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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.

[Music]

**Ben:** Hello there, podcast listeners. In this tutorial, we're going to be talking with Jamie from Mexico and Jamie and I have been having a bit of trouble meeting online just because of the time zones and I recently relocated as well, so that just messed everything up, but we finally got it sorted. So, I'd like to welcome Jamie to the podcast. How are you doing, Jamie?

**Jamie:** Hi, Ben. I'm really fine. How are you?

**Ben:** Good, I'm good. I'm very happy we finally got this meeting finally.

**Jamie:** Me too.



**Ben:** We can finally talk with each other. So, Jamie, could you tell us a bit about yourself like your situation, where you're from, why you're taking IELTS?

**Jamie:** Sure. So, as you just mentioned, I'm from Mexico specifically from Monterrey which is located in northeast Mexico. I'm 31 years old and the reason I took the IELTS test is because my wife and I are looking to immigrate to Canada.

**Ben:** Got you, got you. How are you finding the process for Canada so far? Is it easy? Challenging? Time-consuming? Bureaucratic?

**Jamie:** I think all of the above. It's a bit time-consuming in particular because we are not hiring any legal support or anything. We have talked to a few lawyers just for a little bit of advice, but really all the information that you need is on the Canadian government website. So, it's been time-consuming, but I think it's totally worth it. We're not there yet. We're in the process.



**Ben:** Yes and you've got to move fast because your IELTS certificate only lasts for two years, doesn't it?

**Jamie:** Right, yes, that's true.

**Ben:** Right, I see. Getting back to IELTS then, how were you preparing before you got the grades you wanted?

**Jamie:** My wife and I got this in-person course actually from International House like the official course for the IELTS test.

**Ben:** Okay. So, you were both preparing for it and you were both going to like traditional school setting; classroom, teacher, students, a traditional way so to speak.

**Jamie:** Yes, yes.

**Ben:** Interesting.



**Jamie:** Yes. So, we started there. We took the course and then we took the test. I think it was in September 2018 or somewhere around that. My wife she got the score she needed, but I didn't. Actually, I got a pretty decent score in everything, but writing. So, that's where my journey began actually because I took the IELTS test a total of five times, yes.

**Ben:** Jamie, can I just interrupt you and ask you after each test or after the first test, for example, did you just think okay, I'm going to take the test again and I must be close. So, if I just take the test again, surely I'm going to get it this time.

**Jamie:** Yes, that's exactly what I thought, but it didn't work like that and I'm sure you have had this type of conversation with other students in the past because when I finally stumbled upon your programs and your courses and your content in general, I started to understand that many people around the world tend to underestimate IELTS and it's not because it's rocket science. It is not, but I started to learn that you have to be very strategic on how you actually take the test. So, yes. That's exactly what I thought. I'm close. It's just half a point here and there. I can do it,



right? So, I paid for it again. I booked it. I took it and it happened pretty much-- everything was okay, except for writing.

**Ben:** Interesting. This is so common. This is so, so common and I said it before in previous podcasts. It can be quite frustrating and a lot of people believe it's misleading. It's just like hey, I went from 6 to 6.5 and then it took me two years to get up to a 7, for example, but it's that half a point that is responsible for a lot of frustration.

Just to go a little bit off-topic with regards to the writing, what happened to your other scores while you were focusing all your time, energy, and attention on the writing? What happened to reading, listen, and speaking, for example?

**Jamie:** I got the scores I needed on everything else actually surprisingly and I say this because yes, as you imply, all of my focus or 90% percent of my focus was on the writing part. I



obviously kept practicing the other sections as well, but not as heavily with them. Then again, the writing part was the nightmare for me.

**Ben:** Interesting and for the other parts, what were you doing because it seems like, as you said, most of your attention was on the writing. You just wanted to maintain your scores in the other ones. They were okay. How did you maintain those scores?

**Jamie:** I think for the listening and reading parts, I think it just comes easily for me because I am so used to read and listen to so many contents in English including your podcast, by the way, and music and movies and [Wikipedia](#), whatever. I am very used to consume those contents or pretty much everything online in English.

So, in terms of speaking, what I did was to just practice at home with my wife. She helped me a lot to practice; you know mock up test.



**Ben:** So, the key to maintaining your scores in those areas was basically maintaining your life in English or just basically switching your media to English.

