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INTRODUCTION

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Ben: Hello there, IELTS students. In this tutorial, we are going to be talking with Lucia who has got a very interesting story to share about her IELTS experience. So, welcome to the podcast, Lucia.

Lucia: Hi. Hi, Ben. How are you?

Ben: I'm good, thanks. I'm good. Could you tell us a little bit about yourself; who you are, where you're from, and why you are taking the IELTS exam?



Lucia: Okay. So, like you said my name is Lucia. I am from Portugal. So, I took IELTS academic for a professional registration in the UK. Yes, and I did IELTS academic seven times.

Ben: Wow! Seven times. That's--

Lucia: Yes.

Ben: That is determination. You said for professional registration in the UK. Is it to be a nurse-- to work as a nurse there?

Lucia: No. It's in the general pharmaceutical council because I am a pharmacy technician so I have to be registered with them.

Ben: I see, I see and part of this registration involves taking the IELTS exam.

Lucia: Yes. So, it is a requirement under the law. You need to have a set of scores in the IELTS academic, yes.

Ben: I see. Are you worried about Brexit?



Lucia: No. I was initially. I live in the UK and I'm working as well. I came in 2017. After I came, you know when you start watching English television you realize what's going on, yes? So, I was a bit worried, but I'm not worried anymore.

Ben: Okay. Why aren't you worried anymore?

Lucia: Because-- I don't know. Why am I going to worry? I've done what I which is settlement status-- apply for the settlement status and I think they can't kick us out. I'm working. I'm paying my taxes. I am a good citizen so-- and I passed IELTS so I'm fine. I can prove my English skills, so I'm okay with that to be honest.

Ben: Good for you. Good for you. That's fantastic. Yes, I remember I was in the UK a few years ago and it was when Brexit was just kicking off and I asked a Spanish friend-- I said are you worried and he said like-- he said pretty much the same as you. He said look, I've been here for a couple of years. I've done nothing but work since I arrived and no government in their right mind is going to kick out sort of like hard working tax paying people.

Those who are illegal in the UK they can't pay taxes, but anyway they broke-- but that's just a whole different story, but there were people who came there legally like you did and my friend did and are paying taxes and got professional jobs, are working, contributing towards the



country. Then yes, I think it would be absolute insanity and plus just one last thing because I don't want to talk about Brexit. It drives-- it's absolutely driving me bananas and so much so I've just stopped now I just stopped reading any article because--

Lucia: Yes, because no media about Brexit [unintelligible 00:04:25.16] plan definitely.

Ben: Yes, it's just so easy to get sucked into this media story, to this media like machine and so--

Lucia: Which-- sorry to interrupt you-- which is in many situations opinion-based.

Ben: Exactly.

Lucia: Like kind of prediction.

Ben: Absolutely, absolutely. It's all opinion-based and predictions and I mean nobody can really predict the future and the media they just needed a new amazing story every single day just to get more clicks, to get more eyeballs, but we are going way off-topic. So, let's get back on topic.

Lucia: That's fine. That's fine.



Ben: All right. So, can you tell me about some of the challenges that you were facing with regards to IELTS? Not Brexit, IELTS.

Lucia: Okay. Yes, lots of challenges. Initially, my challenge was with the reading part and writing, of course.

Ben: Got you, yes.

Lucia: Yes, because those were the parts where I was always under. Yes, it was definitely reading and writing; mostly writing.

Ben: Right, I see and what were like the-- what did it feel like not having a solution to this issue with the writing?

Lucia: Tears--

Ben: Oh, no.

Lucia: --sometimes.

Ben: Oh, no.



Lucia: Yes, like what am I going to do and when you see like 6 all the time and you put so much effort and it is very-- it can be very frustrating and you can think oh, I'm going to give up.

Ben: Wow! Or worse.

Lucia: I had those thoughts sometimes, but because I'm really resilient, most of the time I was like no, I'm going to do it. Even if I'm going to [unintelligible 00:06:38.09] for ten times I'm going to do it. I'm going to find the solution.

Ben: Fantastic.

Lucia: And I'm going to keep practicing and also, it's very important to realize that maybe you are not that good even if you think so. Probably you are not that good. It's not the system. It's you. You need to improve.

Ben: Absolutely, absolutely and I just want to highlight Lucia's attitude there; the resilience and the tenacity to keep pushing forward and to keep moving forward and not taking band 6 as satisfactory. Not accepting band 6 basically. So, with the other areas, it seemed like you had those under control. Can you share how you prepared for the other areas, for example, the speaking or the listening?



