



Student: I had Ellen. She was reading my essays. She was highlighting like the weakest points like the errors and 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.

INTRODUCTION

Ben: Hello there, IELTS students. Welcome to IELTS podcast. You no longer have to worry, fret or panic about IELTS because we are here to guide you through this test jungle. Enjoy these IELTS tutorials and if you need more help or want to access the famous online course, you can visit us at ieltspodcast.com.

Ellen: Hi, everybody. This is Ellen and I'm back today with another podcast talking about Writing Task 2. In a couple of my recent podcasts, I've dealt with Task 2 and what I've been doing is I've been looking at different types of essays.



One was a sample essay that would certainly get at least an 8 if not an 8.5 or a 9. So, we looked at that. We analyzed that and what made it such an essay of a high band score. I also recently talked about a 6.5 essay and what kinds of decisions an examiner has to make and what might lead an examiner to choose to give that kind of a score for an essay.

The reason that I'm bringing that up is because the podcast today is going to deal with some of those issues that I talked about in both of those podcasts, but this time I kind of want you the audience to play the role of the examiner. I would like to hear what you would give this essay.

So, just to give you a little background about this student, this is an old student of mine who was again stuck at a 6.5. He took the test at least five or six times. I don't even know. Sometimes he would take the test and not even tell me that he had registered for it and his scores really varied. Sometimes he got a 6.5, sometimes he got a 6. So, it wasn't really consistent. I think he even got a 7 once, but then one of his other scores wasn't a 7. Anyway, that's not really the point.



The point is though that this is the person who is almost there, but isn't consistently there, okay? So, I want today for us to look at an essay of this student and see what would we give him and what kind of score do we think this essay deserves? So, we're going to look at the essay. We're going to pull it apart.

Again, it's always really, really helpful to have the band descriptors next to you when you look at any sort of an essay whether it's your own or whether it's the work of someone else to kind of get yourself in the mindset of the examiner. If you can get in their mindset, then you can make some decisions in your own writing that will help you kind of alter what you write and make it the kind of writing that an examiner will view more favorably or if not more favorably at least something that kind of corresponds to the band scores that you need.

All right. So, without further ado, let's go into this essay. I'm not sure where this essay comes from. I believe it's one of those topics that was posted somewhere on the internet as a recently



listed topic. So, I can't give credit unfortunately to whatever site posted it, but let's take a look. The student might have given it to me himself. So, let's take a look at this.

The topic is some people think that professional athletes make good role models for young people while others believe they do not. Discuss both these points of view and give your own opinion.

Okay, so this is pretty typical. You're discussing the **two viewpoints**; athletes are good role models, athletes are not good role models, okay? Then you also have to insert your own position somewhere in there. So, let's see what our IELTS student here did starting with the introduction.

Many people believe that the star system of sports provides the young with a productive example to imitate while there are others who think the opposite. Okay. So, what is he doing in this first sentence? Pretty textbook case of an introductory sentence. He is essentially rewriting



the task. He is putting it in his own words. He's done a decent job of it, but there is some error with the lexis.

He wrote *a productive example to imitate*. That's not the word he wanted. The word that creates a collocation is constructive. So, we talk about a constructive example or you could talk about a positive example. Those both create collocations, but we don't say a productive example.

So, maybe this is something that comes from his native language or maybe he just messed up the words. We're not really sure, but definitely in that first sentence, we have a poor word choice, okay? So, that's kind of one strike against our student here today, okay?

So, the next sentence says in my opinion, **both sides provide their thesis with solid arguments** and it is difficult to express a clear position, but although I think there are negative aspects, I



realize that the success of such people is founded on hidden virtues that everyone should have in mind.

Okay. So, this sentence is long. It extends over three lines. I don't know about you, but I got kind of lost somewhere in the middle. There is a position expressed, but how clear are you on the position that our student here expressed? I'm going to read it one more time so that you can hear it and see if you can kind of pull out what the position of the writer is.

