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INTRODUCTION

Ellen: Hi there, podcast listeners. Welcome to another tutorial with me, Ellen. On today's tutorial, we're going to talk about speaking. Specifically, I'm going to go over the band descriptors with you to give you a better understanding of how you are being scored in speaking for the IELTS.

Before we get started, I want to recommend that you have the band descriptors in front of you. They are readily available all over the internet. All you have to do is type into your favorite

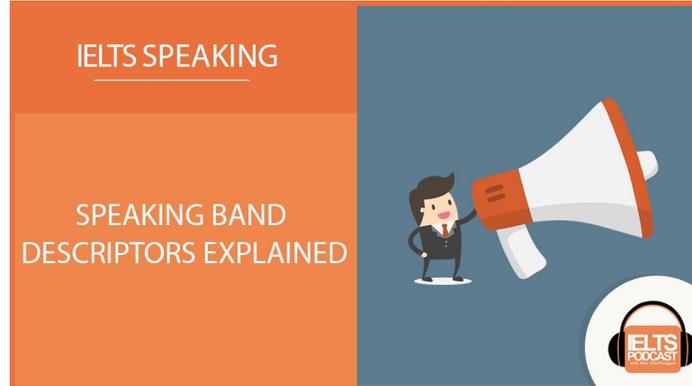


search engine IELTS speaking band descriptors and the public version will be readily available for you. The public version doesn't differ too much from what the examiners have, so it gives you a nice sense of how you're being graded, what the examiners are looking at.

ROLE OF IELTS EXAMINERS

Okay. So, I want you to understand a few things about the examiner; the job of the examiner and the role the examiner is playing when listening to you speak. The first thing that you have to remember is that the examiner is really juggling quite a few oranges at that moment. What do I mean?

I mean that the examiner, first of all, is timing you and timing is really strictly recorded. So, one of the things that the examiner's mind on is on that clock. So, he or she has to make sure that he's not under-timing you or over-timing you. The second thing of course is the examiner is

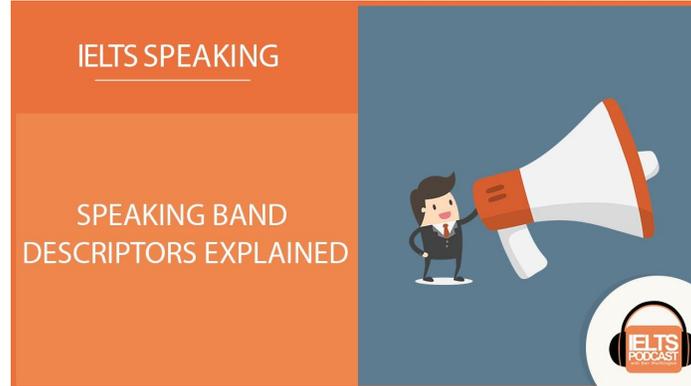


paying attention to the questions. Has he asked the right questions? What questions are going to be asked next?

So, there's this process going on as well and then at the same time, the examiner is also listening to you to see what kind of score he or she is going to give. There is no one part of that test that will determine what your score will be rather it is a very holistic score which the examiner is formulating and changing in his mind throughout those 11-12 minutes.

So, a lot of times I know people have come to me and have said oh, I totally messed up my part 2. It was a disaster. I'm sure I got a 4. I'm sure I got a 5. Well, even if you have a part 2 which is less than stellar, that doesn't make or break your score, okay? Like I said, it is very holistic.

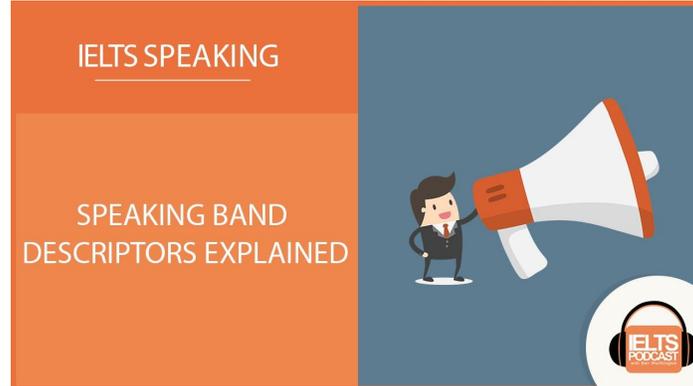
So, what's happening is in that first part of the test, you probably are aware that these are questions related to you. They're not particularly abstract. They're about your past, about things you do currently, so they're about topics that are very familiar to you.