Lucia: Okay. Regarding the speaking, English is not a complete unknown language for me even before I came to the UK because as I was taught English at secondary school by about five years. So, and I used-- even in Portugal when I was working there, I used to speak English with some customers-- English customers. So, I was a bit confident with speaking.

For listening, I practiced lots of IELTS Cambridge exams basically and I also found some tests on YouTube, for example. There are plenty tests on the Internet.

Ben: Yes. Lucia, is it true that in Portugal the media-- we're going back to the media again-- but like if there's an American show shown or broadcasted on television it's with the original English audio.

Lucia: Yes, it is. The subtitles; we use subtitles so we are always in contact with the English language, yes. So, yes, that's why it's not complete unknown for me the English language.

Ben: Yes, that's interesting because in Spain as you know probably nothing-- practically nothing is with the original audio. It's all dubbed in Spanish and it's-- I can understand the reasons for it, but I think in modern times, nowadays, it's really a bit of a handicap, but anyway that's--



Lucia: Yes, but it's good luck that you might like that thing because in Portugal I think that's why we Portuguese they always try make efforts to speak English when they have an English tourist asking for some directions. So, they always look for speaking in English and I think the fact that we have the subtitles system and the television has helped.

Ben: Yes, yes. I remember I was in Lisbon and I was asking for directions and I was asking in Spanish and the guy must have heard my-- well, understood my accent and he replied in English which was kind of weird for me, but yes, it's true. It's true. Everybody understands at a much higher level than they can speak it I think just because of this exposure. So, just to summarize with the listening you were doing practice tests, with the speaking you've got quite a lot of experience with that through school, through your job, and of course, living in the UK probably helps as well.

Lucia: Of course, yes.

Ben: Day in day out and with the reading before you said you had some issues--

Lucia: Can I say-- can I just mention one interesting thing--

Ben: Yes.



Lucia: --is that when I came to the UK, I did my second exam because my first one I did in Lisbon before I came. When I did my second exam I had a lower score in speaking then I had in my first attempt in Lisbon. Interesting, isn't it?

Ben: Yes, yes.

Lucia: Because I was really nervous and I didn't have practiced that much because I thought oh, now I'm here, I've been here for a few months. I will probably-- I will be fine because I have been speaking even at work because I answer lots of phone calls. So, I will be fine, but I was so nervous that I completely like blocked. I couldn't answer the questions in the speaking exam.

Ben: Oh, that's interesting. Yes, it was like a little bit of overconfidence prior to the exam and then lockdown or like a nervous lockdown during the exam. Interesting.

Lucia: I had one complete band less.

Ben: Wow!

Lucia: One complete-- yes.

Ben: Wow! And how did you overcome this because in your next exams it was a different story.



Lucia: Yes, yes. I was really frightened because I was like oh my God! Now, speaking is also a problem. So, I found a teacher. She is an English teacher and she's English, yes?

Ben: Yes.

Lucia: So, I was practicing the IELTS questions, which is really important with her like 13 minutes twice a week.

Ben: Interesting, interesting. So, you were getting very familiar with the exam, with the format, and with the types of questions that are asked.

Lucia: Yes, yes.

Ben: Excellent, excellent and then this kind of not only boosted your confidence before the exam but actually during the exam I imagine. Was it less intimidating?

Lucia: Yes, because that English teacher she was like an examiner. So, I was also training my confidence and how to control my nerves, how to look at her without being frightened; just to face it as a conversation between two people.



Ben: Interesting, interesting. So, this is-- one of the techniques you adopted to overcome your nerves was to kind of like re-frame it as a conversation?

Lucia: Yes.

Ben: Interesting.

Lucia: Yes, yes, just a normal conversation.

Ben: Excellent.

Lucia: And always think why? Why? Why? Why you are saying that? Always try to develop your speech. Always always try not to interrupt. Try to develop why are you saying that? Invent and look at that as a story, yes?

Ben: Yes, yes.

Lucia: Like telling a story.

Ben: Absolutely, absolutely. I was working with a student a few months ago and we developed a framework-- well, ideally the student would say because after giving sort of like an opinion



and then maybe an example afterwards, which is very similar to the framework of what you just mentioned of like why? Why am I saying this? What are the reasons?

And yes, this is a very interesting point that you've mentioned and very valuable for the students and I'll just take a second to highlight that developing your answers as Lucia just mentioned is absolutely critical and a good way to develop them is-- one way as Lucia just mentioned why? Why? Why? Another one is to expand them using because and then another way is to give examples.

And just one more bonus tip; if you're really struggling, you can use a quick framework which is like this is because of two reasons. Firstly, then talk and then secondly... and it just gives you a structure from which you can expand your answers.

