IELTS Podcast

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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.

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INTRODUCTION

Ben: Get ready for IELTS writing in January 2020. This is your year. Hello, there. My name is Ben Worthington. In this tutorial, **we will be looking at some very practical strategies for your IELTS preparation, especially for the writing. You can also have a quick look at the speaking and we're going to look at goal-setting. At the end of this tutorial, I will share my personal goals for 2020.**

The reason why I'm sharing my personal goals is because of accountability. Now, if you've listened to previous tutorials-- podcasts, you will know that accountability is a very strong factor. It's a very strong motivating factor if you share your goals.

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For example, if you say I'm going to-- let's make an IELTS study group and we'll meet online every day at 10 o'clock for the next three days. Now, if you want to pull out of that group or if you just don't feel like going one day, it's going to be really hard because you've got to let down a couple of other people. So, I'll go into this in more detail. I got a bit off-topic there.

SYSTEMS AND HABITS

First of all, we're going to look at systems and habits you can adopt for reaching your smart goals. I've been talking a lot about this recently because I think it is incredibly important. What I see happening is a lot of students like they sit down, okay, you might sit down and you're like okay, I'm going to prepare for IELTS now. Now, what should I do, you see?

I'll go to YouTube. I'll go and write an essay for this question and then you sit down and you start writing it I mean like I've got no idea. So, this is where the game-- I will call it a game or maybe the psychology of systems and habits can really be effective. If you've got this situation where you just sit down you're like right, I am just going to prepare for IELTS now. What should I do? I'll go to YouTube, for example.

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SMART GOALS

Well, with what I'm going to share now, I'm going to give you simple techniques that you can use today that will help you. So, as soon as you sit down, it's effective. First of all, we're going to look at SMART goals. SMART means specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely. So, for example, a bad goal will be I want to improve my-- I want to get better with IELTS, okay? It's not very specific. It's definitely not measurable. It's probably achievable. It's realistic I guess and timely. Another goal-- well, it's not very timely because there's no sort of like deadline on there.

However, if we say I would like to improve my grammar in the next 30 days or I would like to improve my grammar to band 7 or I would like to get full control of articles or the use of articles within the next 30 days, okay? Then you might want to define what full control means like maximum three errors per IELTS essay. Okay. So, that's what I mean about SMART goals.

Now, let's have a look at possible systems and habits you can adopt because when you sit down and you think right, I'm going to prepare for IELTS now, what happens is that you're going to be using up your mental energy in thinking about what to do next. So, you've got it blocked out in

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your diary. Ideally, you would have something like do IELTS listening test or prepare for IELTS writing.

If you've got something like that, that's good, but if you really want to sort of like take out the friction and make it as easy as possible because when it's as easy as possible you're more likely to adopt it. You're more likely to complete it. So, what we can do instead is write out, for example, I'm going to write out five phrases every single day. Now, when you wake up in the morning, you know immediately what to do.

You can just write out five phrases. Maybe you get these phrases from the online course; the C2 template if you're trying to memorize that or maybe you write out five expressions that you could use in the speaking. For example, in the speaking maybe you could use something like imagine you get a question about music very abstract question; typical in part 3.

Why do you think music is important in everyday life? Now, you could memorize the phrase well, I think X or in this case music-- I think music is important in everyday life-- So, what we do is we paraphrase. I think music is important in everyday life for two reasons. Firstly … and secondly probably because… and we just start writing out these phrases every single day until we just know them by heart. So, that was for the speaking.

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From the C2 template, we could use phrases such as-- for example, I've got the introduction from the template in front of me. We can use a phrase which you just memorize this. The first sentence: Experts throughout both the developing and developed world have debated whether pollution or economic growth is more important, yes? I just adapted it for a pollution and economic growth question there.

If we had a question about prisons, for example, experts throughout both the developing and developed world have debated whether incarceration-- which means basically putting people in jail-- incarceration or recovery programs are more effective, yes? So, we just memorize the first part of the sentence, but we must learn how to adapt it to the topic like I've just done there. So, what I'm saying is if you've got the whole template in front of you, you can memorize it and then you just learn how to drop in your topics.

