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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 are going to focus on global [IELTS reading tips](#) and we're going to look at some essential strategies to help you in the IELTS reading test and to help us with this, we've got the author of our new IELTS reading book that were publishing soon on the [Kindle Store](#). So, hello there, Cate.

Cate: Hi, Ben. Hi, everyone.

Ben: And Cate is a former examiner, a former English for academic purposes lecturer and she has a lot of experience and this is why I wanted to give her this job of writing the book. It was an easy decision to do because she just loves helping students and helping them succeed in their exams.



Cate: Thank you, Ben.

WHAT IS THE GOLDEN RULE?

Ben: You're welcome and so, Cate, at the top of my notes, we've got the golden rule which we mentioned very briefly before, but can you just tell us about this golden rule, please?

Cate: I call it the **golden rule** because it's so important that it should be written in huge golden letters all over exam prep books, but it's not because they know it's the most important thing and they're keeping it away from you. No, no. That's not true.

Ben: Conspiracy theory.

Cate: They write it everywhere, but they just-- they are quite discreet about it. So, the golden rule means the following: whatever you see in the IELTS test; in the questions and answers, it's always paraphrased. Just remember that as it is. It's always paraphrased. What does it mean? It means that the answer that you have to choose from the answer options is a paraphrased version of what you already have in the reading passage and it's 100% certain.



So, **the text can actually give you the answer**-- the 100% answer only if you find it and here comes your ability to understand the same idea behind other words. That's why mastering synonyms is very, very important.

Ben: Okay. Why are they testing understanding rephrasing? Why are they testing your ability to rephrase?

Cate: Well, the answer is very simple; because in real life, we don't use the same words all the time. Otherwise, we'll be using Basic English, which is like about 900 words. Any language and English language in particular, is much more complex than just one way of saying things. That's why they're assessing the ability of the test taker to understand similar ideas in different wordings and expressions, collocations, idioms, and all that.

SKIMMING AND SCANNING

Ben: Excellent, okay and now, we're just going to go through some of the essential strategies and next on the list is skimming and scanning. So, can you just talk about this, please?

Cate: Yes. The thing is that despite the fact that IELTS reading is called reading, it's not exactly the usual reading that we do for pleasure. It's not reading slowly for enjoying the beautiful



description [unintelligible 00:04:11.13] and it's not reading for information when we read the news. It's not exact and it's not even reading for studying. When we study, we read differently.

The thing is that this is more of a let's say search and identification contest. This is more like it. That's why you need to be able to read in two very special ways and these are called [skimming and scanning](#). To skim means to read rapidly in order to get a general idea of the text. It's like reading superficially yet not grasping sufficient detail in order not to slow down too much.

So, you read to get the gist; the general idea, but scanning is like-- think of a scanner, the way a scanner works, right? It goes very slowly yet not too slow. Scanning is reading fast in order to find something specific, right? You're searching for the explanation how fireworks were created or let's say in which region of China fireworks were created for the first time. I'm taking this from a real exam. So, yes, I like that part for the fireworks.

So, yes. You are reading. You're searching for something very specific. So, that is scanning, but despite popular opinion that skimming is reading fast and scanning is reading slowly, no. Both approaches are reading rapidly, but the purpose is slightly different.

Ben: Yes, good points there. Good points and I'll just mentioned two things. From my experience, when we're skimming, we're just going through it-- over it quickly, but then once



we get to the useful information or the information that corresponds with the question, we slow down and we go to a much more natural sort of like pace just to try-- and then check with the question. We don't want to just be like skimming through everything. You can slow down and then really understand it and then once we get past, go back to skimming.

And also another point is this is a skill that you can develop. For example, I've got a Kindle and I read-- I aim to read about a book a week, but I'm not reading it sort of like in a normal fashion as if I would literature, for example. I'm not reading it for the pleasure or for the enjoyment. I'm usually reading it to get some knowledge or to get some information and what I've been doing and I just read this online is just like clustering or clumping like looking at three or four words at a time and then just bouncing through the text.

And at first when I did this, I couldn't recall anything about what I was reading. So, I had been reading for like 10-20 minutes and I would be like okay, I was focused and I was doing the technique as I learned, but I can't recall anything and only when I started to do this more often and I started to check my actual comprehension, only then-- I'm doing more often and getting better at it, checking the comprehension could I improve, but now I can read very, very quickly and yes, it's-- I just wanted to say what you're saying before. You've got to find out where your weaknesses are and then just focus on building those up and addressing the issues.



Cate: And Ben, allow me to interrupt you again.

Ben: No worries.

Cate: You said something very important; I checked my comprehension and this is another thing that we should do in the IELTS exam. Even if you skimmed or scanned, you have to go back to your own mind and ask yourself okay, what have I just read and say it to yourself in other words. This is kind of going back to the golden rule because you will be encountering rephrased questions on whatever you read. You're not going to see the same words, the same expressions, the same-- but you will see the same ideas.

That's why you have to ask yourself okay, what have I read about? Oh, this and then what happened next? This and how did they explain that? Like that. Okay, got it. Move on.

