



**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.

## INTRODUCTION

**Ben:** Hello there, IELTS students. In this tutorial, **we're going to be speaking with one of our star teachers, one of the [essay correctors on our team](#) who's correcting tons of essays every single week and she's an absolute star.** This is why she's on our team. So, welcome to this audio tutorial podcast, **Daphne**. How are you doing?

**Daphne:** Oh, hi, Ben. I'm fine. Thank you for that lovely introduction. Help. I am really enjoying working with you and working with all the students at [ieltspodcast.com](http://ieltspodcast.com) and thank you, everybody, for sending in such amazing essays.

**Ben:** When I got Daphne's sample essay correction, which we ask teachers to send in in order as a part of the application process, I was more than happy and I was like yes, we found our star. I



mean maybe I shouldn't be telling Daphne that now, but as soon as I heard it, I was like yes, this is the kind of person we want.

So, let's jump into it. In this tutorial, **we are going to be sharing with you about how to think of ideas and how to get ideas for the lovely IELTS writing task 2.** So, Daphne has been teaching IELTS for about seven years in language schools based in the UK for students like 17 and upwards and she's got lots of experience with students taking this exam for different reasons. Maybe it's for university entrance, maybe it's for jobs, maybe it's for immigration.

<b>WHICH PART OF THE EXAM DO YOU THINK STUDENTS STRUGGLE WITH?</b>
--

So, Daphne, which part of the exam do you think students struggle with the most?

**Daphne:** Oh, Ben, it's such a good question. **I think the [writing section](#) is without any doubt the hardest bit. I love writing,** but I know that for a lot of people writing is the hardest, hardest bit and there are many reasons for this. It's actually not really surprising if we think about it.



Most people aren't used to writing in their own language; definitely not in such an academic style. Most of us write emails rather than long essays about things. So, I think if you lack experience or if you don't need to write in your own first language, let alone in English, it's even harder.

**Ben:** Yes, I totally agree there. I totally agree and I'll just share one thing that I think I've shared before on this podcast is that once I got good at writing and like organizing my thoughts and making my writing more concise, I almost instantly discovered an improvement in the quality of my thinking.

Like the brain fog evaporated and I got much clearer and crisper, not only my thinking but also in my speaking. So, I think this is an immensely valuable skill to develop, not just in English but also in your own native language.

So, which questions, Daphne, are you asked the most by your IELTS students?



**Daphne:** Again, one of the hardest things is-- well firstly, what does this question mean? It takes a lot of effort actually to kind of unpick the question, which means breaking the question down into little sections. Quite often I find that students have got one half of the argument, get super excited, write a lovely essay, and then we look at the question again and go hang on, but what about the other half? There's something missing here.

**Ben:** Yes.

**Daphne:** Yes, I think that can be quite tricky.

**Ben:** Yes, I totally agree. When I began like preparing students for IELTS, because I would write out essays myself and I would fall victim to this exact same problem and even worse, I would get excited about my answers and start developing them even further, but as you just said, forgetting a whole chunk of the question and just developing my train of thought and presenting solutions and I'd be like that is actually a really good solution.



But as I said before, it's not really the quality of the solution. It's just the quality of the communication. It's the quality of the way it's expressed and developed and, of course, as you just mentioned, is it actually answering the question. So, you said students struggle and will focus maybe on just one part of the question instead of the entire question.

**Daphne:** Yes. So, this is where we really come on to I think what we're going to chat about, Ben, which is the planning and the brainstorming. So many of you say to me I don't have time to plan. I know I only have 40 minutes for this essay, but what we want to show you is that honestly, in three minutes, you can think of some really good ideas.

Once you've got those ideas out of your brain and onto a piece of paper, you can quickly check back as you're writing and almost cross off the ideas when you've put them in your essay and then you stay on task.



## HOW TO GET IDEAS

**Ben:** Absolutely. This is a good point, but let's just rewind a little bit. A lot of students can't get ideas onto the paper. How do they solve that or how do you teach students to solve this, Daphne?

**Daphne:** There are two elements to this. The first element is something that you can start doing right now if you know you're going to do your exam in the future even if your exam is in two weeks' time. It is not too late. So, we would suggest start getting informed.