In my opinion, both sides provide their thesis with solid arguments and it is difficult to express a clear position, but although I think that there are negative aspects, I realize that the success of such people is founded on hidden virtues that everyone should have in mind.

So, it sounds kind of impressive when you first look at it and you can't really say that there is anything wrong per se grammatically, but it is a sentence that requires re-reading. You don't really want that, okay? Especially when it comes to presenting your position, you want to make



sure that your position is clear with the first read-through. Personally, I've read this now at least twice and I still have to kind of work through it.

My overall feeling is that the position is not clear and if there is a position, it is not directly related to what we're talking about because through all of these lines where does the writer actually tell us his position? He says *I realize that the success of such people is founded on hidden virtues that everyone should have in mind.* What does that mean? That they are good role models or they aren't good role models?

So, you can see that our student here has really not answered the question, okay? There's all this writing, there's all this language, but you can't really say okay, this person is in favor of athletes as role models or this person is not in favor. It's just not clear. So, it's long, it's wordy, there are some nice words like thesis and collocations like solid arguments and clear position and you think wow! This is a person who has a really good command of English, but with that



good command of English, is there actually a message being put forward and my conclusion here is well no, not really.

Okay. So again, you can look at the **band descriptors** if you have them with you and see where does this fall in the band descriptors? If you look, it says in band 6 presents relevant main ideas, but some may be inadequately developed. Well, no. That doesn't apply here.

If you look in band 7, it says **presents a clear position throughout the response**. Well, we've pretty much established here that it's not throughout the response because from the introduction, the position of this writer isn't entirely clear. We don't really know where he stands on this issue of athletes as role models.

All right. So, let's move on to the body paragraphs. Okay. *Clearly, the major argument for those against the professional athletes as role models is the fact that the most known part of their success is their extravagant and out-of-limits way of their living. They are usually the personalization of consumerism as a concept and as existence though the products that they*



advertise or through the goods that they consume. Their moral limits are often questionable and there are a lot of rumors around their relationships with the others which implies often personality disorders.

Okay. So, I'm going to ask you all to take a look at the band descriptors and think about this in terms of task achievement. Was it developed? Are there any conclusions here? Were the arguments supported? Were there arguments?

Then in terms of **coherence and cohesion**, were the arguments laid out in a logical manner? Was there proper linkage between the ideas? What about the grammar; was it accurate? Did you see a range? For lexical resource; was it precise? Was this person able to say what he wanted to say?

Okay, so see these are some of the things that examiners are looking at. If you want, pause the podcast, take a look at the band descriptors and listening again to this paragraph, what would



you give this? Obviously, examiners are not rating your writing paragraph by paragraph, but as an examiner progresses in an essay, they are kind of tweaking their score.

They might start out with something in mind like well, maybe this is a 6, maybe this is 6.5, maybe it's a 7 and then as they go on through the essay, they're honing that idea and they're kind of making some corrections like well, maybe this is 6. Well, maybe that part is a 7, okay?

So, I'd be interested to hear what you would give this. I'm not going to tell you what I would give it, but we can look at it again and think about where some of the weak points are and where some of the strong points are.

So, looking at the first sentence: *clearly the major argument for those against-- you don't need the here. It should be against professional athletes as role models is the fact that the most known part of their success is their extravagant and out-of-limits way of their living.* Now, this



last section is really not an appropriate expression in English. We don't say that people have *out-of-limits way of their living*. It's an unnatural expression in English.

We would say this rather differently. So, we would say that their **extravagant and over-the-top way of living**. Now, that would make a more sensible expression, not out-of-limits but over-the-top. So, let's try it again. Clearly, the major argument for those against professional athletes as role models is the fact that the most known part of their success is their extravagant and over-the-top way of life. Okay, that makes a little more sense.

