



IELTS SUCCESS

Colombian Diego jumps from 6.5 to 7, now going to Canada

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.

[Music]

INTRODUCTION

Ben: Hello there, students. In this tutorial, we're going to be talking with Diego and I guess we can just jump straight into it. Diego has got a fantastic story about his [IELTS preparation](#). So, Diego, could you please introduce yourself and tell us in a few words about why you are taking the IELTS or why you took the IELTS.

Diego: The IELTS idea was just because it was a **requisite for immigration**. So, if you want to **emigrate to Canada and maybe the UK**, you need to take it and if you really want to claim points to be selected, you need to score really high like C1 or C2 level in some components. So basically, I started applying to do it over and over until I finally did it.

Ben: Okay and where are you from originally, Diego?

Diego: I'm from Colombia in South America.



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Ben: Got you. I thought I could hear the Spanish accent. I thought so. I thought so. I was going to say something in Spanish, but then I thought it wouldn't be that good for the rest of the listeners, but no worries. We can chat in Spanish afterwards and you can laugh at my Spanish probably.

Diego: Okay.

Ben: Okay. So, what position are you going for in Canada?

Diego: It's not about a position. It's more like a program they have. It's called the Express Entry. So, basically, if you meet the minimum requirements like you have a professional background and some years of experience and maybe a master's degree and you can prove your English and your French and certain age and certain amount of money, you can apply and after you have reached all that things, you simply apply and you can go and establish whenever you want the country.

Ben: Interesting. Interesting. Okay. So, can you tell me about the specific problem you were looking to solve with your IELTS preparation because you said you'd taken it a couple of times, a few times before?

Diego: Yes. I've taken it like six times.



Ben: Wow! Right.

Diego: So, maybe I could share with you-- let me see if you can see that. It's an excel file. So, you can see there six attempts I did in the previous two years.

Ben: Okay. I can't see it, but it's fine. It's fine.

Diego: Okay, perfect.

Ben: Yes. Can you just--

Diego: You can see it later.

Ben: Yes. Probably, cool.

Diego: Honestly, I wasn't having any problems with listening, reading, or speaking. Those were perfectly fine, but I didn't notice or I didn't know that the writing section could be as challenging as it were initially like when I started taking the IELTS like two years ago or three years ago, I significantly repetitively scored 6.5 over and over and I didn't know why.

Ben: Right. Right. And what were the pain points of not having a solution to this problem?



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DIEGO'S JOURNEY TO FINDING THE PERFECT IELTS ONLINE COURSE

Diego: Well, I think that the first thing was recognizing that I had a problem and that there were people who really knew how to solve it because one day just in simple despair I googled [how to jump from 6.5 to 7](#)--

Ben: You put that straight into Google?

Diego: Yes.

Ben: Beautiful.

Diego: And that was the moment where I noticed that really, really it was a huge thing and that there are a lot of people suffering from this.

Ben: Right. Right. Yes. Wow! And having that problem, how did that make you feel? Were you frustrated? Were you irritated?



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Diego: Well, the good thing is that when you notice that there are a lot of people having this same problem, you feel that you're not alone anymore. There are a lot of people suffering the same thing and you simply can say okay, I'm not the only one and if there are people who are overcoming this problem, I can do it too.

Ben: Good point. Good point. I use that same thinking for a lot of challenges that I have or I've had personally. I use that rationale. It's like okay, if this person can do it, there is no reason why I can't do it either. It's just a case of finding out how and putting in a lot of effort. So, let's just summarize. You're on your way to Canada. IELTS was blocking you. The IELTS writing was blocking you and you'd done a good amount of tests and you were stuck at 6.5. So, you went to Google and you discovered a lot of other people were also stuck at 6.5. Is that right, Diego?

Diego: Yes, that's perfectly right. That's perfectly the story.

Ben: Got you. Okay. Now, did you consider any other options before joining our [course](#)?