So, that's when the examiner is getting his or her first impression of your speaking and maybe thinking okay, well this student is maybe around a 6. Maybe this student-- Wow! This is some nice language. Maybe this student is in that 7 or 8 range. So, that's what the examiner is doing and then throughout the test the examiner is going to be kind of recalibrating this first impression to see where you fall on the other-- on all the four criteria, okay?

I want to talk about what these different scores are. When we say someone is a 9 or someone was an 8, what do we mean, okay? So, the first thing I want you all to understand is that who could possibly get a band 9? Is it just native speakers? Well, it's people who speak native-speaker like. That's who is going to get a 9.

So, it's people who speak really very fluently, very naturally, people who are able to say exactly what they want to say at the moment they want to say it. So, there is precision. There is accuracy. There is fluency. So, these are people who you say wow! I can carry a beautiful elaborate detailed conversation with this person. It flows nicely and this person is absolutely



capable of saying everything he or she wants to say with very, very, very few inaccuracies.

Maybe one, maybe two, not much more, okay?

Pronunciation is-- it might not be native speaker pronunciation, but still it is-- and I've talked about this in one of my other podcasts that pronunciation is really a whole host of different elements. So, it doesn't matter if you speak with an accent as long as you're using a lot of those other pronunciation features like emphasis, like stress, like appropriate use of pauses.

So, all of these things will figure into your score and even if you do have accented speech, if you're using them all appropriately all of these features, you could very well get a 9, okay? So, that's what a band 9 speaker looks like.

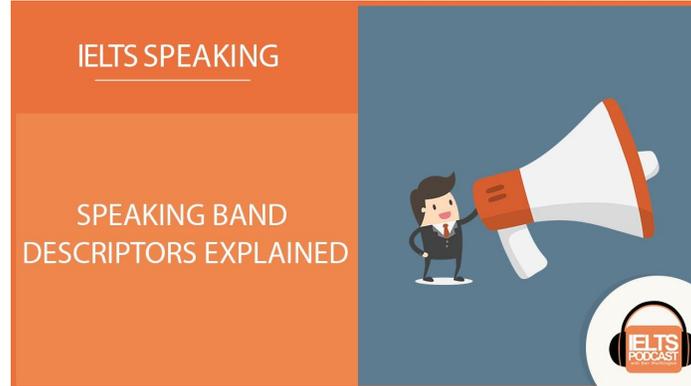
A band 8 speaker has a lot of these same characteristics that I just described, but maybe there is a tiny bit more hesitation. Maybe there is occasional repetition of a word. There's still a lot of lovely language, a lot of lovely vocabulary, precise vocabulary, but maybe it's not as seamless as



the band 9 is. Most of the sentences that this person is speaking are error free. There is some advanced grammar, some advanced vocabulary, and there is sustained use again of pronunciation, okay, all of these features that I just talked about. Maybe occasionally, there will be a little hesitation, a little error, but it's very, very minimal, okay?

So, there's not a huge difference between an 8 and a 9 and 8 maybe just doesn't have that flawlessness that you find in a 9, okay? So, there will be a few flaws here and there, but really not very many.