The key part of your IELTS operation is reading anything you can. So, this obviously helps with the reading section as well because you **will get faster at reading** and you're thinking about what you're reading at the same time. So, anything you can **read like magazines, online material**. We love National Geographic, but think about what you're reading. Don't just sit there scanning through. Think about reading.



If you're traveling a lot, **listen to podcasts, listen to the radio**. So, I listen to radio; the world service BBC and the content is very diverse. So, that can give you some ideas. You think, you question your own opinion, and you can even make a note of some good vocabulary as you go along.

**Ben:** Absolutely, yes. This is the point that I was going to mention that sometimes sitting there watching a movie in English or listening or just reading a good book and sort of like passively doing it is better than nothing, but the real stars and to get more sort of like bang out of each hour that you put in to your preparation, if you're actively reading, so you grab a pen and you start attacking that newspaper and circling vocabulary or if you're reading online, like highlighting it, copy-pasting it into a vocabulary file or writing it down pen and paper.

It's probably better to write it down pen and paper because you've got more senses involved. A sense of touch there and you're writing it down and spending more time dwelling on that vocabulary phrase and you learn in context as well.



**Daphne:** I completely-- sorry, Ben. I completely agree. One teacher said to me ages ago when you read you need to have a pen or a pencil in your hand and the pencil should be touching the page you're reading and I don't know if this is scientific, but the thought was that literally because your brain is sort of in contact therefore with the actual page, you are actively reading, which is what you're saying. **It's active rather than passive.**

**Ben:** Exactly. Exactly. I knew a tutor who specialized in learning difficulties especially with dyslexia and what she recommended was-- like for spelling tests is that you actually get the word that you want to learn and you print it out maybe like in a really big font or you just write it out in a big font.

So, maybe you have one word per A4 sheet of paper and you just-- while you're saying it out, you go over the letters with your finger as you're saying it to get a deeper-- to internalize it and to increase the amount of senses.

**Daphne:** You're kind of printing it into your brain, aren't you?



**Ben:** Exactly, exactly, yes and she said she was getting some really good results from that, but the point Daphne and I are making is like the most sensors you can get involved, the higher the chances that you'll remember it and also, it's just much better use of your time if you can actively read or actively listen rather than do it passively.

And just one thing that I'd like to mention that of course, we're all human and sometimes listening to the BBC or National Geographic and IELTS topics can sometimes be a bit draining. Sometimes we just want to escape into somewhere else and watch an exciting film or whatever.

This is okay as well, but what I wanted to mention was that if you can get lost into an addictive book like a turn-pager it's called, this is really good because all of a sudden, you've got to finish this book, so you're putting in five hours, six hours just desperate to find out the story, desperate to find out the end and you forget that you're learning English.



This is also a good state to be in because it's not then a chore. It's like your leisure activity and you're deeply-- you're practically hooked, which is--

**Daphne:** And that's so true. All the time you're reading like that you are just on-- I know this is more on a vocabulary sort of Lexus level, but all the time you're doing that, you're noticing [collocations](#), which are the words that go naturally together and you're noticing fragments which might be four or five words which naturally sit together.

If you can get these nice collocations or fragments into your exam, that shows the examiner that you have a really natural command of the language. So, it's a good thing to do.

**Ben:** Absolutely. I totally agree there. So, let's get back to IELTS. We just sort of outlined a summary there for getting ideas, for filling your brain with information on [IELTS topics](#). One last thing I'd like to mention is questions-- find some recent task 2 questions and go through them. If you can't get an answer for each one, if you don't have an opinion on each of those questions, jump online and research that specific area.



So, what could a self-study student do, Daphne, when they're in the exam room and maybe they're in a panic because like the question and maybe-- this is very common actually that a student-- the mind goes blank and they are like oh, my word! What am I going to do in this situation? How can they solve this?

**Daphne:** Yes. This is the most horrible, horrible feeling and what I want to suggest today is making a mind map. Now, you may have done mind maps at school. A lot of people love them. Some people don't feel too confident with them and I must confess I wasn't a fan until a tutor of mine said you need to do a mind map and I started doing them and it really, really worked for me.