Diego: Actually, yes I did. I paid a lot of money for a lot of courses for a lot of [unintelligible 00:06:31.00] use. I paid essay correction before. I paid four courses. I wasted like two months doing these courses, cramming every single day and finally, they didn't find exactly what was harming my score. I simply tried the essays and the background, whatnot, a video like in your



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case. It was much more like hey, these are your notes and your essays are pure garbage like [unintelligible 00:07:02.05]. They tried to give you a score and they always would say like hey, this is a 5.0 or 5.5, something like that, but I went to the IELTS and I [score 6.5 again and again](#).

Ben: Wow! Okay.

Diego: So, there was this moment like okay, maybe my brain is not used to it and that was when I simply googled it. I saw the light at the end of the tunnel.

Ben: Beautiful. Beautiful. That must have been insanely frustrating because if you're getting these essay corrections back not only are they kind of insulting your intelligence by saying you're at a 5.5 when three months ago or six months ago, you were at a 6.5, but not only are they insulting your intelligence, but they're also sort of like beating you over the head with a stick saying your essay is garbage. Is that right?

Diego: Yes, that's-- I sort of understand why they are doing it because you can compromise yourself. Maybe you grade an essay and you say okay, this is a 7 and the person goes and scores 6.5. So, they were protecting themselves.

Ben: Exactly. Yes. Yes. I can understand, but it must have been frustrating and then to actually-- and then for them to sort of like be negative with your essay. It's sort of like hey, I'm kind of like



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on the floor already with these insanely expensive and frustrating IELTS tests and now that I'm on the floor, you're kicking me. Now that I'm down, you're kicking me and my own teacher is booting a boot in me, so to speak.

Diego: That toughens you. That really toughens you.

Ben: Absolutely. Good point there, Diego. Good point. Good point. So, you did these four courses and you weren't happy. At what point did you decide to join us at ieltpodcast.com in the [Sentence Guide course](#)?

Diego: Okay. It was sort of-- for this Canada program, you can claim points based on your age. So, if you pass 30 years, you start losing like six points every single year. So, my deadline was December. So, if I wanted to claim that six extra points, I need to take the IELTS and score high before December. And that is where I just find your [course](#) and I started [watching](#) and I saw the [reviews](#) and I think that really gave me the conviction or the security was your policy that **if it doesn't work, I'm going to refund you**. So, I think okay. If these guys are so convinced and they can guarantee it, maybe it works.

Ben: And it did.

Diego: And it did.



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Ben: Super. Sorry?

Diego: It worked twice.

Ben: Okay. Let's get into that. That sounds very interesting. Okay. So, you read the [reviews online](#) and that convinced you plus the guarantee convinced you. Did you have any other doubts or concerns before joining?

Diego: Not really. I think at that point, it was just a matter of okay, I'm going to try this. What can I lose?

Ben: Got you.

Diego: Yes. It's nothing else to lose.

Ben: Yes. You had reached the point of do or die, no? That was just like okay, I've got to do this. Just to rewind a second, the cut-off point where your points start deteriorating, what age is that? Did you say 30?

Diego: Yes. Actually, it's like 29, but since I am already 30 and in December I'm going to be 31, so that would mean six points less.



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Ben: Right.

Diego: But last year, I had six points more than I have right now.

Ben: Right. I see. I see. So, the clock is ticking or the clock was ticking.

Diego: Yes.

Ben: Right. Okay. Can you describe the specific movement you realized it was working or the course was working for you?

Diego: I think it was like-- okay. In your course, we have to send several essays. I think **it was like the 8th essay or so I noticed that finally, I didn't feel dumb trying to find ideas. I realized that it was simpler than I thought initially and you just need to follow your algorithm and when you do that, you're going to be fine.** And it's not like the pre-made answers. They want you to not follow, but it is just like logical thinking. Since I am an engineer, I think like hey, this thing works. This kind of thing works.

Ben: Excellent point there, Diego. Just two points that I want to mention for the students. It's not a copy-paste solution. It's not a model essay. It's an algorithm or framework. I prefer to use



the term framework, but I think you were working with Daphne because Daphne always calls it an algorithm, doesn't she?

