



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.

INTRODUCTION

Ben: Hello there, IELTS students. In this episode, we're going to be speaking with Laura from Columbia who is now living in England and you'll be able to hear the difference between her accent and my accent because while living in London, I think she's picked up a rather elegant accent. Would you agree with me, Laura?

Laura: I wouldn't. People here tell me I have a horrible American accent.



Ben: They do, really?

Laura: Well, two. Two actually have told me. I think English people they are too polite to actually tell what they think.

Ben: This is funny because I've been in the exact same-- I've been in a very similar situation recently because I was trying to tell a person that I didn't want to work with them this developer and he was a friend of a friend and even my friend got confused because my friend he's called Gary and he was just like look, do you want to work with him or not because he's got no idea and I was like oh, really?

I thought I told him that I didn't want to and then when I reviewed what I said, it was actually-- what I said was that the project is on pause for now, but we might be putting it back into action soon. So, I'll be in contact. After I reviewed it, it was very English or very vague because I didn't want to be rude.



Anyway, let's get back to you, Laura. So, why are you taking the IELTS exam-- no, actually, tell us about you and where you're from, please.

Laura: Okay. I'm 26. I'm from Columbia. I come from a small town in Colombia. I don't think anyone actually hear about it. It's called Monteria and there is very nice meat there and steaks if someone wants to go. Well that's me. I graduated from med school in 2017 and I came to England to try to validate my career here and pursue the dream of being a doctor in the UK.

Ben: Awesome. Wow! So, you have to do the-- what's it called-- the homologous..

Laura: PLABs.

Ben: Oh, the PLABs, right.

Laura: But I've done them. I've done them and I passed them. I was stuck because of the IELTS basically.



Ben: Right, I see. That was holding you back and you needed the IELTS and the PLABs to start working as a doctor. Is that right?

Laura: Yes, to be able to join the foundation programs which are the two years that medical students from the UK do when they finish university here.

Ben: Interesting. Wow and now you're settled in London and just before the call, you were saying that you much preferred student life and now that you're settled there-- because I was-- just for the interest of the listeners, I was asking Laura which she likes most; England or Columbia or which if she misses Columbia. So, you were saying that London is quite expensive. Is that right?

Laura: It is. Life here it's absolutely expensive. I don't know. I've never spent so much money in my life. Just now literally even like going for a soda or a bottle of water is really expensive. So, anything--



Ben: It's painful, isn't it? It's painful.

Laura: Yes.

Ben: I know exactly what you mean.

Laura: Well, it's horrible when you actually go to a restaurant and think about asking for water because you don't want to pay for a bottle. So, you kindly ask like oh, can you give me tap water, please? Compared with Colombian prices, this country is absolutely expensive.

Ben: Yes, yes, it's tough. It's tough I think. I totally understand you. I totally know where you're coming from. So, did that affect how you were preparing for IELTS in any way?

Laura: What do you mean?

Ben: Like maybe if you were in Colombia, do you think you would have prepared for IELTS in a different way? Maybe a private tutor or something like that?



Laura: I don't think so because in Colombia I would have been working and what is time consuming is actually having to fit IELTS preparation in between work or exercising or hobbies or whatever, family commitments, and everything. So, literally I don't think I would have changed the way I was studying for IELTS. It would just have been cheaper or actually it wouldn't have been cheaper. I would have to pay IELTS prices in Colombian pesos, which ends up being more expensive.

Ben: Okay. All right, that's interesting. Okay. So, you wouldn't have changed the way you prepared because you would have just prepared the same way which I understand is online. You did everything online.

Laura: Yes.

Ben: And one of the reasons was because you were short on time and you didn't have the time or-- basically, you didn't have the time to do it the traditional way of going to an academy. Is that right?



Laura: Yes. I think online studies just give you that opportunity to fit in studies around your daily commitments. So, to me that's a plus instead of having to fix a time with someone. I mean you can see how difficult it is to agree the time and then being able to actually do something. I find that more difficult.

Ben: Yes.

Laura: And in the past, I paid tutors which didn't kind of work.

Ben: Oh, really? It didn't work out with the tutor? Why not?

Laura: I don't know. Maybe it was the person's approach to the exam, so I'm not completely sure what happened, but I took the exam and I didn't get the scores.

Ben: Okay, that's interesting and just I want to expand on this for the listeners that it's really important you find out what works for you personally. Recently, I discovered that I don't work well with a tutor myself. We went to a shooting range and I had this tutor shouting at me,



telling me to relax, literally shouting at me relax, relax. So, I don't know if it was just him, but I realized that I don't like these kinds of direct tuition, but I do love learning and I realized that. YouTube, for example, is a much, much better place for me to learn.

So anyway, you said you took the test before. What grades did you get, Laura?

Laura: Well, I've taken the exam eight times.

Ben: Eight times.

Laura: Eight times.

Ben: Were some of those in England or just one in England?

Laura: Most of them in England.

Ben: Okay.



Laura: Last year, I took five times the exam and this year, I was seen two attempts-- no, actually one because one was in December and then the next one was in January, but basically, the first time I took the exam I needed a 7 which I got after two attempts. Then I discovered that I didn't need a 7. I needed a 7.5.

Ben: That must have been frustrating.

Laura: --taking the exam because when I knew that, I was kind of short of time for preparation. I think I did the mistake that every student does that is taking the exam one again and again and again and again without thinking too much about it or without preparing properly for it and then I was just getting 7, 7, 7, 7, 7, 7.