**Jamie:** Yes, pretty much.

**Ben:** Yes, even if you were just searching for something casual on Wikipedia, for example, you would probably search in English before searching in Spanish. Is that right?

**Jamie:** Yes, yes. That's right.

**Ben:** Got you, got you. You know what's interesting? I tried doing this with Spanish. I tried switching my whole media into Spanish. I don't know if you would agree with this, but maybe it was because my Spanish wasn't good enough, but I found that the quality of information in English was a little bit more in-depth and a little bit more detailed and a little bit more up-to-date. Would you agree now or do you think it's 50/50 with Spanish?



**Jamie:** No, I agree totally. I don't think it's balanced and actually, that's one of the reasons why-- I don't even think about it. I just I just do everything or search everything in English. The quality of information, as you mentioned, is obviously-- for me in particular-- it's better in English.

**Ben:** Yes, yes and just one last question and we'll get back to IELTS. Did you find yourself going down [Wikipedia](#) rabbit holes?

**Jamie:** How's that? What do you mean rabbit holes?

**Ben:** Like you search for a term-- I was looking at World War 2 stuff for some reason the other day and once I started reading about it, I clicked on another link and then that led me to another link and before I know it, 20 minutes have passed and I only wanted to know what the abbreviation was for something, but all of a sudden, I've gone down all these pages, I've looked at all these pages and that's a Wikipedia rabbit hole, so to speak.



**Jamie:** Story of my life. I honestly end up with dozens of tabs in my laptop all the time.

**Ben:** Okay, that's good to know. That's good to know.

**Jamie:** You're not the only one.

**Ben:** I think another term is hopelessly curious, no?

**Jamie:** Yes, that's good definition actually, to be honest.

**Ben:** Yes, it's healthy though, isn't it? It's healthy for IELTS to be hopelessly curious because now you've got a--

**Jamie:** Oh, yes.

**Ben:** --full of ideas which you can use for writing, you can use for speaking and all that vocabulary is going to help you obviously in the reading and listening.



**Jamie:** Totally, totally correct. Yes, I totally agree. For me in particular, as I just mentioned, that's how I am. You're absolutely correct when you say that that's useful when you're taking IELTS and you learn so many different topics in the reading part and the listening part and practicing and everything. So, yes. It was like a little bit of a torture for me, but I learned so much. So, it's worth it.

**Ben:** That's fantastic. Now, let's go back to the writing. When you were doing these five tests, how were you specifically or what were you specifically doing? We've covered that you were doing test after test after test. What were you doing in between the tests? Just writing out essays or?

**Jamie:** Yes. So, the first three times that I took the test if I remember correctly, yes, they were between 2018 and the beginning of last year-- of 2019 and those three times, I just-- in my mind, it was just about keep practicing. So, I just kept doing it, but without guidance or anything, without research or anything about the structure. I just replicated what I thought--



**Ben:** What was needed.

**Jamie:** --what the test was asking of me, but not really with a strategy or anything in mind. Just writing and writing and that was it. Actually, I remember I was writing way more words than I needed. For example, in the part 2 of the writing test, they ask you for 250 words and I was getting more than 3,000.

**Ben:** Jesus! Oh, my word! That's insane.

**Jamie:** Yes, that's crazy, but I didn't really think about that. I didn't even notice. I was just doing it automatically for some reason and that was obviously not working. I think it was in October or November this last year I started practicing again, but then I took one of your writing correction packages--

**Ben:** Okay.



**Jamie:** --and then that's when things started making sense for me and I started realizing what was needed on the next time that I take the test.

**Ben:** Interesting. So, just to summarize, you were writing essay after essay and writing more and during this time, were you searching online, looking in books or anything like that?

**Jamie:** Not really. The first three times I just did it automatically. I think in my mind, it was just about getting that half a point that I needed and that was the only goal, but I didn't really think about how I would do that. Just keep doing it, but that's obviously not a good strategy. So, as I said, nearly a year after that, I was aware of the existence of your website and your podcast and everything, but for some reason I didn't ask for help in terms of buying a course or something from you.

**Ben:** Interesting.



**Jamie:** But then I said you know what, here's all this information available and I know that this works because I had listened to the podcast and I subscribe to your mailing list and everything and I said you know what, the obvious thing to do is just to buy one of those courses and just get this done. It's enough already, so let's do this.

**Ben:** Yes, yes, but sometimes it takes a while though to reach that point, doesn't it? Where you just think enough is enough, right?