Diego: I think yes. I'm trying to remember if she mentioned it, but I'm not sure. I'm using algorithm because I'm much more familiar thanks to my profession.

Ben: Got you. Okay. So, yes. It's a framework or an algorithm and once you've thought of your ideas for the essay, you drop them in and you have to kind of adapt the framework a little bit. Otherwise, the essay just doesn't come out right. But if you can adapt that framework; just a little bit of tuning, so to speak, it can produce some pretty effective essays. Would you agree with that, Diego?

Diego: Yes and I think it's-- those are beautiful essays. That's amazing. Something like-- I haven't thought that was possible before because I know when I saw-- when I read essays that were really high score, I thought okay, maybe that couldn't be written in one hour or in 40 minutes. That's something complicated, but when you start practicing, you notice that it's perfectly possible. It's perfectly doable.

Ben: That's a beautiful moment isn't it, when you get to that point and you're just like actually, I can do this.



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Diego: Yes and you recover your tranquility and it's like being free again.

Ben: Yes. Wow! That's a good expression. That's a good way to put it. So, you said that you just dropped your ideas. Just rewinding again, was thinking of ideas, was that a challenge for you?

Diego: Not really. I think what was a real challenge for me was to keep it simple because for even the simple topics, it was so easy to think about 20 or 30 things. So, my original idea was to force 20 or 10 ideas in each paragraph and I didn't know how to manage that. So, when you start talking about list, I finally understood oh, okay. That's what they mean when they want a fully developed answer.

Ben: Absolutely. I think this is a very valuable point that you've mentioned, Diego because some students cannot think of ideas and they just like-- their mind goes blank and this is very common and then at the other end of the spectrum, some students think of too many ideas and it's just like okay, how can I organize my thoughts into a coherent essay? And then you've got to develop the argument as you just mentioned whether you've got two ideas or five ideas. You've just got to-- yes. And this is why the framework can really help either student; the one who's got zero ideas or the one who's got 20 ideas. This is just a case of then-- once you've got your ideas, choosing, dropping them in, and developing it, in your case. If you've got very few ideas, then we work on generating and improving and building your idea generation muscle, so



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to speak. So, yes. So, in your case, I guess you selected just a few good ideas and then developed that argument. Is that right?

Diego: Yes. That's correct. It just jumped to my mind that-- I can't remember if it was you or Daphne or somebody or on your website, but I saw this phrase that IELTS is not an intelligence test. It's a language test. So, it's no real reason to think that you need to be a genius to make a good essay.

Ben: Exactly. You just need to be a good communicator.

Diego: Exactly.

Ben: Look at Trump.

Diego: That's tough.

Ben: Yes, yes, but look at Trump. He's not a genius, but he's an amazing communicator. I would like to see his IELTS essays though.

Diego: That's a very rare talent.

Ben: Yes. That's a good point. That's a very good point, but you're right and I think I'm going to claim that it was me because I vaguely remember myself saying this quite a few times that it's



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not testing your intelligence. It's not testing your ability to solve global warming challenges. It's just testing your ability to communicate any idea effectively and a developed coherent argument. So, just going back to coherent argument, was the framework-- did that help you at all with developing the argument?

Diego: Yes. I think that was the trickiest part for me to accept because, in Spanish, we try to think in a different way. So, trying to accept that in English-- in British English, you need to follow the pattern of thinking in which you start developing and you repeat or reinforce your thoughts over and over to communicate clearly, for me, that was difficult to accept.

Ben: That's interesting. I am familiar with writing in Spanish and it's very flowery, isn't it? It's sort of like-- it's quite expansive and I think with English, we kind of avoid that and we're going a little bit more direct.

Diego: Yes. We can use a lot of commas. You can see perfectly a single paragraph like maybe 10 lines completely with commas without a full stop in Spanish.

Ben: Yes. It's crazy, isn't it?



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Diego: Even in Portuguese. If you read José Saramago, he was Portuguese and his translations to Spanish are very similar. You make really long paragraphs just with commas and it's perfectly fine for us.

Ben: Yes. That's strange. It's really strange.