So, let me show you how this works. So, I've got a question here, Ben. This is about uniforms. So, the question says uniforms should be compulsory in the workplace. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement? We all have maybe some ideas, but I'm thinking help! Exam! Quick! What do I do?



So again, with my pencil and a bit of rough paper, I will draw a circle in the middle, which is called uniforms at work. So, that's basically what the question is asking me about and then I'm going to draw other little circles around it and label the circles. Now, the more you do this, the more you will get to know what the circles are.

So, it's going to be quite quick. So, it may be past as in what did people do, present; what people do now and the future. Often, we forget to think about the future, but this can be a really important sort of aspect. Do these all relate to time?

Then there are other little circles on the other side which could be personal or international. It could be to go with the more sort of topics. It could be science, politics, education, economics. There are all sorts of different circles which you can label and we'll write this down for you. Don't worry. So, you can copy it out for yourself.

So, I'm thinking-- let's get back to this question. In the education box, I'm immediately going to put school uniforms. I went to school in England and in England, it is compulsory to wear school



uniforms. So, I know I can talk about this. I know in a lot of countries you don't have uniforms, so I think that's going to be quite a good point to make.

I'm also going to put in another box to do with the military and the police--

**Ben:** Good point.

**Daphne:** --because some people have to wear a uniform. They might not like it, but they have to wear it.

**Ben:** Daphne, sorry just to interrupt you. So, Daphne mentioned a really good point there that she said okay in England, we have to wear uniforms at school. It's compulsory. But maybe in your country it's not compulsory. What I want to mention here for the listeners is that this is a point.

Even if you didn't wear uniforms in your country, mention that, but don't say in my country, we didn't wear uniforms or we don't wear uniforms. You just say in a lot of countries especially



Asian countries, uniforms are not compulsory at school. It's a valid point because you don't have to wear uniforms to answer this question.

We're just brainstorming ideas and maybe you can develop it further. What I'm trying to say is don't just throw it out there. Don't just get rid of it. It could be a valid point in your argument.

**Daphne:** Absolutely. Yes, I think you're right, Ben. Actually, let's pick up on that one because even if you think I have nothing to say, if you think back to what you had at school-- so this is-- you're thinking about your past in a way, you go back to those circles which had past and present in.

You think that you used to have uniform and you know that on the international side, some people don't have uniform. You can immediately start thinking well actually, why did I have uniform and was it a good thing and what difference does it make?



The thinking in the UK is that all students should be the same in terms of what they look like, but it's also the discipline of you are working. Therefore, you're wearing work clothes. So, you might think you have no ideas, but actually, you probably do have quite a few ideas.

**Ben:** Exactly. It's just a case of developing it and being aware. Okay, we didn't wear uniforms in our school. Let's just write this down in-- for example, in Denmark, it's common for children not to wear uniforms. However, in other countries it is a very important part of the culture and has been standardized for the last 20 years or whatever and so on and so forth. Sorry to interrupt. Let's get back to your--

**Daphne:** No, no, no. You're absolutely there. As soon as you've got your ideas-- so, my ideas in the little boxes were going to be school uniforms, the military, and police. I'm also thinking about the kind of present time dress-down Fridays. Now, this probably came from America. I'm guessing. I don't know. But this is a kind of newish trend or fashion where on Fridays people don't have to wear a suit and they can wear their own clothes.



So, I would write that today, society has become more relaxed, [unintelligible 00:18:06.13] have changed and that the traditional expectations have been modified. So, I could have a lovely sentence like that which basically says that it's not the same as it used to be in the past.

**Ben:** Yes, absolutely. That's a good point and phrases like dress-down Friday or casual Friday, this is a good example of your lexical resource and of your knowledge of this topic. So, if collocations and phrases like that come to mind when you're brainstorming, write them down as well because you can easily drop or fashion a sentence around these collocations and pick up those points later when we go to developing the essay.