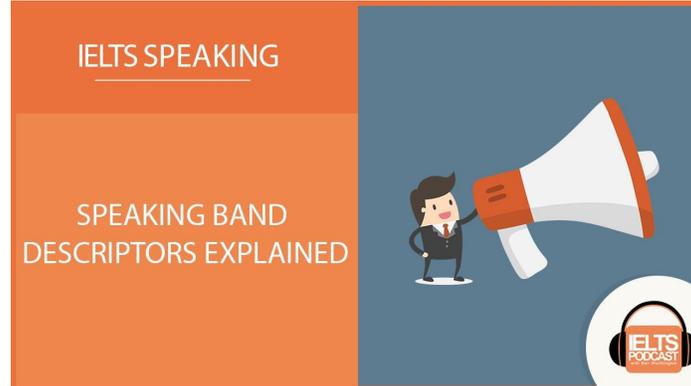
So, with that now I want to go to the 7, okay? We're going to talk about the 7 more at length because I know that this is a score a lot of you are interested in getting. The 7 much like the 8 speaks at length. So, this is a person who can carry on and who can continue what he or she is saying without stopping. He or she is able to continue without becoming incomprehensible. So, the examiner can understand a flow of speech without getting lost, without asking himself what



is this person saying? So, the person is able to speak for a considerable amount of time without confusing the examiner.

Maybe occasionally, this kind of candidate hesitates. Maybe these hesitations will be because the candidate is searching for a word in English that might not come readily, but there's not a whole ton of this type of hesitation, okay? Now, even native speakers hesitate in our speech. You'll hear in my podcast sometimes I hesitate. Well, there is a difference between language-related hesitation and content-based hesitation.

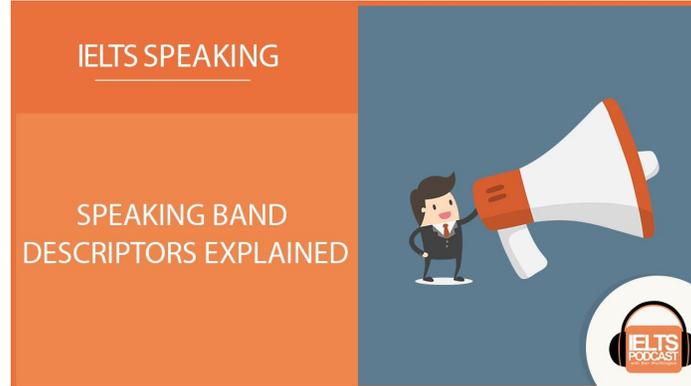
What I do primarily is-- and not just me, but I mean every native speaker is more content-based hesitation because we're looking for how to formulate what we want to say next. So, how do we want to string together our thoughts and our words in order to convey what we're trying to say? That's what content-based hesitation is and you'll see this of course in a band 7.



You'll see this even in a band 8 or band 9, but in a band 7 what you'll start seeing is some language-related hesitation and a trained exam examiner can spot the difference, okay? In a 7, the candidate may correct himself. So, if he has mispronounced a word or maybe he has used the wrong tense or think he's used the wrong tense or maybe he's used a wrong preposition, this kind of a candidate will catch himself and then try to correct it. There's some of this going on in a 7, but the candidate can use a whole lot of connectors and discourse markers.

So, you're probably wondering what our discourse markers because it's actually mentioned all over the band descriptors for IELTS. Discourse markers are these words that we kind of pepper our speech with. They have different functions, okay? So, at a band 7, the discourse markers are used flexibly. There's a range of them.

So, a band 7 is not just using words like and, but a band 7 will use words like also, as well as, okay? So, a band 7 won't just say for example, but he'll say such as, all right? Just to give you a couple of more examples, a band 7 wouldn't just say because or so, but a band 7 might throw in



a consequently, okay? So, there's a range of these and they're used flexibly. They're used well. They're used appropriately.

Okay. Vocabulary; the lexical resources that a band 7 is going to be using-- this person is able to talk about a variety of topics. This person is not somebody who gets stuck in talking about different topics regardless of the level of sophistication, okay? So, this is a person who can hold his own.