Diego: It's a different way of thinking.

Ben: Yes, definitely.

Diego: So, trying to ignore 25 or more years like doing things this way and start doing the British way, it's a little challenge for us, but once you notice that this works, you finally have-- you have this aha moment when oh! Okay, that's what they want and it's simple.

Ben: Yes. Yes. I must admit those aha moments they are so rewarding because-- while we're talking about the style of writing, when I left Manchester University and I did my [unintelligible 00:21:07.13] in Spain, I had to start writing in Spanish and I had a very-- Well, first of all, obviously I was reading in Spanish and it was just insane because I had to hold so much information and things in a different language, but eventually, it got to the point where I could understand the lecturers without having to concentrate. My reading was still pretty low, but I could understand the lectures without having to concentrate and I got that aha moment and



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then from then on, it's kind of like yes, life just gets a lot easier and the complexity just disintegrates, so to speak. So, can you think-- well, I guess you could share your results now. You said you took the-- actually, no. Before we jump into the results, Diego, could you tell the audience how you successfully prepared for the other sections because they didn't seem like a problem for you, did they? They didn't seem like a challenge. How did you prepare for the listening?

HOW DIEGO PREPARED FOR THE OTHER SECTIONS

Diego: Okay. I think listening to a lot of podcasts is the main thing. I discovered this The Economist podcast--

Ben: Say that again, sorry. What's it called?

Diego: The Economist podcast.

Ben: Oh! That's high-level stuff, Diego. Good for you.



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Diego: And basically it is going to be the same accent like in the real IELTS test, so basically listening over and over this thing and podcast in English. It really helps, but I have let's say incorporated English to my daily life for a really long time.

Ben: Can you give us an example on how you did that?

Diego: Basically, reading and listening, not too much of the speaking part, but consuming information; consuming mostly podcasts. When I have to commute, I'm all of the time listening to podcasts.

Ben: Excellent. Excellent.

Diego: So, listening shouldn't have been a real problem for me. In listening, you do need to have some luck. You will later see why.

Ben: Okay. You said you were reading a lot. Were you reading on websites or did you have a Kindle or what?

Diego: All of the above and I discovered an app. It's called [Lingga](#). I use it a lot. Basically, I use it to really jump my [vocabulary](#). So, you start learning words and words, but you learn them in context. You can translate, you can listen and after several million of words read it, you sort of understand the 40,000 or 50,000 words in English. So basically, you are confident enough to



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read whatever they show you. For me, reading is like-- during the IELTS test, I just have like 30 minutes left. So, I did everything half the time and I have time to look around and see everybody stressing.

Ben: Did you smile at them?

Diego: Yes, but they didn't smile back.

Ben: Okay. So, you used this app called Lingq App to boost your vocab.

Diego: Yes.

Ben: Okay. I'm going to post links to all these resources Diego was sharing and what about the speaking, Diego, because you said that you didn't really practice that daily. So, how did you work on that?

Diego: Well, I used to have-- that was long time ago, like two or three years ago when I started practicing for IELTS, I didn't know how to hire maybe or to look for partners to practice talking, simply find people who wanted to practice and I tried to choose or-- yes, I tried to choose native speakers. I think that's the thing you need to do really.

Ben: Got you. So, you didn't pay for classes.



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Diego: Yes, I did pay.

Ben: Oh, you did. Got you. Okay. Okay.

Diego: I think that was the main practice.

Ben: Okay and was there any specific structure to the lesson or was it just like a natural flow chit chat conversation?

Diego: Usually, both of them, I did use for the second part your advice.

Ben: From the [Speaking Confidence course](#).

Diego: Yes. I did use that. I realize that sort of relief my mental process of thinking a [coherent answer](#). Honestly, speaking wasn't a huge problem and I think the requirement for the Canada process is not as high as you can think. It's a band 7 and band 7 is achievable.

Ben: Yes. I would agree with you. A lot of students find you jump from 6 or 6.5 to band 7 in the speaking much easier than jumping from 6.5 to 7 in the writing. There's a massive, massive difference. I think we've got time now for you to share your results.

