 19 years old. That was my very first experience. I found it really hard because I had no idea how to learn languages, but I tried really hard. I moved to Paris and I eventually ended up learning French quite well and I got lots of confidence from that experience and so I then went on to learn lots of different languages.

I probably learned about 10 languages all in all, but a few of those I've forgotten because I didn't get them to a very high standard or whatever. So, I've learned lots of different languages and then about 10 years ago or so I decided to teach languages. So, I did my teaching qualification and then I moved to Japan. I lived in Japan for three or four years and then while I was in Japan, I obviously got lots of experience as a teacher. I was an IELTS examiner as well and then I went on to become a teacher trainer and a recruiter.

I've kind of done everything when it comes to teaching. So eventually, when I moved back to the UK, I decided to start my own website which was I Will Teach You a Language. What I do on that website is I combine my years of experience in learning languages with all my experience in teaching languages and I try to kind of explain language learning from the points of view not really of a teacher but from someone who's actually done it a lot.



So, I try to kind of offer that unique angle. The main thing that I concentrate on doing these days is making courses that teach you languages through story because I find that a story is a very, very powerful way to teach and to learn. So, I produce courses and material for different languages that all kind of rely on the power of story to help you learn.

Ben: Wow! That's really interesting. I'm also very keen on stories. I tell students if they can tell little stories or anecdotes in the exam, the speaking exam then it just makes life a lot easier for them; for themselves, for the examiner and it makes it more personal, more interesting as well.

Well originally, we were going to talk about Olly's days as an ex-IELTS examiner-- well, as an examiner, but what I'd like to do actually is we'll talk about that at the second part and we might as well talk about stories if that's alright and we'll talk about language learning. Is that okay, Olly?

Olly: Sure. Absolutely.

Ben: Excellent. Okay. So, when you're teaching using stories I guess-- are you dissecting the language and placing it into a story? How does that work?

Olly: Yes, the basic principle of learning through stories is almost kind of like an antidote to the way that languages are usually taught. So, people listening will be very familiar with traditional ways of teaching languages where you study a lot of grammar, you maybe memorize vocabulary, you have tests and things like that. That's how languages are taught in most places



around the world, but for most people learning languages as an adult it's not a very effective way to learn because it's great for passing tests, but when you get out into the real world you realize you've had almost no experience really using the language and kind of speaking with people at length. I mean to understand people talking when they are speaking very quickly or noisy situations or whatever.

So, my way to teach languages is kind of the opposite of that. I say yes it's important to learn grammar, to learn vocabulary all of these things, but what's even more important than that is actually to get lots of exposure to the language. To spend time listening, spend time reading and do lots and lots of listening and reading because if you do that you will learn all the rest of the vocabulary and the grammar anyway.

So, the most important principle is to spend lots and lots of time exposed to the language and that's something people don't do enough of. So, in terms of the actual courses what I do is I start with the story and the story is always the most important thing. So the story comes first. So, I write stories that are suitable for beginners or for intermediate level. It depends on the course.

We start with the story and then I teach the-- I teach vocabulary and grammar and all those things, but I teach it from the story. So, I might pick out a word here or a phrase here or a grammar point here and I say hey, did you see that in the story? Let's talk about that word or



that phrase. Let's talk about why it's used. Let's talk about how that helps the story or why that character is saying that word.

So, everything is very, very contextualized. Everything is very, very connected to everything else and it's a very kind of natural way to learn. So, we don't start with the grammar. We start with the story and then everything you learn from the story.

Ben: Awesome. That's very natural and plus I imagine that if you've got a story or a character pinned to a certain grammar point you're much more likely to remember it. Would you agree?

Ollly: Yes, I mean grammar-- the thing about grammar is-- again, the way that we teach it is that it's usually broken down into rules, but that is not really what grammar is. Nobody-- grammar doesn't come from rules. Grammar comes from actually using it in the real world. So, the real key to learning to use grammar very, very well is to see it in context. So, as long as you are seeing grammar actually being used for real communication, then ultimately you will remember it and you'll know how to use it.

So, obviously there's lots of ways you can place that grammar so you can see it in a story, which is what I like to do. You can see it in dialogues. You can see it in news articles, but the real important thing is that you are always seeing it in context. The power of doing lots of reading or lots of listening is that you get to see that grammar being used over and over and over again



and that is for me, a far more effective way to learn it properly than just trying to learn the rules and then practicing the rules until you're blue in the face.