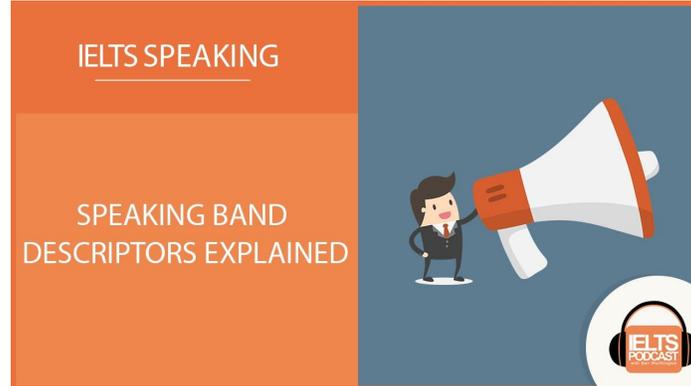
However, there might be some mistakes, okay? It might not be exactly the word that the person wants to use, but there will be some idiomatic language; some nice idioms. There'll be some nice collocations, okay, that are a little less common, a little more advanced and occasionally, when this person doesn't know the word that he wants to use, he'll find a lovely way to paraphrase and to kind of get around any sort of obstacles that he has with his vocabulary, okay? So, it's a person who may not be able to speak with the precision and the



fluency of a 9 or even an 8, of course, but this is a person who can hold his own in any level of conversation, okay?

Now, as for grammar, a band 7 is absolutely using complex structures and we know I've talked in one of my previous podcasts about what some complex structures are. So, we're talking about conditional sentences. We're talking about modal verbs like would, could, should, some more challenging tenses like the modal perfect is a challenging tense for a lot of people to use like should have done, must have gone, things like this.

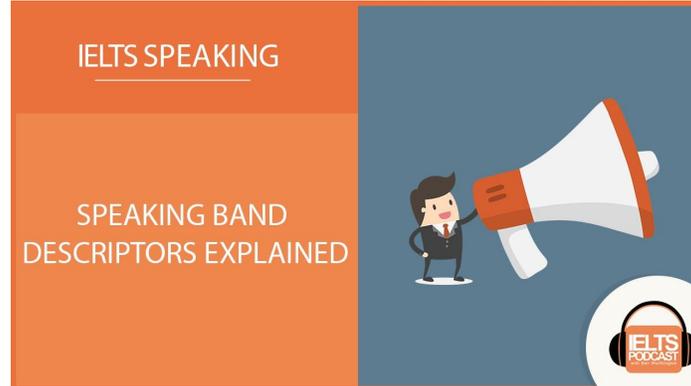
Using things perhaps like inversion; only after we arrived at the hotel did we realize that we forgot our luggage at the airport or something like that. So, that's an example of advanced language. At a 7, a person is going to be using some of these types of grammatical structures, but of course there might be some errors and of course, the more complex this language is, it's kind of expected that there'll be some mistakes.



What I want you all to remember today is that what an IELTS examiner is going to maybe look upon less favorably is grammar errors on simple grammar, okay? So, it's really rather strange for the examiner if you're getting a third conditional correct, okay, if I had known you were going to cook, I would not have brought home burgers, okay?

So, it's kind of strange for an examiner when you get a sentence like that right, but then you don't get simple things right like the present simple or you don't have correct subject-verb agreement, things like that. So, you want to absolutely make sure at a band 7 that your simple grammar is accurate and then of course, the examiner will be more lenient when it comes to errors with your complex grammar.

As far as pronunciation is concerned, the band descriptors are a little vague here. It becomes a little strange because it says that at a band 7, the candidate has all of the positive features of a band 6 and some, but not all of the positive features of the band 8.



So, in other words, it's as if you're almost at an 8 for pronunciation using all these things like a wide range of pronunciation features, very minimal accent, but you're not quite there. So, they give you a 7. It's that kind of a thing.

So, that's a little bit about a 7. It's a person-- this is the best way I can explain it. It's a person who can hold his own and can really carry on a conversation just about anything, but maybe without the accuracy or fluency or precision that a higher level score would get, okay?

So, those of you who are aiming for a 7, you have to ask yourself does this describe me and the way I speak, okay? And if it doesn't, then you need to make some effort in order to get to that point, okay, and that's of course why we are here as well.

So, let's look at the 6. The 6 is what I kind of like to call the base line score and what I mean by that is that when you get a 6, it means you're doing what you're supposed to be doing. You're communicating. You're getting things across. You're getting the messages across. You're getting



through the test successfully, but that's pretty much it. You're not doing things at a higher level.