C2 TEMPLATE

By the way, it's called the C2 template because C2 is the common European framework for language grading and a C2 equates-- it basically starts at A1 which is very, very, very early very

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beginner stage. B2 is roughly intermediate and then C1 C2 are the upper intermediate and C2 is pretty much a band 9. I researched verbs and phrases and different words.

I researched them in the Cambridge dictionary because the Cambridge University Press is the one or the Cambridge University is the one who-- is the organization that basically made this framework; the C1 C2 B1 B2 all of this and in their dictionary, they put a little mark next to each word if it's B1 or B2 or C2 C1 whatever. Phrases like developing and developed they're B2, but using debated is C2. You can go to the dictionary and you put debate in there: to discuss a subject in a formal way. C2. So, this is why the framework is basically getting students high scores.

Now, this is one sort of habit that you can adopt. This is one daily routine that's going to not only help you with your language skills but also your exam skills. Now, here are some other strategies. You could listen to a podcast every single day. If you want to take it to the next level, you could transcribe a single podcast every single day.

Make sure if you do do this one, make sure that you can compare it to a transcript afterwards just to check for accuracy. If you do this, then you're going to be not only improving your vocabulary you're going to be improving your grammar, you're going to be improving your pronunciation, and obviously, you're going to be improving your listening skills. So, this is a very

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powerful way to improve your language skills. When you do this, make sure you do it with native English speaker material or authentic native English speaker material like this podcast, for example.

If you want to take it to the next level, you can maybe find a podcast about globalization, a podcast about climate change and then just start transcribing it. If you don't have time to do that because it does take a lot of time, you could possibly summarize a podcast about these topics and you just summarize it in 200 words, for example, or even better about 200-300 words and you summarize it in the way of an IELTS essay. This is going to help you because you're going to fill up your brain with ideas. You're going to start learning about environmentalism, about the left the right, about security or technology, all these different IELTS topics.

Just to make it more straightforward, you could do a different topic each week. So, for week one, all your summaries are going to be about climate change. The next week, all your summaries are going to be about technology and the internet or about cyberbullying. I'm saying cyberbullying, technology, and climate change because these are very common topics nowadays. I see a lot of these questions. What I'm saying is that if you can make the most of

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your study time by just having it pre-prepared in a schedule, then as soon as you sit down you're going to be productive.

WORKING ON YOUR WEAK SPOTS

Other areas or other points to help you sort of like get your goals for 2020: **1) you need to be working on your weak spots.** To find your weak spots, you need to be either doing practice tests or you need to be getting feedback. You can get feedback on your writing by sending it in to us and we'll give you your correction back and you'll hear us talk through it. We'll be saying okay, this is really good. This is bad. This is good. This way, you can really just work on the parts that you need to work on.

So, if you get your feedback returned and the tutor says-- for example, on our team, the tutor says your vocabulary needs to be improved, okay? Or you need to improve your vocabulary. Then you know exactly what to do now. You need to go and maybe read the Guardian or read BBC or read The Economist, read some academic papers and start extracting vocabulary that you think would be useful and then you put it into your next essay.

Or the tutor might say you need to work on-- as I said, the use of articles. So, what do you do next? Well, you start doing-- you review the theory. You find some reputable sites online and review the theory of the use of articles. Then you do some online quizzes and then you write out some more essays and you get some more feedback and you can find out-- you can find whether you've improved or not.

By the way, in the online course, as you probably heard recently, we have a way to kind of sidestep the use of articles and it sounds a bit strange, but it definitely works and a student has talked about it in one of those their success interviews.

GET ORGANIZED AND GET A SYSTEM

The next thing is **get organized and get a system in place**. This is what I've been talking about earlier in the tutorial. A system could be just to write out-- copy pen and paper, copy one IELTS essay a day. So, go online, find some model sample essays. If you sign up actually at ieltspodcast.com, you get a big PDF and in that PDF there are lots of sample essays. You can just copy it pen and paper, write it down and that's one easy system.

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The key here is to aim for small wins to begin with. Also, you need to be reviewing what works for you. This is really important. You need to be assessing if what you are actually doing is working for you. For example, you could be going to a language academy every single day for like two weeks and if you're not getting feedback, maybe it's not working for you. If you don't think your essays are improving, then trust your gut and decide to change course.