Ben: Yes, and like you said it's a more natural way. You're going to be exposed to it constantly and as you said, over and over again. Like I've said before in previous episodes repetition is the mother of all learning. Just through reading the story you're going to obviously progress further and get more exposure to it.

What I wanted to ask you Olly is is it one story like per module or is it like an epic massive novel by the time you finish the novel it's like super advanced language level?

Olly: Yes, we have lots of different courses and material, so it's all a little bit different. So, for example, I have a book of-- actually many books of short stories and in-- and you can buy these in bookshops everywhere. So, these books of short stories are multiple different short stories. We have eight stories within one book.

In my courses actually, I prefer to have one very long story because you want-- ideally, you want to spend more time with the characters. You want to spend more time with the story, with the plot because then as you get to know the story, as you follow the story as it goes, that's exciting, that's motivating and you want to come back and find out what happened next.

You want to find out who the criminal was, or who the-- whatever the story may be. I think there's a lot of benefit to having a long story because that's more motivating for you as a



learner. The trouble with very long stories obviously, is that it can feel too long and it can be hard to finish.

So, what I prefer to do is to have very short chapters so that you can finish the chapter because one of the most motivating things for learners is to feel that you've finished something. You completed something. You know when you are reading a book and you have a really long chapter and you never get to the end and you're like oh my God, this is just-- come on. I want to finish this now. I want to feel like I get to the end.

Ben: Yes.

Olly: So, I like to kind of give you very short chapters so that you can read them, listen to them and then finish them so you get that feeling of satisfaction from getting to the end of it, but then there are lots of them.

Ben: Awesome. I like that. I like that. Are they getting-- they must be getting progressively more difficult towards the end of the book I imagine, towards the end of the story.

Olly: Well, to a certain extent. Actually, there are various different courses and materials we have. They are very-- they are pitched by level. So, we have stories for beginners and then for intermediate learners. So actually, I don't-- what I don't really do is start them very simple and



finish them very hard because, at the beginning, I think the big danger is if you make it too simple you're kind of avoiding the real issue. You're kind of avoiding the real challenge.

So, I actually prefer to give you real language right from the beginning, so that you are getting used to what the language sounds like right from the start. Too many textbooks-- you know you open your textbook and the first dialogue you see is Mr. and Mrs. Smith. It's like hello Mr. Smith. Hello Mrs. Smith. How are you? I'm fine. Then it's finished.

So, my approach is a bit different. I actually have real conversations and a meaningful story from the beginning so that even though it's a bit hard at the beginning, that's what makes you strong. That's what gives you your power in the language because right from the first day you're learning to deal with the language even if it's a little bit hard for you.

Ben: Interesting. I guess it's-- actually looking back it would be a little bit ambitious to kind of teach the whole language and go from basic to advanced in one story.

Ollly: That's the other thing. Again, like the way that I-- it took me a long time to figure out how to teach in this way and it took me a couple of years to really understand how to do it and I tried lots of different ways. What I realized was if I try to teach you everything from the beginning to the end or a complete beginner, intermediate level, I can't do it because there's too much to learn. You get these textbooks "Teach yourself French" or something like that and they say by the end of this textbook you'll be fluent.



Ben: Bilingual

Ollly: Yes, it's just ridiculous because there's too much to learn in the language and nobody says that in one course they can teach you everything that any intermediate learner will know. It's just not true. You can't do that because so much of what you have to learn in a language it's not words. It's not phrases.

It's actually the skill of being able to speak confidently, to be able to listen and understand the main point of a sentence. Your body language, the way that you-- even learning to kind of say something and then pause and smile. All of these things feed into what it means to learn a language.

So, I just-- I kind of started it from the beginning and I said look, there's something wrong. There's a fundamental problem with me trying to say I can teach you everything you need to know. I can't do that, but what can I do instead? And I thought well, what I can do is I can give you-- I can teach you the most important skills that you will need to go on to learn.

So, if I can get you to spend lots of time reading, lots of time listening, lots of time thinking about the language, you will learn. With those skills then you will go on to learn everything else that you need. That for me is the foundation.



In fact, in these courses there are actually quite a lot of things that we don't teach, but that's deliberate because I would rather have you spend your time on these really important skills of reading and listening than studying another grammar point.