So, that's more or less the overview of what a 6 is.

So, looking at the band descriptors, specifically looking at fluency and coherence, at a band 6, you're able to speak at length, but maybe there is some loss of coherence, okay, and that loss of coherence could be because of hesitation. Maybe you're repeating yourself a lot of times. Maybe you're correcting yourself quite a bit.

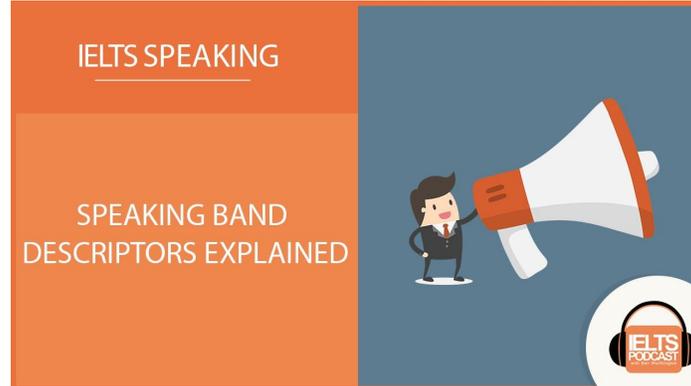
You're using some of these connectives and some of these discourse markers that I talked about, but maybe you're not using them correctly. I'll give you one example of an incorrect discourse marker. I've heard a lot of times people use according to incorrectly. So, they say according to me, I say this, this, and this. Well, that's not correct. We only use according to when we want to refer to the beliefs or the language of somebody else, but we would never use it for ourselves, okay?



So, that is an inaccurate use of a discourse marker and that's the kind of thing that you may see in a 6 or you might see a very small range of discourse markers and you only hear and, and, and because, because, because, and for example and that's it, okay? So, that's what a 6 would do. You're doing it, but you're not really doing it with any real finesse or more fluency, okay?

So, looking at lexical resources, you can read along with the band descriptors with me. Has a wide enough vocabulary to discuss topics at length. So, exactly. You're getting the job done. You're answering the questions. You're getting meaning across, but you're really not doing a lot more.

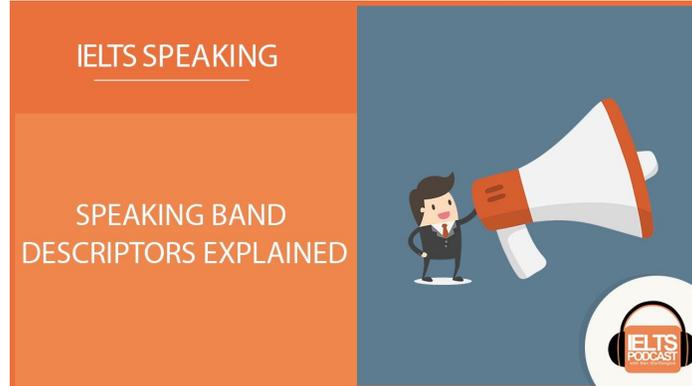
Now, I should add though that there are a lot of different ways to be a band 6 in lexical resources. One way is to use just safe vocabulary, okay? Safe simple intermediate vocabulary that gets the job done. You get through the test no problem and that's one way, but there's another way to get a band 6 in lexical resources and that's by using some higher-level vocabulary, taking some risks, using some words that you've read or that you've maybe jotted



down in your notes, but you're not always accurate. You're not always hitting the nail on the head, okay?

So, that's another way you could be a 6 because you're using some words that are higher level, but not always the word that you're supposed to be using. It's not always precise. It's not always accurate. So, there are a couple of different ways that you can wind up with a 6 in lexical resource.