**Daphne:** Yes, absolutely. Yes. So, shall we have another look at another title, Ben?

**Ben:** Yes. Yes, that's fine.

**Daphne:** Yes? So, this is one I found the other day and this is really interesting. I think it's very topical. The title says advertisements are influencing us in a negative way. It's a very short statement. To what extent do you agree or disagree? I think this is quite relevant.



So, in my circles, in the big circle in the middle I'm going to put adverts; positive or negative. So, I can put a little plus or a minus literally. The other circles I think I might need for this are education, social because I want to talk about health. I could put health. It doesn't matter-- and economics.

I'm thinking about okay TV. What have I watched on TV? Which adverts have I seen like on my computer or as I'm walking around billboards, that kind of thing and there's a lot of adverts for food and McDonald's. In the UK, unfortunately, there's a lot of unhealthy food around. There's a lot of junk food. So, I want to write about that junk food.

This is a bad idea to have it advertised because it has a negative impact on health and I can just talk about obesity, which is a real epidemic, a real problem in many Western countries and has an also negative impact on the economy.

**Ben:** Absolutely, yes. Good point and I just want to jump in here that what you just heard there was Daphne developing the argument and this is a very important part of any band 7 or higher



IELTS essay is your ability to develop the argument. So, just to recap there, we're talking about advertisements and we're talking about food industry advertisements such as and it's important to drop in that example because then it becomes much more-- it makes your argument much stronger.

**Daphne:** Yes. It kind of grounds your essay, if you know what I mean. It's real. It's not just what we call airy-fairy sentences.

**Ben:** Exactly. So, I could say there are lots of advertisements in the UK food industry. That's fine, but if I can give you an example and pinpoint an actual company that does a lot of these advertisements, now I'm using irrefutable logic in my argument and irrefutable real-world examples. It just makes my argument much stronger.

So, just to recap, we're talking about advertisements; good or bad. I'm going to say it's bad in this part of my idea generation. Now, I develop this idea. I say it's bad because some companies especially the food industry advertise perhaps too heavily and this might have caused or might



have contributed to the obesity epidemic and other disorders-- other eating disorders such as bulimia or possibly anorexia and so on and so forth.

The only reason I mentioned those eating disorders or mentioned more eating disorders is because 1) it's relevant and 2) I'm going to pick up points for the vocabulary and just for showing off to the examiner my knowledge of this kind of situation.

The point we're making here is that in the idea generation phase, keep your eyes open and your brain aware of a chance to develop an argument. In my experience, these gifts of developing the argument, you have to be aware that ah and follow that train of thought because it's not insanely-- it's not an easy task to develop an argument on command.

**Daphne:** That's so true and a lot of it is your logic and then honestly, Ben and I, we're not talking about anything super intelligent. This is general knowledge. We're kind of developing your argument down the stream if you're down the river if you see what I mean. It's like what next? Okay, junk food. Okay, a list of this. Okay, this is this. So, when I'm doing some



corrections, I may say to you you need to develop your argument a bit more and this is exactly what we mean.

**Ben:** Yes, exactly, exactly.

**Daphne:** There's another point. So, that could be my first body paragraph, that one and the second argument I will probably use is that the power of some global companies and I am need to name some here because then you will immediately know what I mean. I'm thinking Nike, Apple, Sony, Toyota. There are some super enormous giant companies out there. Some of them have almost cult status. People want the newest Apple phone. People want the newest Nike shoes and they're selling, not just great products but they're selling a desirable lifestyle.

The danger from that is that it encourages consumerism. It is very tempting for people to buy things. If they buy things, then that might lead them into debt and that has negative economic consequences.



**Ben:** Yes, absolutely there. So, that's another good example of developing the argument. So, we're not going to talk about I saw an advertisement yesterday for my local restaurant because nobody can really relate to that unless they saw the advertisement as well, but if we're talking about these sort of like big global companies; Toyota, Coca-Cola, Nike and all the rest of it, then everybody knows about them. Unless you've been living in a cave for the last 50 years, you know about these companies and you know the marketing they do.

And then what Daphne very clearly illustrated is like the dangers and the effects. So, we had like the cult following, which would probably be a good phrase to drop into that essay and then the negative consequences, which could be consumer debt.