They are usually the personalization of consumerism. He doesn't mean personalization. He means the personification. So again, you can see that it's another example of a wrong vocabulary word. It's close, but it's not precise. It's an error and it reduces the accuracy here. So, they are usually the personification of consumerism as a concept and as existence through the products that they advertise or through the goods that they consume.



Okay. Well, where is the extension of this? Where is the development? Where does he give us sort of some tangible illustration or understanding of what he's talking about? These are some rather broad and strong statements, but there's nothing backing them up. So, they just sound as theory and they're not extended, okay? So again, look at the band descriptors and see what that means when you're not supporting your ideas well. You're not really giving them the extension that they need, okay?

So, what our student does here instead is he goes on into more detail, but not actually supporting his previous idea. Take a look. He says *their moral limits are often questionable and there are a lot of rumors around their relationships with the others*. He doesn't mean with the others, he means with others-- *which implies often personality disorders*.

Okay. Again, there's no extension of this. It's a rather broad statement. It's rather absolute-- their moral limits are often questionable. So, how could you change this? There was another podcast with us recently about hedging and about softening some of your arguments. So,



rather than saying their moral limits are often questionable, you could say that often, the moral limits of these athletes can be questionable.

All right. So, you're not putting everybody into one big pile of immoral people with questionable behavior, but you're saying that you know what? Maybe sometimes some of these people behave this way, okay? It shows a little more nuance and that's really what you want to do in this essay.

So, sometimes their moral limits may be questionable and there can be a lot of rumors around their relationships with others and instead of saying which implies often personality disorders, which is poor syntax; we just wouldn't phrase a sentence like this, what he could have said here is with others possibly implying personality disorders.

Now here, you would also need to extend this. Give us an example. Tell us maybe something that you know from-- it sounds like this person knows some things about sports, so maybe he could give us an example of something he's heard, something he's read or maybe even just a



theoretical example like a pretend example. It's not a truth test. No one is going to give you a lie detector, so make something up.

Say that maybe such-and-such basketball player was rumored to be involved in X Y Z questionable behavior. This then brings the concern that perhaps these people are not the best role models, okay? Just some example, **but try to do something that supports what you're saying**. Don't just leave it kind of in a theoretical sort of way where there's nothing supporting it and nothing kind of anchoring it with any fact or any extension, any sort of further illustration, okay?

So, yes, there was a problem with some of the vocabulary a little bit in terms of syntax. Most of the grammar has been pretty good actually and there are some nice elements of vocabulary, but there's still some imprecision.

So again, I'm hoping that some of you while you're doing this, while you're listening to this podcast have the band descriptors and are looking to see what would I give this student? That's



kind of what I wanted you to do with this. So, think about it a little bit and thinking about the errors as well as some of the strong points in this essay, where would you put this candidate?

So, let's take a look at the second body paragraph. *On the other hand, how has this success been achieved? For many people, the answer may be 'talent' and talent is in quotes, but everybody knows that talent without devotion, perseverance, and patience does not always conclude to success.*

Okay, now there's a lot of this I actually really like. This is lovely. It's interesting. The person here took a risk by including a question in that introductory sentence of that paragraph. That is a risk and sometimes that risk works out for some students, sometimes it doesn't. Here, I think it's nice because it's a nice kind of segue into the opposite side of the argument and it works.

Unfortunately, there's a grammatical problem in the next sentence that makes this whole thing kind of not as strong as it could have been. So, he says that patience does not always conclude to success. That's the wrong word here. Again, we've got another example of a poor vocabulary



word. So, what he really meant to say was talent does not always result in success, okay? That would have been-- or patience does not always result in success or it does not equate to success. That would have been good too, but conclude is the wrong word here to be sure, okay?

Thus from this point of view, athletes who struggle to be better every day through hard constant work may be a good role model for the young. Moreover, we discover that devotion plays an extremely important role in the effort to reach success for these people. Without a firm belief in self, these athletes would not achieve what is shown on the TV and the media as a life full of money and glamour.