For me personally, I'll give you two good tools now that really work well for me. I have an online calendar that seems to be syncing up with a lot of other resources. For example, I'm also taking Spanish classes about an hour a week where I just review my goals for the next week and what happened last week and I managed to integrate that with the Google Calendar. So, I book on a class and then it appears on my Google Calendar. Also in Google Calendar, I am just linking-- what do you call it-- like blocking out times on the calendar to do certain tasks.

So, in your case, you might go to your online calendar and block out Tuesdays and Thursdays 10:00 till 12:00 two hours. I'm going to be doing IELTS writing and then write down what exactly you're going to be doing. I'm going to be writing out phrases. I'm going to be improving my vocabulary. I'm going to be reviewing the feedback that I got, you see?

Here's another really useful resource. I've been using this a lot recently and it's really improved my working-- my productivity. It's focusmate.com and this really does seem kind of weird, but

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what it is, at focusmate.com what you do is you book a time and then-- So, for example, I'm going to book 10:30 in the morning. I click that and then there is another person waiting and at 10:30 you can book what-- you can see when people are going to be online and another person books a 10:30 slot and then at 10:30 you open up the app on your computer and you have a quick conversation like a Skype call.

It's like hey. What are your goals for this session and then you say okay, my goals for this session are to organize the week and to respond to some emails. What are your goals? And then the other person completely random she says my goal is to finish this proposal or to at least make progress with finishing my proposal and then you just leave it on.

So, they're watching you and you're watching them and it becomes incredibly more difficult to get distracted. It becomes incredibly more difficult to reach for your phone and just check if somebody's replied, for example.

Oh, and by the way, when I'm doing this, my phone's in flight mode and it's just out of sight and my headphones are on and I find it really much easier just to make meaningful progress, to do deep work as I call it. I'm not just messing around, bouncing around, reacting to different things in my inbox, on my computer. I'm doing deep work, which is the kind of state that you want to

be in when you're working on your-- when you're preparing for IELTS, when you're working on your smart goals.

Now then, here are my goals, okay? Just before I jump into this, before each work session, these three questions really help me get the most out of each work session. So first of all, I ask myself what am I trying to accomplish in this session? So, it might be-- the answer might be I want to improve my vocabulary or I want to improve my speaking skills, okay? So, what will I accomplish in this session? Number one.

2) How will I start? How will I get started? This makes it so much easier because once you've thought about it, you're kind of overcoming the initial friction. 3) Are there any hazards present? What I usually write in that section is sitting in a common area people might come up and talk to me, okay?

So, I'm now aware that that is a possible hazard and the way I avoid that hazard is I've got my headphones on. Sometimes it's not even music playing, but somebody will come up to talk to me and they're looking like in the common office and I'll just turn and I'll be like just point at the computer. I'm trying to get the Focusmate window up where somebody else is working on.

So, basically like I can't talk, which is technically the truth. I could do, but this has worked. Some people just bounce off. They just go away and let me get some work done. So, **those three**

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questions: what am I trying to accomplish in this session? How will I start? Are there any hazards present?

MY GOALS FOR 2020

Now, let me tell you my goals for 2020. Most of them are surprisingly IELTS related. So anyway, 1) I want to launch an IELTS speaking app and I want to do this using this kind of technology that we've got in Hey Google or Siri or Alexa. I've been testing and it's been depressing because the technology is not there at the moment for the exercises that I want to put into this technology.

If you want, I'll basically disclose my long-term goals. My long-term goals and hopefully you can help me with this is to eradicate English teachers. Yes, I want to eradicate English teachers. I haven't told the team yet. I'm just joking, but basically just to qualify that phrase, I want to eradicate bad English teachers because when I'm working-- sometimes I work in a cafe or even in the office sometimes I'll see an English teacher and I'll see the class and it just makes me

cringe because they'll be like so what did you do on the weekend? What do you like to do in your spare time?

And I'm like wow! This person is paying for this class and you asked the same questions last time. So, I think in the long term, my app can replace these English teachers. A lot of English teachers are kind of just opportunists because they just see that there's a lot of demand there and they're like ah okay it's better than pulling pints. Somebody can actually pay me and all I have to do is chat. This is a bad state. This is a bad state of affairs for English learners.