So, back to you, Lucia; let's get back to the writing. What solutions did you try before you joined our course? What solutions did you try to improve your writing with?

Lucia: Right. Initially, I was trying by myself without that much feedback, but then I also asked for some help with that English teacher, but she is not trained for IELTS. So, she gave me some feedback with my essays, but she wasn't trained in terms of structure, in terms of developing



ideas in what they want with writing. I have enrolled in-- can I say another online course? Can I mention-- No, I know I can't. Okay.

Ben: Go for it. Go for it. It's fine. I don't mind.

Lucia: Can I mention the name?

Ben: Yes, go for it.

Lucia: Okay. So, I enrolled in an E2Language which helped me to improve writing and when I was on my third attempt, I actually scored what I needed in writing.

Ben: Okay.

Lucia: Yes, because I asked for a review-- it's not review. When they--

Ben: Yes, like a re-mark.

Lucia: Yes. I asked for a re-mark and it increased, but I was under in reading.

Ben: So frustrating, isn't it? Oh, no.



Lucia: So, I could have done it in my third attempt, yes, but then when I went for the next attempt, I was under with writing again. So, writing was my problem and I increased my reading because I invested your time with reading because I thought okay, now writing I know more or less how to do it. I think I will be okay. So now, I need to invest more time in reading. Then-- yes, I was stuck in the writing.

Ben: Oh, my word. It's like juggling, isn't it? You've got to keep your eye on all of them; all of the balls that you're throwing up in the air. If you just concentrate on one, it could happen that one of them drops which-- yes, it's so frustrating.

Lucia: I was also searching online how to structure IELTS writing essays. Basically, that was what I was-- the resources I was using to help me to improve my IELTS writing, but I wasn't investing that much on proper feedback.

Ben: I see, I see. You just said that you weren't investing that much in proper feedback. Right. I see. So, this is when you thought okay, I'm going to get some feedback. I'm going to join Ben's course. Is that right?

Lucia: One day, so this was after my sixth attempt.



Ben: Wow!

Lucia: Okay. I went to Google and I wrote something like how to pass writing IELTS like the solution and books, yes?

Ben: Okay.

Lucia: I was looking for [unintelligible 00:19:12.07] at that time because that is really good to improve your writing skills as you will need to write on the exam, yes? The spelling is really important.

Ben: Yes, yes.

Lucia: So, reading is really necessary.

Ben: Right.

Lucia: And then I found your book about the writing essay. What is the name? It's IELTS Writing Task 2 Sentence Guide.

Ben: Right, yes, yes.



Lucia: Your book, Ben. Yes, how to get ideas and write high-scoring essays. So, I just-- I read some good reviews about it and I just bought it and a few days when it was delivered I started to reading your book and practicing and then you say that we can send an essay to get the feedback.

Ben: Yes.

Lucia: A free essay and then I had Ellen. She corrected the essay. She gave me the feedback and I liked it and I like the way she did it and I thought okay, that's fine and then I went to your website. I enrolled the course-- the writing course and then yes, and then I purchased some essays pack like 8 essays pack and the 20 essay pack.

Ben: Wow! Got you. Wow! Okay. So, you are very very determined and could I just ask you before you joined the online course did you have any concerns about moving forward; about buying it?

Lucia: No.

Ben: Okay, cool. Good.



Lucia: Of course, I read some reviews because we have so much things on the internet nowadays that we don't know anymore. Is this okay? Is this reliable, yes? So, yes, I read some good reviews and I thought yes, that's fine. I'm going to do it. I think I will be okay.

Ben: Super. Super. Okay then. So, you got the review from Ellen and this was the one that started-- your first review, your first feedback session.

Lucia: Yes.

Ben: What did you like about that review that Ellen gave you?

Lucia: Well, she was reading my essay, she was highlighting like the weakest points like the errors in terms of structure and she's very energetic. She pushes the students and in the end, I was like oh, yes. I want to do it. I want to keep doing it, keep writing. Okay. So, she highlights your weakest points, but she also says okay, you are good in this part, but you need to improve this and it's really like interactive.

Ben: Yes, totally. Super. So, she was not only showing you your errors but also encouraging you and what I think is incredibly important and as you just mentioned is encouraging you and rewarding-- not rewarding but highlighting the parts that are going well.



Lucia: Yes, because then you realize how you are doing, yes? You realize if you need to work more, if you need to invest more or okay, you can go now to the exam and do it because it will be fine probably.

Ben: Totally. So, you were working through the course and you used the template-- well, you'd already got the template or the framework-- the sentence guide from the book. Is that right?

Lucia: Yes. I didn't use it totally. I used some words. I used some ideas, but I didn't use it completely--

Ben: Right.