Ben: Absolutely. absolutely and I think as well-- seems like we've both come from similar-- walked similar paths with regards to developing our own courses and our own ways of doing it and putting in a lot of time and effort thinking about and trying and testing and developing different sort of like techniques and ideas until we finally got it refined.

When you were talking about that you've done this a lot with storybook-- using story the teaching and you tested different methods you reminded me-- I had a flashback when I was developing my online course and I was testing different things on the students and trying different methods.

Only through sort of like exposure and getting results and testing these things do you come to the conclusions and then the lucky students who join like now after it's all been refined, they can just pick it up and they get this beautiful finished product.

Ollly: Yes, I think this is one of the great things about the internet that we are able to do this, but I think it's worth saying that any one method is not for everybody. There will be people out there who don't like stories and who can't stand reading and for someone like that my courses



are not going to be for them. There's no point of me trying to persuade them they should read stories. They hate reading.

There's lots of people out there who are teaching languages in lots of different ways. The great thing about working online is that everybody who-- the people who are interested in learning in the way that we like to teach can find us and we can help those people. So, it's a good time to be alive.

Ben: Yes, good point there. Just two more things before we move on to your time as an examiner. One, I read on your site that you have oddball views on how to learn a new language. Controversial and oddball views. Is that related-- or could you tell us more about that?

Oly: Yes, a lot of it relates to this idea of not following a traditional path of learning. It seems to me that in the world of languages, there is a huge irony or a huge-- what's the word I'm looking for? A huge contradiction which is that almost everybody-- if you go to a school or a class or you pick up a textbook, almost everybody teaches languages in the same way. These days it's called communicative language teaching. Hey, here's a dialogue and here's the grammar. Here's the vocabulary. Let's practice that and let's test ourselves.

That's basically how languages are taught. Everybody pretty much, with exceptions, of course. On the whole, people teach languages in the same way and yet if you look at people who are learning languages almost all of them fail to get very far. It's just-- the brutal truth of the matter



is that most people-- most adults who pick up a-- who try to learn a new language don't get very far with it.

So, we've got on the one hand, a language teaching system which does everything the same way and on the other hand, students who are never really learning their languages to a good level. There is an incredible statistic from The Guardian which is that 9 out of 10 people who have learned a language at school are unable to do more than understand basic phrases in that language.

It's a shocking statistic and you see it wherever you go. You go to North America. You go to the UK. You go to Australia. Language education just doesn't work and anybody who just looks around at their friends, think of any friend you know who has learned a foreign language the chances are that they are almost certainly not fluent and chances are they probably gave up after a year or so. That's unfortunately what happens to most people.

So, my basic approach with language learning is look, if it's not working then let's do something different. Let's fix it. So... yes.

Ben: I was just nodding my head all the way through that because I did German for five years and all I can remember is some random useless phrases that I'll never use unless my hamster does actually die then I can use that phrase, but it's--



What I think is so sad and I completely agree with you and it just reminds me of what A.J. Hoge said-- this famous English tutor when I was interviewing him he said the way they teach it at school is a complete opposite to the natural way.

The natural way is the way you learn your own language which is like lots of exposure so you spend a good few years listening and then you'll work up to reading and then-- sorry, you'll be listening first then you'll be speaking and then eventually you'll be reading and then finally, you'll be writing, but in the modern language schools and in the modern-- in Spain, in the UK, wherever, they just start from day one with either reading and writing and maybe some listening. They start with all four skills at the same time and it doesn't work. You're absolutely right there. It's just a complete circus really.

Oly: I think-- I suspect that the English language-- in the English learning world, things are a little bit different because-- I spend most of my time now helping English speakers who are learning foreign languages, so an English person who is learning Spanish, for example. I think in the wider world of people who are learning English it's a bit of a different story and you might have-- you may be able to check facts on this for me.

There are obviously a lot of people around the world who are learning English very, very well to a high level and it is very common to meet people who have learned English to a good level, but



the main difference with that is that if you have someone in, for example, South Korea who is learning English, for these people to learn English is a path to opportunity.

The jobs that they want, the careers that they want often involve-- often you have to learn English. If you want to connect with other people on the internet, so much of our cultural-- our common cultural spheres are-- they take place in English. If you want to understand American pop music or if you want to-- I don't know, understand what's going on with Facebook or Instagram or whatever, learning English really is your kind of access to the big wide world in a lot of cases.