Ben: Yes and this is why summarizing information is a good skill to have. If you can read maybe three or four paragraphs and summarize that into one single paragraph, this is a good way to prepare because you can learn how to capture main ideas and then probably condense them down into key ideas and get rid of all the fat or the fluff and just focus on the main points and just make like a summarized version. So yes, excellent point there.



FOLLOW THE INSTRUCTIONS

Now, moving on to the next one: [Follow the *** instructions](#). We're just going to be brief about this because we've done it before, but I think it's so important it's definitely worth mentioning again.

Cate: Yes, it's very important to focus and slow down and read the instructions focusing on the key words. Remember circle the key words. Circle the most important things where you can go wrong because you know it makes a difference; no more than two words or no more than three words, no more than three words and the number or anything else.

And most importantly, very often candidates overlook simple instructions like additional instructions. Like you may use any letter more than once and they're like okay, just choose a letter and they forget to read you may use any letter more than once and at this point, you need to slow down and say oh, wait a second. I could have two As or two Ds and that's going to be fine. It's not just my imagination. Yes, it's supposed to be this way.



You have said this to yourself. You have reassured yourself and then you can go and work because if you forget this, you are overlooking something very important and you don't understand why it doesn't add up.

Ben: Excellent point there. Excellent and like we said before that doing practice test is an excellent way to get this skill and I just want to mention that Cate is familiar with this-- one of the reasons you're familiar with this rule is because you've had lots of students come to you after the exam and admit that they've made a mess of it and it was basically because they were overlooking or just assumed the instructions rather than reading it in a word-for-word fashion.

Cate: Yes.

Ben: Right. Super. Okay. Discuss it with yourself approach; what does this mean?

Cate: Oh, that means-- I almost mentioned this already. Whenever you read something, you have to understand the most important part of that and that's why you have to say it in your own words in your head and you really have to make a point of not using the words of the text because a lot of exam candidates fall into the trap of the easy parroting back to yourself the line of the text.



No. That's not your idea. That's the text wording. What's your wording? If you are able to say it to yourself in your own words, that means you understood and if you understood, you will remember and if you remember, you will be able to process that idea. You will be able to compare it to the answer options to see what's right, what's wrong, what's a distractor, what doesn't look similar and this means that very often just one conscious reading of a paragraph can help you work with it productively because you read it, you skimmed it, you discussed it in your mind and now you're ready to analyze the answers. That's what it means.

Ben: Excellent point there and this is a valuable skill also for the writing. It's essential. It's one of the skills that we try and develop in the writing course that we have when we have this lovely task 2 question and it's basically-- it might be asking you discuss both views and add your opinion or something like this, but it's like one of the views will be a very wordy phrase about-- maybe about pollution and you've got to simplify that phrase instead of like okay, pollution is bad because and then the second part of the question might be pollution is a necessary evil or whatever.

What I'm saying is that if you can condense that question into a few-- into sort of like the most basic of terms then, it's easier to start generating ideas and plus it's easier to-- well, you're more likely to understand it rather than trying to process this whole wordy phrase. So, it goes



back to what you were saying. This golden rule it's not only going to help you to do well in the reading, it's also essential for writing task 2.

Cate: Moreover, Ben, I might add it will help you in the listening and speaking too because when speak you, have to paraphrase, you have to show a range of vocabulary and when you listen, it's the same reading test, but in the form of listening because what you hear and what you see in the questions are paraphrased versions of the same.

Ben: Absolutely.

Cate: It is everywhere. It's always paraphrased. It's a golden rule for all four papers sections of the test.

Ben: Yes, I totally agree with you there and when you was mentioning distractors in the reading exam, it reminded me that we've got these lovely distractors also in the listening.

Cate: Oh, yes.

Ben: Yes, but let's not go there because we've got a few more points that I'd like to finish with the reading. The next point: follow the plan. Follow the algorithm.



Cate: Yes. As you said, Ben, before, of course you shouldn't take any strategy for granted. Something might not work for you. I had exam candidates who had the courage of telling me Cate, this doesn't work. This doesn't work, but my way works and I would tell them perfect. If you know that it works, use your own strategy. You don't have to focus on mine, but if you don't have your own strategy and you know that nothing that you did worked, try following my plan.

Follow it. It means that if I advise you to read the paragraph first and read the question next not vice-versa, then do it because there's a very simple explanation behind this. For example, a lot of students tell me but you're telling me to do what no book told me before. Well, I'm weird. I'm different. What will happen because if you read the question first, you're trying to hold one idea in your head and you're trying to focus on the text and you can't hold two things with one hand, right? This is what your brain can't do. That's why read the text-- the paragraph first; focus, skim read, rephrase it to yourself, and read the question and you will see the answer immediately and my students had this aha moment. It's like oh my God! It's working. Yes, I know. Thank you.

