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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: Practical IELTS study strategies. Basically, we're going to look at practical IELTS strategies and we're not going to look at sort of like how to write a task 2 or reading strategies. In this tutorial, **we're specifically going to look at IELTS study habits and strategies for success. I will explain why goals are meaningless without systems to back them up and I will share techniques on how to make your IELTS preparation effortless; pretty much like automatic and effortless.**

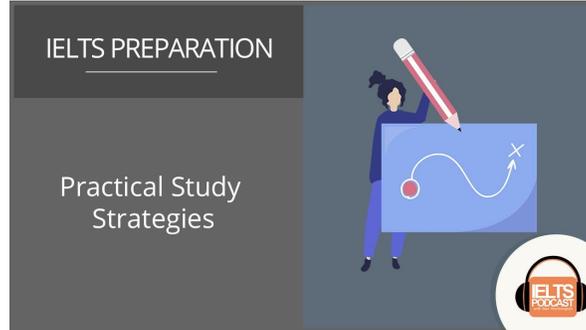
Now, this is an **insanely valuable tutorial if you are taking the IELTS in 2020** because by listening to it now, you can get it in place-- you can get everything in place to start off 2020 as effective as possible.



STRATEGY # 1

Now, **first thing I want to mention is that IELTS success or success in the IELTS exam will be the product of daily habits, not one massive study session**, for example. Not like three days just blitzing it. Of course, that can happen, but that's more likely-- in those cases, it's more than likely that the student has a very high level in English already and in those three days or in those two days, they just learned the necessary exam skills in order to pass the exam.

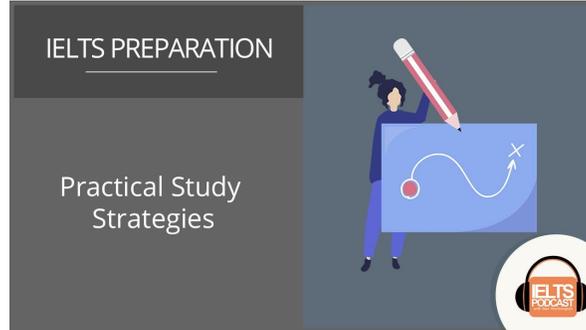
Now, there was an interview or I've done a few interviews where the student says oh, yes. It took five days with your course. It took fifteen days with your course. In those situations and I try to emphasize this in the tutorials I do with them that in those situations, the student has most likely already immersed themselves in English. So, they've already got this habit of watching a TV series in English and they've been doing it for a few years or they just got into the habit of reading the newspapers in English or listening to the radio in English and when it comes to taking the test, they've already got quite a profound, quite a deep knowledge of the English language and they just need to finish it off by learning some exam skills and then they're ready.



Now, this goes back to what I've said before that we don't really sort of like pass IELTS with blitzing it in three days especially if you're-- I mean you can do if your English is quite a high level, but from my experience, most of the students who are stuck at 6.5, it's usually a combination of a lack of exam skills and language skills. So, how do we solve this? Well, there's one technique where we can just basically adopt the strategy of small incremental changes and these do create massive changes in the long run.

I'll just give you a statistic. A 1% improvement each day means that you're 37% better at the end of the year. Now, 37% improvement is probably from-- it's easily from 6.5 to 7, possibly even 7.5 or 8 if you can achieve that 1% improvement. So, what I'm saying is that if we can establish this habit, for example, maybe we decide to study for five minutes a day. Five minutes a day is quite easy. It's not going to take a lot of time and the key part here is setting the habit, okay, is setting up the habit and once we do develop this habit of just doing five minutes each day-- the goal in this stage is not to learn English or to prepare for IELTS. The goal is to establish the habit.

So, maybe we **write five minutes of essay writing every single morning. Once the habit is established, now we can push it to ten minutes and then slowly probably in the next couple**



of weeks, push it to 20 minutes and the key here is to start small, make it easy and just keep it a routine. So, we're going to talk about this in more detail in a second.

STRATEGY # 2

And then another important point that I want to mention for you is along with this compounding of your habits, the same is true with your **self-talk**. Now, this is a very important point that probably no other tutors talk about and the self-talk is how you talk to yourself. If you say ah 6.5; I'm such a loser. **Why am I so dumb? This kind of negative self-talk obviously, it's not a healthy habit, but this can compound as well.**

So, if you're saying it like every single day or every ten times a day, then it's going to compound and eventually you'll start to believe it. Personally, I've had this issue in the past; obviously, not with IELTS but with other things and I just kind of-- the key here is just to catch yourself saying it and maybe you can transform it into a question or even you can just sort of like make it the complete opposite like why am I so intelligent instead of why am I such a loser? So, those are just personal sort of like techniques that I've used.