So, what do you do then if you want to learn to understand American movies or you want to get a job in an English speaking company? What do you have to do? Well, you have to be able to, first of all, understand a lot of what's going on. So, you're automatically going to be doing a lot of reading and a lot of listening. You spend lots of time exposed to English in order to achieve these things that you want to achieve.

So, in those circumstances when you've got something that you really want and you're very highly motivated, then that's the perfect combination to learn a language and I think that's why we get lots of people from different countries around the world who are quite successful at learning English, but if you come to the English speaking world it's a totally different story because most people who want to learn French or Spanish or German they might like the idea



of learning those languages, but they got no real need to do it. So, they just don't do the right kind of things that will actually lead them to eventually become fluent in the language.

Ben: That's another thing is they don't really have that-- from my experience just seeing my dad struggle with Italian. It's like he took the same approach to learning Italian as he would to learning algebra. You know open a textbook, pen and paper or buy a textbook and let's get cracking and really with a language, it's just a-- it's a different skill completely.

One thing I'd like to say when we're talking about the schools and basically the whole language system failing is that one thing that I remembered was that it has a really damaging effect because after-- like in my case, I did five years and I can vaguely recall a few sentences in German.

For a lot of learners learning a language they can feel like real failures like oh my word, I did nothing, but really they were learning from a broken system anyway from the get-go. So, it's like stacked against them. I just wanted to mention that because I know that a lot of the listeners of this show from like broken education systems where they'll spend the whole term learning English, but the class will all be in Russian or it will be all in French with maybe about 60 words said in English and then that's it. That's the only exposure they will get to the language.



Let's move on. On your site, I read you have this crazy 5 a.m. language routine. This sounds awesome. I'm an early riser as well. Tell us more about this, please.

Olly: Yes. Funny most people when I tell them about this 5 a.m. routine, awesome is not the word that they use to describe it. They usually think Olly, are you absolutely insane? Are you crazy? What are you doing? So, the first thing to say is you don't have to get up at 5 a.m. to do this. That's the first thing. It just so happens that for me, I did get up at 5 a.m. because at that time in my life it was the most convenient thing to do. Now, it's 6 o'clock actually, these days as we speak.

Look, the idea here is that learning a language can be very complicated. There's lots of advice out there and so one of the most important things to do is to make it simple. In anything I do, in my life really I always try to ask myself what is-- if I was only going to do one thing what would it be? What's the one thing that I would do to really give myself the most benefits, the most results?

With language learning, consistency is the number one thing. Out of everything you do if you just study every day, if you do something every day, you will improve. So, then the questions is all right, how long do I have to study for every day? For me, an hour is about ideal. I don't think you need to do a lot more than an hour. You can make lots of progress in one hour, but if you do a lot less, then it's just going to be a bit too slow.



So, what I try to do is say to myself okay Olly, you have to do one hour every day. That's all you have to do. Forget everything else. Just spend one hour a day on the language that you are learning. Simple. So, then the question is well when should I do that one hour of learning? Should it be at lunchtime? Should it be in the evening?

Well, for me, I know that as soon as the day begins it's just crazy. I can't concentrate on anything. I work a lot. I do lots of things. I can't concentrate on anything like language learning during the day. So, what I do is the only time I can really have this core study time is in the morning.

So, I get up one hour before I normally do and I spend that one hour on my languages and I do that every single day. That way if all I have to do is get up and do one hour and then the day has been a victory already. I've already won the day because I've done my hour and then after that anything extra I can do on top is a bonus.

Ben: Yes, you get the momentum. You get set off-- you set off to the right-- on the right step and yes, it just becomes easier. Also, I'd just like to add, once again I was nodding my head as you were speaking, that if you leave it till 1 p.m. in the afternoon, then there's going to be so many interruptions and there might be a letter that you forget to post, there might be-- I don't know, an unexpected visitor, but at 5 a.m. or 6 a.m. or early in the morning first thing, the world is usually sleeping. So, there's going to be no distractions.



Oly: Exactly.

Ben: Phone in flight mode, head down and like active focused learning. Not just lounging on the couch watching Game of Thrones, but seriously-- cup of tea in one hand and textbook out or whatever material you're using and just focused, not passively lying down in your bed with the app open.