**Jamie:** Yes.

**Ben:** I'm going to do it. Enough is enough. I've taken the exam so many times. It's now or never. I'm losing time basically. I'm losing time and money. It's time just to invest in myself and get this done I guess.

**Jamie:** Yes, that's correct.



**Ben:** So, let's fast-forward. So, you joined the-- did you join the course or did you just get the essay corrections?

**Jamie:** I got the essay corrections. I think there were eight corrections if I remember correctly.

**Ben:** Right, yes and what was it like when you got your first essay correction back? How did it help you?

**Jamie:** Well, it was like a continuous dynamic situation for me because I really wanted to learn the most off of every correction I got. So, I started noticing that okay, I have like let's say three or four different situations I have to improve within the essay. For example, the conclusion or maybe the examples or reasons or maybe the introduction; things like that. So, I started working on each of them individually because I thought there are so many details in this that if I try to focus on everything at once, I won't make it. So, I started okay, let me just refine my introduction and then we'll go along.



**Ben:** So, with Helen, she would point out the mistakes and then you would be like okay, for now I'm just going to focus on these mistakes, get that perfect, and then I'll move on to the next part. Is that right?

**Jamie:** That's right and actually, interestingly enough, on all the corrections she said you know what, your grammar, your vocabulary, the extension of the words, the use and the placement and everything is perfect. It's too good. There's no problem with it, but the thing that I started noticing is that my problem in particular was I didn't-- let's say, as I said, I didn't land the idea as I should have. It was all over the place; unstructured and vague examples, things like that which in my mind were working perfectly I thought, but that's not the structure that I needed to follow.

**Ben:** Got you, got you. So, she maybe made it a little bit clearer for you of what you needed to write and you also, obviously, must have got a little bit more concise. She probably said hey Jamie, stop sending me 3,000-word essays.



**Jamie:** You know what? Actually, I don't remember her mentioning that in particular, but as I just kept doing it the length of the essays were getting shorter and shorter, but that was not even my plan. It just happened automatically because I started to be more concise.

**Ben:** Yes and I imagine as well you were kind of-- I imagine maybe that at some point you were just like oh, wow! That's all I have to do? And you were possibly thinking that's much easier than I thought. Is that right?

**Jamie:** That's totally correct. That's right.

**Ben:** Yes, yes. I've seen this a lot. I've seen this a lot and a lot of students they might overthink it and then over-write it as a consequence and just think okay, I've covered every single point. I cannot write any more about this subject and really that's not what's needed. What's needed is sort of like a clear argument coherently written that corresponds very tactfully to the question



and is also backed up with arguments and well-structured and communicated effectively. Yes, I'm glad Helen brought on that writing skill.

So, you were working through these corrections and each time, Helen was guiding you as to say this is good, this is bad, this is good. What would you say would be your biggest takeaway from this process?

**Jamie:** Let's say another perspective that is not yours like a third person's perspective saying you know what? You're good in this, so keep doing it, but you just have to notice or you just have to realize that this part that's not what they're asking for. It's so overwhelming that you don't really think much about it. You just act. So, having that guidance in terms of you know what? Okay, that's fine, but you should do it this way or that way. That proved to be very, very helpful for me.

**Ben:** That's interesting and I think we're all in that stage at some points. We say in English that you can't see the wood for the trees. You're just so deep into it and getting that third person to



give you feedback or to look at it from their point of view can be really-- can be extremely helpful, extremely valuable.

**Jamie:** Very much.

**Ben:** Yes, yes, and it's surprising how much you can help and how much you can improve.

**Jamie:** One of the reasons I chose and I decided to buy the essay correction package was-- in my mind, it was about I'm spending all this money on the IELTS tests over and over again. I don't even remember how much that course costs-- your course, but it doesn't matter because it's way cheaper than taking the IELTS test again.

So, I thought you know what? I'm going to invest in this course in particular-- in this package and next time, I'm going to nail the test and that'll be it. That's what happened.

**Ben:** Exactly. I'm so glad you said that because it is like an investment. Some people might see it as a cost; that's fair enough, but I think the best way to see it is as an investment and to save



time and to save money. In IELTS case, you pay \$187 for the course and if you pass the next exam, you've made your money back because you no longer have to start doing test after test and it's not just the money. It's the investment and your time that you're saving and your mental health. Yes, exactly.