Now, I mentioned this before but I'll mention it again. I had a friend, Shawn, he's called from Hungary and his English wasn't that good and I met him in Valencia and what he did was he just spent the whole summer and it didn't do much for his Spanish, obviously. He spent the whole summer listening to self-development audio books. I think it's Brian Tracy.

He improved his English obviously, just from listening to so much and repeating it, but he also managed to completely reprogram his brain with all this American positivity. The point of the story is that progress is not overnight. It's going to take some time and you've got to put in the work as I've said a lot of times before.

Now, a lot of this information not only comes from personal experience but I was reading the book *Atomic Habits* by James Clear and he mentions the valley of disappointment. This is when you start and what you think should happen is not actually happening. So, maybe you do two hours every day for the first week and you see no improvement and then it continues again for the second and third week. This is called the valley of disappointment.

Also, this is why I disagree with the idea of taking test after test after test because you're wasting your money and you've got to give yourself time to push through this valley of disappointment until you can see a measurable and a realistic increase and improvement in your score or in your IELTS writing or in your speaking and then take the test.



While you're pushing through this valley of disappointment, don't put in for another test and another test thinking of this time it might just work. You're best saving your money and invest it in yourself and the Greeks what they used to say-- I think it's the Stoics. They used to say it's not what happens to you. It's what you do about it. So, it's not what happens to you. It's what you do about it.

So, you get this IELTS 6.5. It's the second one or it's the third one this year, for example. Now, what do you do about it? Do you go and book another test or do you just think okay, I'm going to give myself a month, two months. I'm going to work at this and develop some strong study habits. Then once I'm out of this valley of disappointment, once I can see some measurable improvement, then I'm going to book another IELTS test.

STRATEGY # 3

Next point is about goals versus habits. This is what I mentioned at the beginning and James Clear in the book he says you do not rise to the level of your goals. You fall to the level of your systems and just to explain this, he gives a nice analogy about the Olympics.

In the Olympics, pretty much every athlete has the goal to reach gold, obviously. Every single one of them has the same goal and the only ones that do actually get the gold are the ones



who've prepared the best and who are obviously best on that day. How did they get to be best on that day is because they've got a good system in place.

So, this is what it means. It means the ones who have the best preparation mentally, physically are the best systems of preparation. Those are the people who are going to get the goal. So, I'll just repeat it. You do not rise to the level of your goals; you fall to the level of your systems. Now, this is extremely applicable for IELTS students because if you have a rubbish study habit, then you can expect a rubbish IELTS result and vice versa.

So, what systems do you have in place? Okay, we might have the goal of getting an [IELTS band 9](#) by June, for example. What system do you have in place to achieve that band 9? What system are you going to put in place to achieve a band 7 in the next two months or in the next 30 days?

I'll give you examples. **A simple system could be to write an essay every single day.** By the way, without feedback, it might not be the best preparation, but it's better than doing nothing. Secondly, you could do a practice test every day. This is very useful for the [listening](#) or for the [reading](#) because you [get the feedback](#). You've got the answers somewhere probably at the back of the book or wherever. Another system could you learn 20 new words to improve your [vocabulary](#)? Could you translate 20 new words from your native language into English and do that every single day?



These are systems and I think knowing this-- this is why I wanted to do this tutorial because a lot of students beat themselves up. They think that they are stupid or they think that they are inept or they think that they're not clever enough, but it's not you personally. It's your system.

So, if you're not getting 6.5-- if you're not getting 7, sorry. If you're not getting that band 7, it's not you. It's your system that you need to go back and you need to review it and you need to implement it. You need to basically fall in love with your system. You need to fall in love with the process and develop this strong habit. This is how we get progress. This is how we get results. This is why in the online course we've got a system in place. You're writing the essays, you send them in, you get feedback, and you improve.

In 2020, we're going to improve this. We're going to improve the course even more because there are some other powerful techniques that we-- similar to what I'm talking about in this tutorial, but we're going to start incorporating them into the course so we can make the course even better and we can start developing stronger study habits.