Oly: Yes. I think that's a really important point. You need to have-- that one hour, you can completely waste it if you want to. If you just spend a whole hour on Duolingo or something, you might learn a bit, but that's not very productive time. You need to have some focused time where you're really, like you say sitting down and concentrating on whatever you're doing.

So, if you can get that one hour of focused study time, you're going to learn so much. You'll be amazed how much progress you make, but then the cool thing about that is then if you have to get on the bus or the train or whatever later on in the day or you're driving, then you can just spend some time reading or listening or something like that and just enjoy. That can be a little bit more relaxed, a little bit more laid back, but if you can have that focused time early in the morning, it's just-- it's pure gold.

Ben: Absolutely. I totally agree. I often say to my students spend-- if you are struggling with your writing, write an essay out every single day and then after a few days, get some feedback on that essay. Just do this every day and maybe you can start writing out two essays a day, but



at least just do one in that one hour and put a lot of time into it and slowly but surely if you're doing this repetitively, you will reach the goal you want.

And like Olly just said, it's consistency. It's turning up and putting in the hours and just getting started and getting it done. Great point there, Olly. Thank you.

Olly: I would urge everybody to give it a try.

Ben: Absolutely. Now, I'd like to move on to your days as an examiner because I imagine you failed a lot of students and they'll be looking for you. So, now they can find you. They can find your website.

Olly: Of course, the great thing about IELTS is there's no such thing as a fail, right?

Ben: I guess-- yes, maybe if your goal was a 7 and you ended up with a 6, I guess it would be a failure in their eyes. Anyway, tell us about your training. I'm curious. What happens when you become-- when you start your training as an IELTS examiner?

Olly: Yes, to become an IELTS examiner you have to have quite a lot of experience teaching already because you have to be able to quickly and accurately identify different what we call features of language. So, the way that people write English or speak English. You have to be able to quickly identify the way that they are using language and to be able to make judgments.



I had to wait a few years before I was able to become an IELTS examiner, but I was really looking forward to it when I did. So, the training it involves a few different steps, but with-- when you train to be an examiner, everything absolutely everything revolves around the-- what we call the band descriptors. It is-- for every different IELTS level 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and then for every different section. I don't know if it's still the same or if it's changed now, but it used to be fluency and-- well, it's different for writing and speaking but--

Ben: Yes, yes, there's grammatical range and accuracy, fluency and cohesion and then with the writing, it's coherence and cohesion and lexical resource and task response or task achievement. Roughly-- broadly the same but yes, those four categories.

Olly: Yes, and then with speaking you have pronunciation as well--

Ben: Yes, yes.

Olly: --and lexical range. Yes, all these different categories and so basically, for every single aspect of language and for every single score, every single band you have a descriptor. So, it will say something like the student must be able to express themselves comfortably on everyday topics with only occasional errors and-- you know, etc., etc. It describes what the student has to do and so basically, for the examiner training, we are-- that is our bible. That's the thing we are looking at all the time.



Then you go through lots of examples of students written work and students actually speaking and then there's a lot of discussion about what band you think it is. So, for example, I remember in the group, we would do some-- so there's me and lots of other people training to be an examiner and we would watch a video. We'd watch lots of videos of students actually doing the speaking tests and then we would have to sit and discuss together in our group is that-- his grammatical accuracy was that band 6 or 7 or 3 or 4 or whatever.

Just lots of examples like that going through and it was really, really fun because we were just looking at real exams and you're learning to grade them. Everybody gets it wrong at first. You kind of-- people have a tendency often to give-- often new examiners they tend to give marks that are higher than they should be and so you find yourself saying that's a 7 for sure.

Then the trainer would say okay, but did you hear when he said this or when he said that? Then you realize that actually it's not a 7 it's actually a 5 or something like that and so you kind of-- you just-- you try to grade these exams and then the tutor will come in and show you why you are wrong and you do that lots and lots of times.

Then you-- I think-- it was some years ago, but I think then we had a final test so we had to actually do some trial exams and we had to give students marks for their writing and for their speaking. Then if we were accurate, then we would pass and we would become an examiner and then-- a bit like with driving. I think when you really learn to examine is when you actually



start examining and you do hours and hours and hours of examining every weekend. That's how you really get confidence and you get to know the band descriptors very accurately, very closely.

Ben: Interesting and you were an examiner in Japan. Is that right?

Olly: Yes, I examined-- and actually in Qatar as well. So, I lived in-- I've lived in a few countries, but I was actively examining in Qatar and in Japan--

Ben: Right--

Olly: --which was interesting because I got to see two very different types of students.