**Jamie:** Yes, that's not an understatement. That's totally accurate because it consumes you. It consumes so much time, so much money in my case, and so much stress. You don't have any idea of how light my life feels now that I have my score in IELTS and I'm not joking. It's real.

**Ben:** Absolutely, yes, absolutely and just imagine this is what really bothers me, Jamie, is that all this frustration that students go through and then some of them throw in the towel and they walk away with IELTS, but for the rest of their life or they've got it in their mind that they failed at IELTS and it's so heartbreaking.

It's really like a slippery slope because they're like oh, I failed that IELTS, so I'm rubbish at English and really it's not the case. It's just that they didn't know how to pass the exam which is



a different matter to being good or bad with the language. Like in your case, you're a perfect example. Your English skills seemed-- your language skills seemed pretty good. If Helen was saying hey, your grammar is good, your extensions are good, your use of the language is good, but your IELTS exam skills are not that good.

Now, imagine if you hadn't taken the course or got the essay corrections or done anything, you would be still to this day thinking I'm rubbish at IELTS. Maybe you would be, I don't know, but you might be thinking wow! Something must have been wrong with my English. Maybe it's not as good as I thought and it's not a good way to live I don't think.

**Jamie:** Yes, it was so frustrating. It was so confusing for me because I think my English is good enough. I don't have a basic level skill and all my friends were telling me why didn't you get that score that you needed if I know that you're good at English? Like what's happening? And I was telling them I don't know. I have no idea. Maybe it's the structure. Maybe I'm missing something. So, yes.



**Ben:** This is so true, but just one thing for the listeners that in Jamie's case, it wasn't the language skills. It was the exam skills and a lot of students I know they get really mixed up and sometimes they might be lacking language skills, but they think that they just need the exam skills and it's really difficult to know which you need.

So, this really is why getting a third party to look at your work-- getting a teacher to look at your work and give you that feedback is the fastest way to improve because they can tell you exactly-- okay-- well, a good essay correction service can tell you exactly okay, you need to work on this or you need to work on that. Unless you do that, you're making life much more challenging than it needs to be.

So, Jamie, on the exam day, what happened? How did you feel for the writing? Let's just focus on the writing.

**Jamie:** All right. So, actually, to add a little bit more to this, a few days-- I don't even remember when, but a few days before the IELTS test date which I think-- yes, it was this past December.



As I mentioned, I subscribed to your mailing list-- to the IELTS podcast mailing list and I got one of those emails, but that one in particular was gold for me because it was actually on how to better structure the Writing Task 2 essay.

So, I remember it completely explained the different parts and the examples and the coherence and grammar and everything was totally explained like okay, this is an example of a band like band 6, but this is an example of a band 8 and there was like a comparison about it. So, I pretty much took a dive into that particular email, studied it and analyzed it and everything. Yes, yes, I was going crazy. I was going crazy. That was the final part that helped me to feel more confident on the real exam.

So, going back to your question, I go to this IELTS test center and everything and it's strange because you cannot underestimate the other parts because they're equally important, but for me, pretty much the only focus was in writing. So, I was in the other parts like listening and everything, but I tried just to keep the writing related thoughts aside for a bit--



**Ben:** Okay.

**Jamie:** --and then the writing part started and what I did was to structure all my ideas into a paper because what I took is a computer-based exam--

**Ben:** Okay.

**Jamie:** --but they give you this paper sheet and everything to take notes if you want to. So, I did and I made this like map, like an actual map-- yes, something like that and then based on that, I just started typing and that was it. I did it.

**Ben:** So, you just downloaded-- you looked at the question and you got all the ideas out onto a piece of paper and then you just started writing and following the structure that you received in the email from the mailing list. Is that right?

**Jamie:** Yes, pretty much that's what I did.



**Ben:** Cool. Well done. Well done, man, well done. So, what would you say to somebody who is thinking about joining the course or thinking about getting some feedback on their essays?

**Jamie:** I would say don't think too much about it. Just get help. Just ask for help and invest in this type of courses or corrections or whatever you need because as I said, I spent pretty much a whole year on that process, but if I would have done that since the first time or second time that I took the IELTS test, I would be probably in Canada right now.