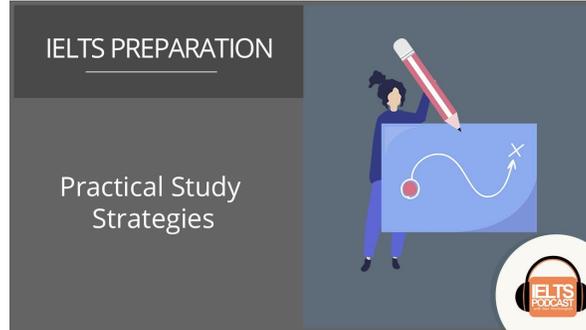


STRATEGY # 4

Next one, which is the next point that I want to talk about which is really important when it comes to establishing new habits and remember habits are what we have behind the system or what are holding the system in place. **The next point I want to talk about is identity.** Now, your identity and how you see yourself is extremely important with regards to your progress and improvement with regards to the English language and with regards to IELTS.

I'll give you an example. So, imagine that a smoker who is trying to quit is offered a cigarette-- or two smokers. The first one says no, thanks. I'm trying to quit. No, thanks. I'm trying to quit and the second person says no, thanks. I'm not a smoker. Can you see? The difference here is subtle, but the impact is massive. How can we apply this small change of identity?

Well, we could say-- we've got two options: to watch either TV series and binge on Netflix, for example, which I'm not saying I don't do. We all do this. We've all got our guilty habits whatever. Nobody is perfect, but what I'm saying is that we've got this choice. We can go out and socialize with some friends or we can write an essay. Now, the change in identity comes in place when we can ask ourselves the question what would a band 9 student do? What would a



band 9 student do in this situation? Would they go out and socialize with their friends or would they write the essay?

So, this is why it's really important just to try and think of your identity and this goes back to the self-talk. For example, if you say I'm not good at English, then this is kind of reinforcing or reestablishing this identity of yourself whereas if you say I'm a confident English speaker, you're bound to get a much better return on investment or return on that action rather than saying I'm not good at English.

STRATEGY # 5

Another point; **we can also say that the goal is not to pass IELTS, but the goal is to become extremely competent in English. This is my identity. I'm an extremely competent person with regards to the English language. And this is why sometimes I'd say I hate IELTS, but that's another whole new episode.**

Again, another example: The goal is not to study 20 hours at the weekend. The goal is to become competent at self-organization or at self-study organization because once you've done that 20 hours then what happens whereas if you achieve your goal of becoming competent at organizing yourself effectively, then you could probably do 20-30 hours every single weekend.



It's probably a bit much, but the goal is not to sort of like get 10 hours, 20-30 hours. The goal is to become a better-organized self-study student or a more effective self-study student.

So, how do we get the right identity to stick? We've talked about our identity, our self-talk. I'm a successful IELTS student. I'm a successful band 9 IELTS student. Now, the way that we get this identity to stick is that the more we perform band 9 IELTS student study habits, the more we perform these habits, the more likely it is to stick. So, the more we perform a behavior, the more we reinforce that identity.

I'll give you an example. After my first podcast or the first IELTS tutorial I did, I didn't consider myself an IELTS-- I did actually. I didn't consider myself a podcaster. I didn't consider myself sort of like an IELTS online audio tutorial maker. That was very eloquent, but after 300 episodes, I pretty much do now and the reason is because I've done almost 300 tutorials. I do consider myself an IELTS podcaster now. I do consider myself competent at giving these tutorials.

This goes back to what we said at the beginning is these small steps and eventually, they compound and eventually, we reach our goals. So, first, we decide on the identity we want to achieve. I am an IELTS band 7 student. I am an IELTS band 9 student and then we prove it to ourselves with small daily wins. For example, we write out one essay a day. For example, we learn 20 new vocabulary phrases.



STRATEGY # 6

Now, just a few more points before we finish. I want to talk about-- well, I've already said that if we start small, it's easier to get started and getting started is key. Another point that I want to mention to **make it easier to get started is to remove the friction**. So, in the book he talks about you can join a gym that you have to pass every day when you go to work. Now, when you come back from work it's there and you can just go in whereas if the gym, for example, and you don't like going to the gym, if the gym is on the other side of town, now there's more friction to get there.

So, applying this to IELTS, as I said, we wake up in the morning, we can write an essay or perhaps we pass a coffee shop and every time we pass that coffee shop, we say ok, I'm going to have a coffee and I'm going to write an IELTS essay or every time you have a coffee it means that you've got to write out 20 phrases that you want to learn for your speaking or for your writing.

Other ways we can remove friction from our studying is we can maybe put the phone in the kitchen while we're studying in our bedrooms or we can just switch it off. What I do is I just put



it-- I do Pomodoro's where I just set it to like 30 minutes or 50 minutes and then it's in flight mode, no Wi-Fi and everything gets ignored until I finish the task or until the 50 minutes has finished.