Ben: Yes, I guess they both had their own sort of like flaws regarding certain language points and maybe advantages in other areas. When you were interviewing for the speaking with the students in Japan, how could they have helped themselves? How could they have scored better?

Olly: Well, students in Japan have one very big disadvantage when it comes to speaking which is that they hardly ever speak English. In Japanese society, there is almost no English spoken beyond tourist interactions and so students they just literally never speak English. They will have lessons-- they won't have regular English lessons and they might even have conversation



lessons or speaking lessons, but the trouble is that in order to speak well, you've got to speak a lot and for a long period of time and Japanese students very rarely have that opportunity.

The basic difficulty the Japanese students face is they never ever, ever speak the language and so they might actually know lots of words. I often found that their vocabulary would be quite good and their knowledge of grammar would be quite good, but when they actually come to speak, they would just be very nervous and quite-- they would be quite incoherent actually because they would often be thinking in Japanese and speaking in English which doesn't work at all.

So, that's the basic problem. So, it was often very difficult for a Japanese student to get more than a band 5 for speaking because there just wasn't that range of fluency and pronunciation was also often a bit of a problem.

Ben: That's interesting and what about for the students in Qatar?

Ollly: The students are very different. In Qatar, actually English is a lingua franca in Qatar. English is a language that you speak-- across the Arab world actually, lots of English is spoken. So, people in Qatar they often speak English every day, but they will be speaking to their maids or their driver or something like that. So, they speak very-- have quite a limited range of topics. So, students in Qatar would often be-- I should say in both Japan and in Qatar, you get students



who are actually very high level. So, they have-- maybe they study in English, they've lived abroad and they've been using English for a long time.

Leaving those people aside, in Qatar often what you have is people are actually quite fluent because they are used to speaking English every day. The trouble is that they have very limited vocabulary and very limited grammar because they've never studied English. They can speak and they can do lots of daily things in English, but they make loads of mistakes. They don't have the vocabulary for anything beyond daily English and then--

Ben: I found-- sorry, I found there's a similar situation with some Indian students like they've used the language daily. They've been listening to it all their lives, but only in very basic context and what's worse is that some of the errors they have because nobody has ever corrected them have become kind of like fossilized and now it's much harder for them to move from this fluent way of speaking to this more accurate way because they've just got set in their ways with the speaking habits.

Oly: I think one of the-- what was most striking in Qatar actually was in the writing exam because a lot of-- I want to be as respectful as possible, but although a lot of people there are quite used to speaking English they never ever write it and they often don't have a particularly strong academic background even in Arabic. So, when it comes to writing English in many cases,



the students will struggle to really write anything because they just never-- they would never write.

Ben: And there's the fact as well that it's not-- it's like easy for a Spanish or a French person who's been using Roman or Latin letters-- alphabet all their life and then an Arabic student who's been writing in a different script and from left to right other than right to left like another factor on top of it as well.

Olly: Yes, whereas Japanese students tended to be quite good at writing because they are very studious. They've been through lots-- many, many years of school and lots of homework. They have to write in English a lot. Often their writing is actually really good. So, it's very interesting how students from different nationalities have got these different strengths and weaknesses and there must be many more examples out there which I'm not familiar with because I haven't worked there.

Ben: Just going back to the speaking if you've got a student in front of you, for example, a Japanese student and they are hesitant. What could you do to ease the situation for them? So, if they are just frozen with nerves, what can you do as an examiner?

Olly: As an examiner, generally what you do is you would follow up and so you would kind of give him the opportunity to answer, but you don't want to make it too easy. You don't want to



kind of make it too easy for them. Generally, the principal is that you want to give people the opportunity to demonstrate how good they are because often you will find--

I saw this a lot in Japan, often you will find at the beginning of a speaking test, the students are very, very nervous and you think okay, this student is going to get a 4 or a 5, but actually as time goes on, and you ask more questions they relax, they start to speak more, they warm up. It's quite common to start the interview thinking okay, this person might be a 4 or 5 and actually they end up being a 6 or a 7 once they warm up and they start to speak more freely.

So, really your job as an examiner is to give the student the opportunity to shine as we say. You want to try and make them feel comfortable. You want to give them as many opportunities as possible, but at the same time, if they can't answer a question and you've maybe repeated the question once then generally, you just move on.