When you were talking about this, Daphne, I started thinking about those payday loans and all this-- yes, but then I was like actually, maybe I could be getting a little bit off-topic if I go down that street and talk about consumer debt, payday loans, and high-interest rates. I'm probably



getting a little bit off-topic. So, this is an important thing that you have to be aware of when you're generating ideas.

Although you've got to jump on this train of thought and ride it and take advantage of it to start to get these ideas for your essay, don't stay on the train too long you miss your stop, so to speak because you can easily--

**Daphne:** I like your analogy.

**Ben:** It's quite easy. I think we've all done this especially once you get to grips and you've really developed your idea generation muscle.

**Daphne:** Yes and I think actually, Ben, on that point because it's very easy to get excited about something and keep going. I think just as a technical comment in the exam, you can show the examiner you have the knowledge.

So, you could put, for example, despite the fact that some advertisements are genuinely designed to educate and spread a positive message, the dangerous impact of cult brands



cannot be overstated because of the risk of consumerism and economic debt or personal debt and you can stop there. You can just throw the words in; consumerism or personal debt and the examiner is thinking okay, great. Wow! That's clever. You don't need to then go on and explain what personal debt is.

**Ben:** Exactly, yes. Exactly. When you were saying it, I was visualizing the essay and then I was like okay, if I was writing this, I'd probably just stop there, as we said before. Just stop that train of thought and then maybe I'll offer an additional point of view.

So, I'll say something like in addition, advertising has also been linked to-- In addition, advertising in such sectors as the beauty sector or cosmetic sector have been linked to lower levels of esteem because consumers are constantly bombarded with perfection or something like that. I need to develop it a bit more--

**Daphne:** I like that, Ben, yes.



**Ben:** --what I'm saying is that we can sort of like offer another idea, develop it a little bit more, stop and then develop another idea rather than keep developing, developing and developing because we run the risk then of going off-topic.

**Daphne:** Yes, yes. That's absolutely right and then in a way going back to our little mind maps when you've made that point, cross it off the list, but keep looking back on it in the same way that you keep reminding yourself of the title of the essay so you stay on point. Exactly.

**Ben:** Absolutely, yes and I think in the online course, we encourage students to like dissect the question and build mind maps and brainstorm around sections of the question to assure yourself that you are staying on topic and that you're going to get full points for [task achievement](#). This breaks my heart when I see a really decent essay and it's good English and it's full of collocations, but it's vaguely related to the essay.

This isn't even-- well, you could argue it's not even an English language requirement because the English language requirement has been completed excellently because this is a beautifully



written essay, but the student wrote about consumer debt, payday loans, and high-interest rates rather than the dangers of advertisements or the positive or negative parts of advertisement.

So, this is why it's incredibly important to stay on topic and make sure you're going to get full points for [task achievement](#) and you're going to basically blow the socks off the examiner and make him sit up in his chair and think wow! This student has skills.

**Daphne:** Absolutely. Now, you are so right. You're so right and so, for me, staying with this thing about making sure you're on topic and [task achievement](#), the mind maps for me are very visual. So, you can see what's happening rather than your planning being in your head, which I know a lot of people say oh yes, it's okay. I plan in my head. It's fine.

If you plan in your head, you are much more likely to go off-topic, but if you've got these ideas just in little circles, you can see where you're going in your essay and you can literally picture it.



So, not only will you get better marks on the [task achievement](#) but for the [coherence and cohesion](#), it's going to be a lot better as well because you are organizing where you're going.

**Ben:** Exactly. Exactly. That's a key phrase there. The ability to organize your thoughts and then just to-- well, to write them down and then organize your thoughts, it increases your chances of writing a coherent essay exponentially and just as a side note, I know I've heard of students who can do it in their head and they say-- and that's fine if you are confident and you've done it and you've been able to do it consistently and consistently generate high-quality essays just by planning it in your head. That's fantastic.