STRATEGY # 7

Another point: **small habits are important.** There's a story about this army general who always insisted that all his soldiers make the bed in the morning and what this does is it sets the tone for making good decisions for the rest of the day. Another example: if I start the morning-- I used to do this. It makes me cringe now. If I start the morning with a big 200-gram block of chocolate-- how embarrassing, but if I start the morning with a big block of chocolate, then the next meal there's no incentive to eat healthy.

I'm just going to be like okay, chips and beans fine whereas if I start the meal-- if I start the day with a healthy breakfast, then when it comes to lunchtime I will think twice about getting chips and beans. I'll be like well, I started off healthy. I am a healthy person, so I'm going to choose some healthy food now. You see? So, it's setting the tone for good decisions.

Another point to help you establish these habits is just to make sure that they stick. You want to make it as easy as possible. So, this is why I was talking about setting a five-minute study



target or just writing down three words. It sounds ridiculous, but then once the habit is established and we've done 20 days or 10 days of just writing a sentence or just writing half an essay or a paragraph then after that, we start writing two paragraphs.

The key here is that we want to keep it below the level where it feels like work. We want to make it sort of like easy to get started and also you want to make it satisfying. So, there are a few different ways you can do this. One way, for example, is like I said if you really enjoy coffee, you make a rule where every time you have a coffee, you do 30 minutes of IELTS active study. So, you read a Guardian article or a Wikipedia article or whatever and you start collecting high-powered vocabulary while you drink your coffee.

We combine having that we enjoy doing with a more productive habit such as researching for vocabulary. This point is basically making a habit satisfying, making it enjoyable. This is why when we take on new essay correctors for our online course of Jump to Band 7 or it's Free, this is why when you get your essay back, we've not only demonstrated like this is wrong, this is wrong, this is wrong, but we also take the time to say that you've done this correctly or this is amazing or well done for following the framework; making it satisfying.

We understand this at our organization. Our team understands this; that it's not easy to study for IELTS and any positive encouragement should be definitely given to the student and this is



also another reason why we aim-- we can't always do it, but we aim for 24-hour turnaround times just to keep the momentum going.

Now, that's pretty much it for me. I'll just give you an instance of how I've been applying this for myself. Firstly, I've downloaded an app called HabitShare and I've got a friend in Spain. Basically, it's just like a tick-box thing. So, every time-- my goal for 2020-- I've already started actually-- is to meditate every single day and what I'll do in January is buy a calendar and then just write M and then the key here apparently is not to break the chain.

So, I'm actively-- well, not actively, but I'm meditating every single morning as soon as my eyes open and then I can write M on my calendar and I just want to see a full January of Ms. I already got almost full December of Ms in the app tick boxes. The important point here-- this is a really good point. The importance is not the single day that you miss because we can always mess up on one day even though it's not ideal. The key here is never to miss twice.

So, perhaps you could buy a calendar or you get an app or whatever and your goal is to actively work on improving your English every single day. So, you're going to write an E in the calendar or an I if you're going for IELTS and the key here is perhaps-- well, it's inevitable that you're going to miss one day. Life gets in the way. You're traveling. You've got a 14-hour flight or whatever, but the key here is never to miss twice.



So, as soon as you slip, you need to get right back onto it because it's not the first mistake that ruins it. It's the second. It's the third. It's the spiral. It's losing the habit. So, the importance is never to miss twice and as the book says, missing twice is the start of a new habit.

Now, that's everything from me today. Just one last point, actually: accountability. If you can make a promise with a friend that you're going to study every single day and you'll give them £10 or \$10 for every day you miss or ₹200 or whatever it is in your country, this is also a powerful factor. Just saying I'm going to do 10 days of studying IELTS an hour a day or 10 minutes every day, if I miss each day, I will give you X amount of dollars, for example.

FINAL TIP

Now, that's the end of this tutorial. If you've enjoyed this, then be sure to go through our back [catalog](#) and listen to some more tutorials. If you've got any friends that are struggling with IELTS, please share this episode or share our website ieltspodcast.com and if you're struggling with the writing, remember we've got the [online course Jump to Band 7 or it's Free](#) that also helps students get to band 8 and band 9 and we've also got the [Speaking Confidence course](#).



These are all going to be improved very-- no, I can't say very soon; probably in the next 30-60 days. We'll have the new versions coming out which introduce some of these techniques that I've been talking about such as accountability, such as habits, such as-- well, I've already got positive feedback in there as well.

So, that's everything. Remember to [sign up to our list](#). If you found this useful, share the resource and just keep going. Keep going. Establish that habit. Never miss it twice and you will get there. You will pass IELTS and I believe in you. So, take care. Have a fantastic week. Keep your chin up and keep going. All the best.

[Music]

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