Diego: Okay.



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IELTS PODCAST

DIEGO'S PREVIOUS IELTS COURSES

Ben: Can you start off with-- yes, start off with your worst ones. We can add a bit of drama and then we'll finish with your best ones if that's all right.

Diego: Okay. Well, I was checking. I took IELTS six times. The first one was in 2015.

Ben: Okay.

Diego: It wasn't as good as okay. It wasn't good. It was awful.

Ben: Yes, but the first time usually is.

Diego: Yes, but I reach a 9 in reading.

Ben: Wow! Excellent work.

Diego: Speaking was a mere 6 and 6.5 in listening and writing. So, the overall was a 7. So, it was quite decent-- that overall was decent, but I think that time the reading 9 was a good one.



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Ben: Yes, definitely.

Diego: And that sort of me leveled the field for that.

Ben: It pulled the other grades, didn't it?

Diego: Yes. In November 2016, I took it again. I'm just giving you the overall here. It was 8.5-- 8. Sorry, 8. Overall 8.

Ben: Wow! Okay, so you were improving.

Diego: Yes, but writing was still a 6.5.

Ben: Right, okay. Got you.

Diego: And finally this year, I took it four times.

Ben: Wow!

Diego: March 2019, I had a 9.0-- a 9 in listening, 8 in reading, 7.5 in speaking, and 6.5 in writing.

Ben: Ouch.

Diego: That was the last time I took it with pen and paper.



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Ben: Oh, interesting.

Diego: And finally, the computer-based test started.

Ben: Right.

Diego: So, I said perfectly I can type faster than I can write with hand. So, this time-- next time it's going to be the good one. So, that was in March. In March, I bought the first course. I started studying. So in August, I took it again in computer and maybe you can imagine what happened. Listening 8.5, reading 8.5, speaking 7, writing 6.5.

Ben: Ouch! And that's with the computer-based one.

Diego: Yes. I was not great in that way of testing.

Ben: Wow! Wow! Yes, that's frustration.

Diego: Yes. In that moment, I noticed okay, I need help and I found you looking for the how to jump from 6.5 to 7 band. So, when I really found confidence, I said okay. I'm perfectly good. I'm going to take it. **So, October 2019, I took it again and I had 8.5 in reading, speaking 7 and writing 7. It was like a miracle. It works. It really works.**



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Ben: Good work. Well done. Well done. We got you there. I'm very happy. Well, done Diego. And well done for not quitting. Carry on.

Diego: But, in listening, I had 7.5 and I needed an 8. So, if you notice I had scored three times-- yes, three times over an 8. I had scored 8.5, 9 and later 8.5 in listening and this time, I had a 7.5. I missed an answer.

Ben: Ouch. It slipped.

Diego: I sort of remember what happened. It was like I had to spell oxygen and I haven't remembered if oxygen was with y or with an e because in Spanish it's with an e, in English y and even I know a little bit of French so,

Ben: It just added to the confusion.

Diego: Yes. That was the point, but I received the results and I had to say I'm going to take it again and I wasn't sure I was to score a second 7 in writing, a second time. It was like one week later.

Ben: Can I just interrupt, Diego?

Diego: Sure.



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Ben: You took it on the computer again every single time since the first time?

Diego: Yes.

Ben: Got you. You never went back to pen and paper.

Diego: Yes. I think computer is preferable because it's kind of like you don't need to suffer a lot for-- it's easier.

DIEGO'S FINAL EXAM SCORES

Ben: Yes. Totally. I totally agree. Okay, so your final exam. Your last IELTS exam?

Diego: Yes. Also, **in October and it was listening 8.5**, I could breathe again.

Ben: Good.

Diego: **Reading 8.**

Ben: Good.



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Diego: Writing 7 and speaking 7 again and overall was 7.5.

Ben: Beautiful.

Diego: Finally, I was free after six attempts and two years of struggle and preparation.

Ben: Absolutely. Yes, but you got there, man. You got there. That is fantastic. Well done, Diego. I'm very, very impressed.