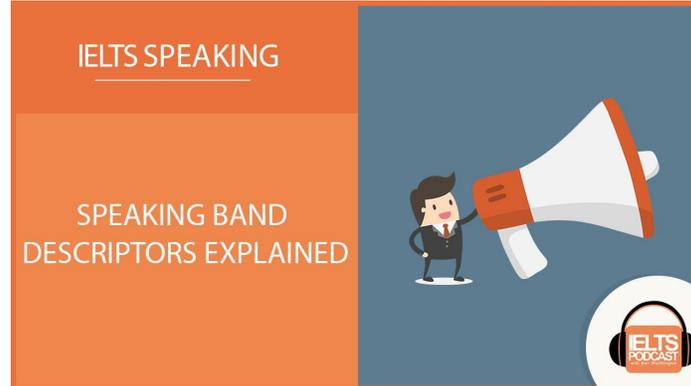
Now, as for grammatical range and accuracy, it's kind of the same thing. So, you're using some complex structures, so maybe some passive voice, maybe again some modals, and you're using a lot of simple grammar as well, but you're probably not-- it's not really flexible. So, maybe in your native language you would answer a question with a rather complex structure, with a more sophisticated way, but in English, your language abilities are really only allowing you to stay in a certain kind of level.



So, there's not going to be a lot of flexibility. You're not going to say exactly what you would want to say. Can you get the job done? Can you answer the question? Yes, but again, with less flexibility than a 7 or an 8 would.

You can see in the band descriptors and it says right here, it says may make frequent mistakes with complex structures. Well, that's exactly what I was saying. So, yes, go ahead make some mistakes with complex structures when you're a band 6. Try to avoid at all costs making mistakes with those simple structures, okay? The examiner can pretty much understand you throughout your test. Maybe there a couple of times where he's thinking to himself, huh? But he understands you on the whole.

Now, here we're going to have some mispronunciation of words, maybe some sounds. Maybe your native language is creating some sort of interference in the test. I know that there are certain languages where the P and the B sound aren't clear or sometimes the L and the R aren't



clear. In other languages, I've heard people they can't say 'the' because it comes out like za, okay?

So, a lot of these things happen and most of the time it's okay, but sometimes this kind of influence from your native language will create a totally different word in English, okay? So, let me see if I can give you an example. It's one thing if you want to say beer, for example, but because of your native language it comes out peer, all right, which is a totally different word and an examiner hearing of that is going to say huh? It totally changes the meaning of the sentence. So, at a 6 you're going to have some of that.

So, we've talked about the 6. I think the thing that I really want you all to take away here is that you're getting through the test. You've gotten through it successfully, but it's not really been a higher level. It's a person who just gets through maybe with some difficulty, maybe with some mistakes, but you get through it and you can communicate.



All right. So, let's look at what a 5 means. A 5 is a different can of worms altogether. A 5 for me is someone who creates some strain. This is a person who has some difficulty getting through the test. This is a person who-- yes, there are times of incoherence. There are times where the examiner really has not understood what you have been trying to say, okay?

So, looking at fluency and coherence, sure there is a flow of speech, but there might be a lot of repetition, a lot of slow speech, and a lot of hesitation. There's simple speech, but if there's any time where there's any sort of more complex communication happening, then there's going to be some sort of a breakdown. There's going to be some sort of a confusion and there's not really a lot happening with those connectors or those discourse markers, okay? So, that's as far as fluency and coherence is concerned.

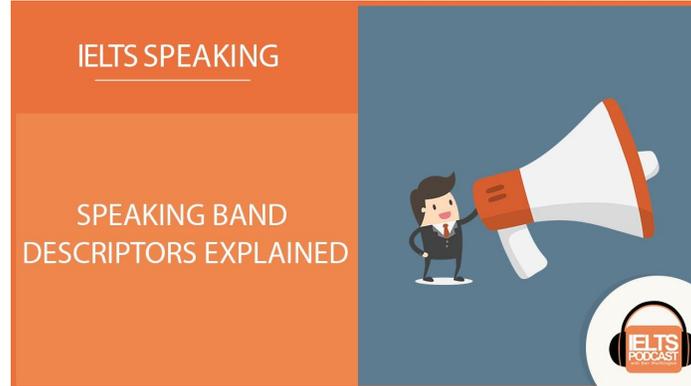
With lexical resources, there's not a lot of flexibility there. There's not a lot of variety. It's a limited set of words that this person can use. So, when you get into Task 3-- part 3, forgive me,



when you get into part 3, you're not going to be able to really appropriately answer the questions or to really say what you wanted to say at a band 5.