Then for you, you don't have to mind map or brainstorm or anything like that, but in my experience, people who can do that are very rare. They do exist, but they're very rare and the other thing that I'd like to mention that mind maps-- I personally use mind maps a lot. I use mind maps pretty much every morning, but I call it a brain dump. I just dump everything that's



in my mind onto a piece of paper so then my brain is empty and I can focus on the task in hand. So, I'm also a massive fan of mind maps.

Some students just after talking with successful students they said no, I'm more of a linear thinker, so I just like to write down bullet points. That's fine as well. What we want to get across is that there are different ways to do this. You need to find out what works for you, but in our experience and for a lot of people, mind maps are the way forward, but it's up to you.

You've got to take responsibility for your own education and find out what works for you personally. Don't be a robot just following instructions.

**Daphne:** Yes, I agree with you, Ben, obviously. You can do it in a little picture. You can do it as little arrows for one point to follow another point. You can do it in a table. It doesn't matter.

**Ben:** Yes. I'll just mention one thing. In our online course, we are massive fans of brainstorming the question, dissecting it, like classifying it, dissecting it and then assigning ideas to specific parts of the question pretty much like what Daphne was mentioning before and then



numbering the ideas in order that you will mention them in your essay just to make sure that there's some logic there when you're developing your argument.

Okay. Right then. Is there anything else you would like to add before we finish because we're pretty much close to the end?

**Daphne:** Yes, let me just sum this up, Ben. What we've talked about is what you can do now. So, what you can do now is to build up your ideas and challenge your opinion. You can build up your ideas through reading or through radio podcasts. Also, TED Talks; Ben and I are massive fans of TED talks, which are brilliant.

You can practice as much as possible. [Getting feedback](#). The online correction service we do is really, really good. So, you will have one of the tutors going through your essay with you, giving you really good feedback, which is a great way to improve.

**Ben:** Yes.



**Daphne:** And-- Sorry.

**Ben:** No, just because I totally agree there, sorry.

**Daphne:** And then taking the time before you start writing; just 2-3 minutes to do your brainstorm and planning through your mind map and then you can concentrate on writing the essay. Then you're not starting to write thinking okay well, that's one paragraph. What on earth am I going to say next? You've done the planning and then you can focus on beautiful writing.

### FINAL 2 TIPS

**Ben:** Just two things that I want to say that if idea generation and brainstorming is something that you struggle with, give yourself time and permit yourself to work on developing this skill.



Don't just say oh, I'm rubbish. Give yourself time and allocate time to develop this skill and you will see an improvement.

Second, keep developing it to the point that it becomes almost like muscle memory; that you just do it automatically and it becomes a skill in itself because once it becomes so embedded and ingrained in your thinking for answering task 2 essays, it kind of disappears into the background and frees up mental resources for you to focus on your essay and the language and the quality of your writing and it's one of those skills--

What I'm saying is it's one of those skills that can be internalized, so it's not going to take up so much mental energy and once it's internalized, it happens quickly and automatically and this is what a lot of successful students-- this is the level they get to especially band 7 or higher-- that it's internalized and this allows them to focus on the actual essay writing and pick up the big points.

**Daphne:** Yes, absolutely. Thank you, Ben. Okay.



**Ben:** Yes, that's everything. If you feel like this has been a very-- if you feel like this has been a valuable tutorial for you, then you'll probably love the online course because we go into this in a lot of detail and we know from personal experience after coaching so many students that this is a massive pain point and this is why we go into it in a lot more detail and with more-- even more practical solutions on the online course. As Daphne mentioned before, we're getting a ton of success with this.

Just one last thing with the essay correction; it really is like a tutor is there looking over your shoulder and guiding you and encouraging you just to write your best possible essay and keep on improving because without this feedback, you're more or less on your own and it's not fun preparing for this lovely exam on your own. It's much better--

**Daphne:** It's hard.



**Ben:** It's tough. It's tough and this is why we're here just to help you and help you write the best essay that you can write and to get the best results that you can get and the results that you really deserve. So, I think that's everything. Thank you very much, Daphne.

**Daphne:** Thank you, Ben. Good luck everybody.

**Ben:** Good luck.

[Music]

**Female Voice:** Thanks for listening to [ieltspodcast.com](http://ieltspodcast.com)