Okay. So, this paragraph for me is a lot stronger. The grammar is-- with that one little exception-- accurate. There is some nice vocabulary; an extremely important role, the effort to reach success, firm belief in self-- that's beautiful. That's very nice language. So, now you're kind of like well, this is accurate. This is precise and now this candidate is really able to say



exactly what he wants to say. You get the idea that these are precise ideas here. There is nuance here.

So now, what do you do with that especially when you consider some of the mistakes and kind of missteps that we saw in the previous paragraph? Now, the next question that I have for you, podcast listeners, is what about the task achievement? Has our student here answered the question? Has he developed, has he supported his arguments?

Look at what those arguments were. Listen to this paragraph again and ask yourself did he support his arguments? What were his arguments? What was the central idea of this? And just to help you and guide your thoughts a little bit, the answer is that-- he's saying here that yes, these people need to be talented and they also have other traits like devotion, perseverance, and patience and this combination of traits is what makes athletes good role models because not everybody has these things, okay?



So, it's this trifecta-- well, it's more than a trifecta, but it's this kind of combination of traits that makes these people worth admiration, okay? They struggle, they overcome adversity, they devote themselves, and they have confidence as well. He says here without a firm belief in self, these athletes would not achieve what is shown on TV.

So, he does support this idea of devotion and perseverance as traits that are important and thus these traits make athletes worth being role models, okay? So, this paragraph, for me, was definitely stronger than the previous one.

Now, let's take a look at the conclusion. *In conclusion, it is not easy to answer straight to this matter I think although that we should understand the deeper causes of phenomenon and exploit them for the better future before we condemned as an inadequate role model.*

Okay. So now, this paragraph, unfortunately, has undone a lot of the beautiful language we saw in the previous paragraph. There are mistakes with the grammar. There are mistakes with the punctuation. I tried to kind of show you where some of that punctuation was with commas etc.,



but this definitely weakens that kind of positive effect that we had in the previous paragraph. So, first of all, we have the first sentence. In conclusion, it is not easy to answer straight to this matter. That's an incorrect expression. We don't say to answer straight to this matter. So, I think he means something else here. He means in conclusion, it is not easy to draw a clear conclusion with regard to this issue.

Now, if you think about it, this is not really what the essay has asked. They do want your opinion and they do expect you to provide some sort of opinion here either in favor or against the argument, okay?

Then he says I think, although, which is wrong, all right? That although should not have had a comma after it. So, it should have just been I think although we should understand the deeper cause of the phenomenon-- you know what? The although didn't go at all actually now that I look at it again. So, it should be I think that we should understand the deeper causes of a phenomenon.



Now, when he says that, which phenomenon? What phenomenon are we referring to here? So, this is a word that is referring to something, but that reference is not entirely clear. So, it's definitely leaving a big question mark here when he says the deeper causes of the phenomenon because I'm not sure what phenomenon he's referring to.

So, he says I think that we should understand the deeper causes of the phenomenon and exploit them for the better future. Well, if we don't know what that phenomenon is and the deeper causes of that phenomenon, how can we exploit them? So, it's a lot of words that sound lovely, but they don't really create meaning. So, they don't really create coherence. They don't really extend an argument because we're confused. We can't conclude and we can't understand what is being said here.

And then the last clause here is before we condemned as an inadequate role model, but condemned is the wrong tense. He means before we condemn someone as an inadequate role model. So, that word someone there was missing, but again as I've said, some of the language



here is just unclear. We're not really sure what our student is trying to say. So, it's not the strongest conclusion and it's certainly not the conclusion we would have hoped for after such a strong second body paragraph, okay?

TELL US YOUR OPINION

So, I would love to hear in the comments from you what would you give this essay? What did you think were the strong points? What did you think were the weak points and how would you have changed this around? What would you write on this topic? I think that would be an interesting kind of dialogue to begin. So, I absolutely invite you to write to us and tell us what you think, okay?

So, I wish you all the best of luck. Thanks for listening and keep on writing.

[Music]



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