This kind of person has no choice but to paraphrase because he's really missing a lot of those important words that he needs. Unfortunately, this paraphrasing is not always going to work. Sometimes it will, but there are going to be times where the examiner is really just not going to be sure what the candidate is trying to say.

As far as grammatical range and accuracy are concerned, at a band 5, this is a person who probably doesn't know a lot of complex structures let alone know how to use them accurately. So, some basic sentences can be formed. There is some accuracy with those basic forms, but there's a lot of mistakes going on here and this is going to create communication problems and the examiner is probably not going to understand what the candidate is trying to say in various parts of the test, okay?

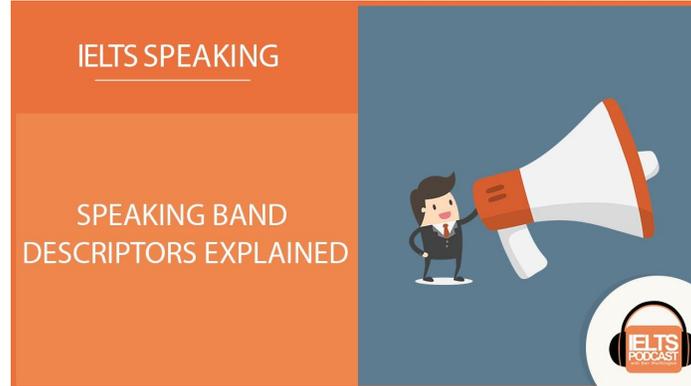


Now, as for pronunciation, there's not really a whole lot going on here. The candidate probably doesn't understand things like using stress, using emphasis, maybe pausing to provide emphasis or pausing appropriately, pausing at the correct breaks in the language.

So, this is a person who might be speaking very monotonously throughout the entire test without the appropriate ups and downs of language, okay? Or it's a person who thinks that by speaking fast that they're doing themselves this favor, but a lot of this comes out really incomprehensibly.

So, how this 5 in pronunciation can take shape really varies depending on each person or maybe just sometimes the native language is so strong that it creates pockets of speech that the examiner really just can't understand, okay?

So, those are the bands that I wanted to cover today. I don't really want to go into those lower bands because I think most of you listening to this podcast are-- in fact, I'm pretty confident

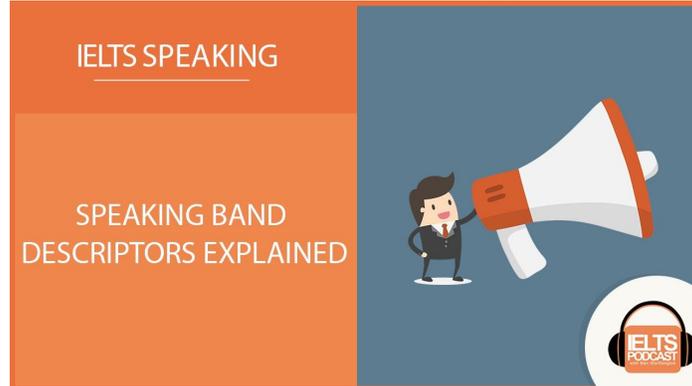


that you're all at the higher levels. At the band 4, you can just imagine that it's like a band 5, but just really not a lot of communication happening, okay?

So, getting your score up first of all requires you to have the language level that describes the band score that you need. So, that's the first thing you need to have and then of course, it comes with practice, practice, and practice and no doubt having the feedback of an experienced IELTS tutor who can help you with feedback, help correct you, tell you where your strengths are, and tell you also what your weaknesses are so that you can work on them, okay?

I hope you've all found this tutorial helpful. We are here at ieltspodcast.com to help you with all areas of the IELTS test. Definitely take a look at the online course which covers everything. It's a wonderful, wonderful tool to help you reach your IELTS goal. So, I hope we get to see you all on the course. I look forward to it and wish you all lots of luck with your IELTS.

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Female Voice: Thanks for listening to ieltspodcast.com