I mean a lot of English students they just kind of bite the lip and get on with it and through sheer determination, they do end up speaking English or they've got the money to buy lots and lots and lots of classes. I want to get rid of this problem because it's expensive to have lots and lots of classes and it's expensive to pay somebody to ask you what you do in your free time twice a week. You're not going to improve.

The only way you're going to improve is by lots and lots and lots of speaking. You probably know this and this is why the technology is perfect for this because Alexa and Siri or whatever I use are not going to get bored of you and they're not going to break the bank when you're having class after class.

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So, this is the goal, but first I'm going to start with making a simple straightforward app for the [IELTS speaking](#) where you can chat with it. This is the idea. I want to re-test this vocabulary system that I was talking about a few months ago and I'm going to improve the [IELTS course](#). I will improve the [online IELTS course](#). Let me just give you a bit of background story.

When I started, there were lots of courses online available and all you did was buy the course. I was like okay, that's not going to really get the students any results because you can just buy the course, watch the videos and then what? You're just going to magically improve? Fair enough, you might learn a few tips, but it's not really going to improve your language skills.

This is why you need [feedback](#) because the feedback is not only going to help you with how to construct the IELTS essay, some exam skills but it's also going to help you with the language skills because we've got native English speakers who are going to give you feedback and say okay, this grammar is wrong. This vocabulary is used incorrectly.

So, this is why I went that extra mile and I wanted to include a course with feedback. However, to keep on improving, we need to go a little bit further. I want to introduce into the online course some kind of commitment promise, some kind of accountability groups and some kind of study planner.

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We're still researching this, but giving feedback was kind of a big step. The next big step is to push it. To push it and really just try not only give the students the feedback but also give you an extra push. An extra push so that you're going to turn up and write essays, so that you're going to turn up for the study sessions. This way, it's just going to increase the chances that you'll pass.

The final goal-- this is number four. I will launch a new podcast; a new series of tutorials and this is for students who are done with IELTS. Maybe you've passed or maybe you've just changed course. In the new podcast, we will be talking about progress. We'll be talking about speaking. We'll be talking about confidence. We'll be talking about all of these elements related to speaking English effectively and confidently.

So, that's it. Just to give you a quick summary of the goals. **Launch an IELTS speaking app. Re-test the IELTS vocabulary system. Improve the online course and launch a second podcast**. How am I going to do that? Well, it's going to take a lot of planning, scheduling, and systems. So, maybe it's five hours a week working on the speaking app. When will I do that? Every Tuesday morning. How will I do that? Maybe Focusmate, maybe the Google Calendar. I'll just get it all set up. So, this is the master plan.

Now, let me give you a summary about what we talked about in this tutorial. So, **to reach your goals, first make them SMART** i.e. specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely. Try to aim for a system rather than goals. If you can get the system in place, then the goals will fall into place.

Different types of systems: maybe memorize five phrases **a day, transcribe a podcast, summarize a podcast, learn about a new topic.** Also, you can f**ind your weak spots by getting feedback**. Regarding the system, it's better to start small and then build it up. For example, one sentence a day or one essay a day.

Final thing: **use technology.** Use the certain tools like Google Calendar, any online calendar, focusmate.com and make sure that each session is effective. How do you do that? Well, you answer these three questions. What am I trying to accomplish here? How will I get started? Are there any hazards present?

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Right. That's everything from me and I hope you enjoyed this tutorial. I'm looking forward to hearing from you. Maybe you can send me your goals and we would love to help you reach your goals especially if they're IELTS related.

If you're interested in my goals especially the speaking app, then please get in contact with me. Maybe you're a developer. Maybe you just want to get on board. I could do with some help because I'm asking around-- we're making progress, but I am a little bit impatient with this and I want to get it started. I will be updating as well in the next few podcasts.

So, that's everything from me. Hope you've got an amazing 2020 planned and it's your year. It's your year for passing IELTS and we are here to help you do this. This is why I'm making these tutorials. **So, let's do this. Let's pass IELTS.**

[Music]

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