Diego: Thank you. Thank you guys for your help and your support and your encouragement.

Ben: You're welcome. You're welcome. I just want to say to the audience that there are a few good things here.

- 1) Diego didn't give up, which is insanely important.
- 2) He gets help.
- 3) He takes it on computer which is what I always advise and I think probably most importantly is sort of like he identified the-- he kind of identified his challenge and like we were saying before, the key challenge was writing in an academic fashion and developing the arguments. Would you agree there? Would you agree with that, Diego?



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Diego: Yes, that's completely-- I completely agree with you.

Ben: Yes. So, there are a lot of takeaways there. Before we finish-- oh, also-- I'm just looking at my notes. Diego was listening pretty much daily on his commute to authentic native English speaker resources especially like *The Economist*, which is high-level stuff and I think that will also help you with idea generation. Would you agree?

Diego: Yes. They have this podcast called *Babbage*; *The Economist Babbage* and it's like the sort of topics IELTS really like to ask. It's about environment and culture and a little bit of economy. So, yes. It's the idea.

Ben: Yes. It does sound very much like IELTS topics and if you get *The Economist* magazine as well, there are lots of IELTS topics there and they usually take it from a financial point of view or an economic point of view. So, they'll review the climate change debate and look at it from an economic point of view and so on and so forth. Also, lots of reading-- Diego did lots of reading. He used a very powerful app called *The Lingq App* which I'm going to look at. So, thanks for sharing that, Diego and he also found a speaking partner online and we'll put some links to all of these resources as well. So, is there anything else you would like to say to students who are struggling with the IELTS exams before we finish?



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FINAL TIPS FROM DIEGO

Diego: Well, maybe the cheesy advice that just keep going, **keep trying, keep pushing and a really interesting one is you don't learn English for IELTS. You need to learn English because you really enjoy it, because you really like it.** Otherwise, it's going to be a burden. If you see this as a burden, it won't work. You need to enjoy. You need to be happy.

Ben: Yes. Excellent advice there. I'll just go back again. It might sound cheesy, Diego. It might sound cheesy, but when you are in a bad situation, you need to hear it. You need to hear somebody say don't give up and I know this for a fact. If my dad ever said don't give up or don't quit, it means a lot to hear it and I do admit when I first started saying don't give up to other students, it did seem a little bit cheesy, but after hearing it, I know and after reading emails from students saying thank you and all of this, it is important to say it. So yes and also what was the second thing you said? It just escaped my mind. I've just forgot it. You said don't give up--



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Diego: That you need to enjoy the process.

Ben: That's it. That's it. Yes. Yes. And this kind of goes well with what I have been saying in previous podcasts about immersing yourself in the language. Learn English to get you to the next level. Don't learn English to pass IELTS. It's a much, much healthier attitude to have and it's going to-- If you adopt that attitude, it's easy to put in two hours' worth of prep whereas if you see it as a burden, it just takes so much mental energy and resources and effort to put in those two hours' worth of prep. So, very good point of view there, Diego. Very helpful. Excellent.

So, that's everything. Thank you very much, Diego and before we finish, I'd just like to say to the listeners just three things. Remember to [sign up for the email list](#). If you've got any friends struggling with IELTS, please send them this [resource](#). If you want to have the same success or similar success as Diego, if you're stuck at 6.5 or even if you're going for 8 or 9, then we can get you there.

We've got [qualified IELTS tutors](#). We've got [ex-IELTS examiners correcting essays](#), native English speakers correcting essays and we're more than ready to help you and get you moving and end this horrible ordeal, this frustration. We can get you to Canada and you can hook up with Diego. You can meet Diego, have a beer with him.



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Diego: That could be fun.

Ben: And I'll put all Diego's personal details-- contact details on the site for everybody to contact him. I'm just joking, Diego. All the best with your IELTS preparation. Thank you very much for listening and thanks again, Diego for joining us today.

Diego: Thank you for your invitation, Ben.

Ben: You're welcome.

[Music]

Female Voice: Thanks for listening to ieltspodcast.com.