If someone really can't-- if someone is too nervous to properly respond to questions, well that in itself is a problem and that's something you would mark down on the fluency aspect because again, in order to be fluent in a language, you have to be able to respond confidently, not be too nervous about the speaking situation.

So really, you have to take all of these things as a whole and look at everything in the round, but it's only-- it is very important as an examiner to remember that students do take time to warm up and you want to judge them against their best self as much as possible.



Ben: Excellent point there. Now, we are coming towards-- we are coming to the end of the interview and my final question is for-- now, this will probably and hopefully draw on your experience not only as an IELTS examiner but also with all your skill and experience of learning different languages. How could a student improve their confidence specifically for the IELTS speaking exam?

Oly: Yes, I think-- earlier we were talking about the concept of the one thing. What's the one thing that you need to do that will get you the most progress? For me, it is daily speaking. So, there are lots-- you can speak with yourself, you can practice with other students. There's lots of things you can do, but my advice would be to find a speaking tutor and to take lessons with them every single day.

So, you can go to a website like Italki, for example, I-T-A-L-K-I dot com and you can find English tutors there on the website. They don't have to be a professional teacher. They can just be-- you often have people who are just at home wherever they live in the world and they want to sell a bit of their time. So, you can often get time speaking with somebody without it being too expensive. It can actually be quite cheap, but then just aim to spend at least 30 minutes a day speaking English with this person.



It almost doesn't matter what you talk about. Just get comfortable speaking and so 30 minutes every day for as long as you can, weeks probably, months maybe. The only way that you are going to get confident with speaking is by speaking a lot.

You can do it in other ways. You can find language exchanges where you find an English speaking person locally and exchange your language. That's free, but it takes a lot of time. So, I think it's one of these things where if improving your result in the speaking test is important for you, I would really suggest investing some money to spend time with English speakers and then talk to them every single day.

You'll see your confidence explode over the course of a few weeks and certainly after a few months, but you've got to be speaking English every day if you want to improve your speaking. There are lots of tips and tricks, but at the end of the day if you are not speaking English every day you will never get the confidence that you need to get the higher levels of an IELTS speaking test.

The examiner can see it. You can't fool an examiner. You cannot fool an examiner through memorizing a few words here or a few tips and this is a testament to the IELTS exam itself. It's a very strong exam because it will capture-- if you are too nervous and you can't speak properly, if you are not-- if you hesitate too much when you speak, the exam and the examiner will capture that. The exam allows for all of that. So, you've got to look at improving your results



holistically, in the round and that's why actually speaking every day is by far the most important thing.

Ben: Excellent point there. That's like before the exam and what about actually in the exam room with the examiner in front of you and the student is nervous? What can a student do then?

Ollly: Again, a lot of it comes down to practice. So, if you are more familiar with the exam formats, if you know what's going to happen in the exam, then you're going to be more confident. So, I think the way that you perform best in the exam is by doing lots of practice exams.

So, maybe you meet up with another student a friend of yours and you practice giving each other IELTS speaking questions over and over again. You just practice; practice those tests so that you are confident with the format. When you're actually sitting there and you're looking at the examiner, just remember he or she wants you to succeed. He wants you-- he really wants you to be good.

The examiner has probably sat there and had dozens of not very good IELTS tests and he really wants you to be good. So, be confident, relax, look at him or her in the eyes, smile and just try to have an enjoyable conversation and give real honest answers to the question. If you're



ready-- this is the thing. If you are ready and you are at the right level then it should be the easiest thing. You just have to relax.

Ben: Good points there. Good points. Well, I think that's everything there. Olly, now if a student wanted to reach you, how can they-- tell us where you're-- tell us the address of your site and just remind us what is available there.

Olly: Yes, sure. So, my website is I Will Teach You a Language and you can find me on the website which is iwillteachyoualanguage.com and then I've also got lots of active YouTube channel, Instagram, Twitter, all of that stuff. For example, if you go to YouTube or Instagram and just type in "I will teach you a language" then you will find me.

There are not too many people out there using the same website name as me. So, yes you can find me across all the different social networks and say hi. Come and leave me a comment or send me a message. I always like to hear from people and if you'd like to find more information about my courses, the different languages then head over to the website I Will Teach You a Language.

[music]

Female Voice: Thanks for listening to ieltspodcast.com