Ben: Yes. I totally agree with you there with like the student-- like we were just saying in the other episode it's taking responsibility. Okay, if my strategy doesn't work, that's fine, but at



least give it a shot because this is battle-tested and we've had lots of success stories and in general, it works. You could be a little facetious and say oh yes, it doesn't work for you because it's Thursday. I'm sorry.

That's being a little bit silly, but like in a lot of cases, it will work and with the writing course, I know that it works and of course, some students are not that comfortable with it and they prefer to do it a different way. So, they'll say okay, I don't think this is for me. Can I have a refund and I'm like okay, no worries, but if they're-- no, I'm not going to go down there, but yes. We've still got a few more points to cover.

Cate: That's right.

Ben: So, find proof in the text. Underline a number. All right.

Cate: Yes. This again, goes back to the golden rule. You know that the right answer is in the text, right? That is written in huge golden letters in the forefront of your mind and what you need to become is a detective. You need to find that hidden answer in the text. So, when you found the answer, you compare it to the answer options. You realize it's the same thing. You underline that word/words. It's typically several words. It's never two sentences. No. It's like one line, one-and-a-half lines; depends. You underline it.



You tell yourself why is this answer correct? This answer is correct because I found this in the text and I know it's correct because look how it's rephrased. Good. This is question number 14. Move on. This means that you have marked your progress. You have reassured yourself that that's the right answer and you are not going to waste any time worrying that it might be wrong. It can't be wrong because it's there.

Ben: Got you. Got you. Excellent points there. Next one: don't panic if you don't know some words, but try to deduce from context. I like this one. I like this one.

Cate: That's a very general recommendation. Everyone says that and yes, I will tell this a thousand times. You don't have to freak out. No one knows everything not even the most educated people. They don't know everything. This means that you either relax and move on or you try to look around the word. Maybe the content can give you a hint. Maybe it's positive. Maybe it's negative. Is it a person? Is it a place? Is it a feature maybe? Oh, it's a feature.

Simplify it down to very simple things: good, bad, future, past, occupation, job, a man, woman, whatever. It doesn't really matter. Simplify and then it becomes clearer. Very often it's enough to at least point you to the right direction. It also works to try and figure out how word parts work like prefixes. For example, un is to cancel or re means to repeat or under means



insufficiently. So, this can help you work with a root that you know, but you had never seen that word before. You figure it out. You move on.

Ben: Yes and it goes back to what we were saying the other day about learning the sort of like the formulas or learning the synonyms and then learning the formulas to expand your vocabulary exponentially and if you'd have done this, then obviously if you've got a good grasp of the root like you've just said or if you know the formulas, the prefixes, and all the rest, then it's going to make it much, much easier and I like the idea as well of just guessing the context.

Also, I know this from personal experience of reading in Spanish. If I read in Spanish, I don't understand every single word, but I can get the gist of the sentence with just 80% of the words nine times out of ten. So, it's just a case of carrying on, moving forward and I guess not letting it freak you out.

Cate: Yes. Yes. Fear and panic are the worst enemies in a test; in any test in any language.

Ben: Yes, yes. I failed my driving test so many times I [unintelligible 00:21:20.29].

Cate: Tell me about that. I failed my driving test four times.

Ben: I can beat you on that, but I don't want to go there. I don't want to talk about that.



Cate: Okay, okay.

Ben: All right, moving on to the next one: when in [unintelligible 00:21:35.27] guess. This is quite straight forward, but just share with us.

Cate: Yes. A lot of exam candidates are afraid of letting go, I'm guessing, because they think it's not good enough; they're smarter than that. You know when you're out of time you're not smarter than that. You just have to guess. Why do you need to guess? Because unlike some other exams-- you know I did take a French exam and the thing is that you're penalized for incorrect answers and this is huge. If you have the wrong answer, you get minus one and if you don't write anything you get zero.

Ben: That's crazy.

Cate: Yes, that's crazy. I don't think it's fair. So, IELTS is not like that, thanks God. So, if you don't give it a try, don't give it a chance, you won't know. You will know that you got zero points. Yes, an empty box on your answer sheet means zero points 100%. No miracle can happen there, but if you guess-- you know it's a multiple-choice. It's an A-F choice. Just try; you never know. You never know.



Ben: Absolutely and it could be the extra two points the tips it from a 6.5 to a 7.

Cate: Yes, which is the most important difference.

Ben: Yes, exactly. So, you've got nothing to lose. Give it a shot. Yes. All right. So, we've finished now. Thank you very much, Cate. It's very valuable as always and there'll be more podcasts--more tutorials about reading and probably other topics from Cate and myself or maybe just Cate in the future. So, stay tuned for those.

If you are struggling with the IELTS exam, then remember you can email us and ask us for help. You can [sign up to the email list](#) to get all the IELTS materials we send and the tutorials that we send and the updates and you can also check out the [online course](#) which comes with lots of essay corrections where we give you [feedback and we help you improve](#) much, much faster.

So, thank you very much and one last thing. If you've got any friends, family members that are maybe struggling with the exam, please share this resource with them; the [IELTS podcast](#) and we can possibly help them as well. So, thank you very much and all the best with your exam.

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