Lucia: --because I don't like to memorize. I like to understand.

Ben: Yes.

Lucia: I like the logic--

Ben: Yes.



Lucia: -- because this is so difficult exam. It's really tough. So, many hours doing it and I thought I'm not going to memorize this because I believe I will be fine because I understood the logic of it--

Ben: That's it.

Lucia: And the idea, yes.

Ben: Yes, that's it. Yes, this is exactly what I try and communicate in the course. You can memorize it at first. That's okay, but what I strongly encourage is that you take the principles here and you follow the principles of developing your argument using the framework. If you can fit it in word-for-word then you're very fortunate, but ideally, you're just going to use the principles there and develop it and personalize it yourself and you'll have a strongly structured coherent essay.

Yes. So, it seems like you were doing a lot of essay writing to basically memorize-- not memorize because you just said you didn't want to memorize it, but to-- how do you say-- integrate the principles.



Lucia: Yes, yes, yes. So, the main idea-- so, you have to mention your main idea and then explain why and then give an example.

Ben: Exactly. Exactly.

Lucia: Body paragraph, yes.

Ben: Yes and then conclude as well within the paragraph ideally.

Lucia: And conclusion; yes, yes.

Ben: Exactly, yes. So, you were working with Ellen and you bought these extra essays--

Lucia: Ellen-- sorry-- Ellen and Daphne because at some point I had to start with Daphne because Ellen she went on holiday.

Ben: Yes.

Lucia: And then I started with Daphne. So, Daphne, she corrected most of my essays.

Ben: Good, good, okay and then this kind of built your confidence and--

Lucia: Oh, totally, completely. It helped me a lot.



Ben: Fantastic. That's excellent and then once your confidence had been boosted, you decided to submit for the exam again.

Lucia: Yes and what I said I was in my last essay from the package and I said to Daphne, Daphne, I'm sending you my last one. I'm going for a one-week break. I'm going on holiday. So, I was lying because I was going to do the exam. She didn't know that. She didn't know that I was going to do the exam because if I failed it will be a very sad story. So then, when I knew I passed I just emailed her straight away and I was really happy and she was really happy.

Ben: Super. That's beautiful, absolutely beautiful and just one other question; why didn't you continue with the E2 course? You started with them. Why didn't you continue?

Lucia: Well, price-- yes, I think it was the price and probably because-- it helped me to improve my writing skills--

Ben: Okay.

Lucia: --but then-- yes, I think the main reason was the price.

Ben: Okay, interesting.



Lucia: Yes, to buy more essays because with you it has a really good relation in terms of price and what you can offer; the quantity of essays.

Ben: Right.

Lucia: Yes.

Ben: Okay, that's interesting, yes and also like I think some courses are for like a monthly package which doesn't include the essay corrections, but I always thought-- I've always thought and I still do think that it's a complete conflict of interest to offer a monthly priced course with monthly access because like if you're a business, you want to continue them paying the monthly price as much as possible and that means them not passing.

So, it's always been-- that's why I have kind of avoided that structure, but yes, that's why with our course it's just you buy the course, you get access, and you get the essay corrections included and you just keep moving forward and keeping improving with more feedback. So, yes, that's-- as you know, that's our structure.

So, is there anything else that we haven't covered yet that you would like to expand on; maybe some resources, maybe some techniques?



Lucia: Yes. I also used the Grammarly. I bought the Grammarly Premium which was very, very helpful.

Ben: Interesting.

Lucia: Yes. I also wrote about some recent task 2s shown in the IELTS leads website.

Ben: Right, I see. So, you were answering recent questions as well.

Lucia: In terms of ideas. I have lots of notes in my bedroom wall.

Ben: Okay.

Lucia: So, yes, about like the main topics-- the usual topics to help me to improve, to study my ideas and that was the main resources I used.

Ben: Excellent, excellent. Yes, I think getting up-to-date on recent questions and planning possible answers and researching the topics definitely, definitely--

Lucia: And also those topics they can be asked in your speaking.

Ben: Yes, absolutely.



Lucia: So, I think I believe it was really helpful.

Ben: And how did you start getting ideas for these topics?

Lucia: Google, yes.

Ben: So, if you didn't have any idea about the question, you would just type the topic into Google and then start reading about it.

Lucia: Yes, just try to find 1-2 main ideas and just one explanation for each and one or two examples, yes.

Ben: Fantastic. Good work there. Good work. That's a good tip and we also encourage the students at the beginning of the course to write ideas down for a list of questions and if they can't find ideas, we encourage them to do exactly what Lucia just mentioned; to jump online, to do some research, start reading, and start developing opinions about these topics. So finally, Lucia, as my last question-- oh, no. There are two more questions.