**Ben:** Wow! Yes.

**Jamie:** So, and actually, I think that's the most important part because for many of us, it's not about the IELTS test. It's not about writing or it's not about the reading part. It's about a higher-- a more important goal like go study in Australia or to United States or whatever or immigrate to another country. It's pretty much-- for me in particular and I know many people think like this as well, it's just like a life goal. So, IELTS is a-- obviously, it's a really important part



of it. You have to go through it, but just think about the importance of this specific part of the journey like the IELTS test.

**Ben:** This is a really elegant way of putting it, Jamie, is just thinking about what are the bigger goals? How are we going to get there? IELTS is one small step to get us to where we're going to go. Are we going to let this tiny little step frustrate us and hold us back for a year, for two years? Or are we just going to deal with it? Take the hit, buy the course or whatever, get the help, sign up for a language course or whatever. Are we going to do that or are we going to let it hold us back and delay us reaching our overall goal?

Yes, I think this is a really good point actually because by focusing on this IELTS exam, I guess it's easy to lose sight of the big picture.

**Jamie:** Yes, totally.



**Ben:** I think this is the issue here. That's a really good point. I've never seen it like that, so thank you. Really. Really, thank you for elucidating that point. So, Jamie, tell us what scores you got the first time you took the exam.

**Jamie:** So, the first time on listening I got 8, reading I got 8 I think as well, speaking I got 7, and writing I got 6.5, but I needed a 7. The minimum that I needed was a 7 in writing.

**Ben:** Okay, okay and then was it pretty much the same story for each of the times afterwards?

**Jamie:** On all the other sections, I kept improving my scores, but not in writing. So, I actually ended up with some 9s, for example, on reading, on listening and everything, but I kept getting 6.5 on writing and that was the only thing--

**Ben:** Ouch!

**Jamie:** Yes, that was the only thing that was holding me back from the immigration process.



**Ben:** So frustrating. So, what scores did you end up with?

**Jamie:** So, I ended up with 9 on listening which is pretty much the highest. I got a perfect score in listening, 8.5 on reading.

**Ben:** Wow!

**Jamie:** 7 on speaking and 7 on writing and to be honest-- and you didn't ask for this, but to be honest when I got the scores, I had to go to the IELTS center to get the printed version of the scores. You have no idea. I was just trembling and so nervous because I felt that I did it this time, I achieved the score that I needed, but you never know.

It's also subjective because somebody else in another part of the world is actually reviewing and examining your writing and speaking tests. So, you never know. Maybe I think I did great, but the examiner didn't think like that. So, it's so nerve-wracking the moment that you're seeing your score.



So, I just opened the folder and the first thing I saw and that was my only concern at that moment was the writing part and I got the 7 that I needed. So-- and I'm not joking-- I started jumping around and screaming like I did it. I finally did it. It was crazy. So, I called my wife and she started screaming as well and we went crazy that day.

**Ben:** That is beautiful. That is fantastic, Jamie. Well done, man, well done.

**Jamie:** Thank you, thank you. Thank you and actually I just wanted to mention a little bit more because it's not only-- and I hope this helps some other people that are in touch with your programs, because it's not only the courses and it's not only the essay corrections in my case or whatever. It's also the mailing list. It's also the podcast. It's also all the resources that are available in your website because in my personal experience, I had to deep dive on this IELTS situation and this IELTS experience.

So, it's not just practicing three or four times. It's reading the IELTS materials and getting help and listening to the podcasts while you're in the car or whatever. So, thank you for all the



materials that you have because most of them are for free and those are really, really helpful, but actually the one that helped me the most as I said was the essay correction program.

**Ben:** That's fantastic. Thank you very much, Jamie. Yes, thank you and just for the listeners, yes, Jamie's right. Get on that email list. Go to [ieltspodcast.com](http://ieltspodcast.com). You'll see one of those lovely pop-ups, stick your email in there and we'll send you lots of free material, sample essays, essay structures, tutorials, and also special offers for you to get essay corrections and also more information about the online courses as well.

So, yes, that's a good point, Jamie, and I really do forget to mention it, but I should mention it every episode, but I do forget sometimes. So, thank you. Thank you for that.

**Jamie:** Yes, sure.

**Ben:** I think that's everything. So, thank you very much, Jamie. You've been an absolute star. You've been a wonderful guest; very honest, very helpful for the students.



**Jamie:** I hope everyone who listens to this gets cheered up and get back on track and nail that IELTS course.

[Music]

**Female Voice:** Thanks for listening to [ieltspodcast.com](http://ieltspodcast.com)