Lucia: Okay.



Ben: Well, the final question will be about your grades and the penultimate question is this one which is what would you say to anybody who is sitting on the fence right now about whether they should join us or not?

Lucia: Definitely 200% join IELTS podcast. You are not spending money. You are investing. Yes, I spent a lot of money with this IELTS exam. I don't know how much because I didn't want to realize-- to know the exact amount, but it is without a doubt a great investment and the course and the writing feedback is really, really good and I found two great teachers. They helped me a lot.

Ben: Fantastic. Thank you for that, Lucia.

Lucia: You're welcome.

Ben: Yes, I totally agree with you. It is an investment and it's-- for example, if you can invest in yourself by buying the course and it saves you taking three exams or four exams then it's been a money-saving investment. So, yes, that's the way--

Lucia: And also-- sorry Ben to interrupt you. Having the feedback from Daphne, for example, because she was a teacher who I was most of the time, for me, writing was like a burden.



Writing, I have to write. She turned this in something interesting because the feedback I was getting from her it was really good and I was improving with her and she was giving me really good feedback. So, she was motivating me a lot and I miss her, to be honest. Yes, I miss her.

Ben: You can buy an extra pack of essay corrections.

Lucia: Well, I don't have time. I don't have time.

Ben: Yes, I know what you mean.

Lucia: She's really good.

Ben: That's fantastic, yes, I mean building this relationship and as we were just saying you do build a relationship and you are getting more motivated to write these essays.

Lucia: Oh, definitely.

Ben: Yes, yes, definitely. Okay.

Lucia: Because it's a thing you really need is to-- when you fail so many times, you need lots of motivation and you need to find it somewhere.



Ben: Exactly, exactly.

Lucia: Yes.

Ben: And I think a lot-- well, practically all the people listening to the podcast I think they're fighters because you're fighting to improve, to stay in a country, to get to a country, to join a university, to join a course of some sort. I think everybody on this podcast listening is a fighter--

Lucia: Yes.

Ben: --and we get our motivation maybe it's because I don't know we've got a brother or sister in Canada or maybe we're doing it for ourselves, but motivation is like a finite resource. We can only pull on it so much and sometimes it's good. It's extremely beneficial if we know that somebody is on our team and pushing us forward. It is just so much more motivating when you know that you're not alone in this. So, yes.

Lucia: Yes, definitely.

Ben: I totally agree with you there. So, final question, Lucia, can you tell us what scores-- you took the exam seven times, right?



Lucia: Yes.

Ben: Wow! What were your final scores then?

Lucia: So, my final scores were listening I got 8.

Ben: Wow!

Lucia: Reading 9.

Ben: Wow!

Lucia: Writing 7.

Ben: Wow!

Lucia: And speaking 8.

Ben: That is wonderful, Lucia, wow!

Lucia: Thank you.



Ben: And what an improvement, no? You were worried about your reading and then you went and studied and you got it up to a 9. That's insane!

Lucia: Yes, and once it was my weakest point. This is to show that with work and commitment and being positive you can do it.

Ben: Exactly. Yes, I totally agree with you there and I think your words will be so inspiring because a lot of students--

Lucia: Thank you.

Ben: --they really-- it can be easy-- not easy, but it can be logical to deduce that hey this isn't for me. I'm going to do something else, but if you've got the tenacity and the determination and if you're on the right team just like Lucia mentioned and you're getting the right feedback, then you could definitely do this and as Lucia just mentioned as well, it's up to you. Lucia did the reading all by herself. Is that right, Lucia?

Lucia: Yes. Yes, yes, true, yes.

Ben: Yes. So, with the speaking and with the writing all by yourself can be more challenging. It's not impossible, but it can be incredibly more challenging. With those I recommend feedback,



but with the listening and the reading practice tests and just determination as well, definitely the way forward. So, thank you so much, Lucia.

Lucia: You're welcome.

Ben: You're an absolute star, an absolute inspiration.

Lucia: Thank you very much.

Ben: Well done and yes, you're definitely staying in the UK. As stupid as the politicians are they would never ever ever kick out anybody like you.

Lucia: Yes, hopefully. We will be fine.

Ben: We'll all be fine. We just stop listening to the media, get our heads down and work. We can do much else. Yes. So, thanks again, Lucia.

Lucia: Thank you for all your help and thank you very much for existing and yes, you are doing a great job.

Ben: Cheers, Lucia. Thank you.



Lucia: You're welcome. All the best

[Music]

Female Voice: Thanks for listening to ieltspodcast.com