Ben: Right, that's interesting. What was going through your mind when you just kept on putting in for the test?

Laura: I was thinking the amount of clothes I would have bought with that money.



Ben: Okay, sorry for laughing, but it just seems-- okay, okay. I was expecting-- the answer that I had in my head was like-- I was expecting you to say I must be close. I just put in again. I can do it. I can get it. I just need to write the question or whatever. You weren't thinking anything like that?

Laura: No, I was thinking I need to get help. So, I started doing loads of online preparation. I was jumping basically for from one to another and another, but I was always-- I think I was always going from the beginning to the end of online courses with different approaches. So, each time I took the exam, there was this plus from every single place. I had so much information that I didn't know how to use.

So, I was literally vomiting ideas or having a rainbow of information in my mind that I didn't know how to convey and do good with it. So, I think that was mainly a problem and also I think from-- because I'm a Spanish speaker, I have big problems with articles which Ellen did



marvelous and she corrected me one, two, three times and all the necessary times to work on my articles and prepositions.

Ben: Wow! So, you got these articles and prepositions under control via working with Ellen. Is that right?

Laura: Yes, yes.

Ben: Super. Super and these other online courses you were taking-- so you would take a test, you wouldn't get the grade that you wanted, then you'd go out and start looking online and start taking online courses and things. Is that right?

Laura: Sorry, I missed you for a few seconds, could you repeat that?

Ben: Yes. So, you would take a test and you wouldn't get the grade that you wanted, so you would go online, start searching for materials, start searching for courses, take that course, and then take the test again and not get any improvement. Is that right?



Laura: Yes. Well, I was taking courses that other people were suggesting me or paying tutors. I think I paid two different tutors or three actually and two online courses. So, you can imagine the amount of money I was spending on this and it was all like recommendations. So, someone approached to me and say I got score I needed with this person or with this website or with this course and I was following that advice.

Ben: Wow! That must have been even more frustrating then.

Laura: Yes. I think every time to take the exams you build out a wall, a mental wall that is the worst one. So, at the beginning like the first attempt that I did last year, I got a 7 and after doing two months of writing a task every day and paying a tutor, I got the 6.5. So, I wonder myself at that time like what's happening here? Why am I getting worse after having English lessons?

Maybe English speakers don't know how to speak their language or maybe I'm just looking in the wrong place and because on the IELTS feedback you don't get the place where you are having mistakes then it's even more difficult. I even paid someone for her to tell me you're



doing great. I don't know what's happening with you. That were the £40 badly spent in my whole life. I regret that.

Ben: Yes, that must be infuriating. I would be really annoyed if somebody was saying this; thank you for the £40. You're doing great and then you lost points. Was that the same tutor who lost you points?

Laura: No.

Ben: Okay, it's a different one.

Laura: But I got annoyed with that one.

Ben: I'm not surprised. I'm not surprised. I honestly think-- I'm just going to preach here for a second, but I think a one-to-one tuition can be okay if it's speaking or something like that, but if it's something like writing, you want an expert who's correcting essays day-in day-out and who's specialized in specifically IELTS Writing Task 2 and probably IELTS Writing Task 1, but



definitely who is specializing in IELTS Task Writing because a lot of personal tutors and these one-to-one tutors they will teach business on a Wednesday, then they'll teach kiddies on a Thursday, and then they'll help a university student write their cover letter on a Friday, and then an IELTS student on Saturday morning. There's no surprise that they're not specialized in that, but anyway--

Laura: Yes, you are absolutely right. I met a few people that they were saying to me I'm going to guide you. I can be your tutor. Let's do a free testing session and then you can decide if you want to work with me or not and then I was like okay, what's your background? Did you study English or are you a teacher? No, I actually studied medicine, but I did the exam six times and I think I know now what you need to get the score and I was like all right. No, thank you.

Ben: Yes, this is it. This is it. I think a lot of tutors as well will take advantage of students who are in a desperate situation and they'll see that there's a lot of people who need to pass, who want to pass and they'll be like okay, I took the test a few times and I eventually passed and



there's all these students wanting to pass, so maybe I should be teaching them. Then it's like that's not the--

I disagree with that. I completely disagree.

Laura: Yes.

Ben: And then finding a tutor as well for the-- like I said for the speaking, but even then, you've got to take control of the class and you've got to make sure that they're specialized in IELTS speaking and it's not easy. So anyway, Laura, back to you. With your IELTS writing, was this the only pain point you had the IELTS exam? What was happening with speaking and listening and reading?

Laura: The other aspects of the exam were absolutely fine. I was getting 8.5 or 9 in reading and listening and then 8 or 8.5 in speaking. One day, I got a 9 in speaking and I was like really? I was really ill. I was coughing all in between the interview with the examiner. I think she felt sorry for



me, but she gave me a 9 and I was like well, maybe I need to have a cough for the examiner to give me a 9 in the speaking.

Ben: Yes, we're going to add this to the next Speaking Confidence Online Course. After every example you give, you have to cough or wipe your head. It might not be the best time to suggest that though with everything that's going on, but anyway. So, all the other parts were under control and it was just the writing that you were struggling with. What was the biggest value that you got from Ellen when she was correcting your course? What was the most valuable takeaway for you?

Laura: Well, I think Ellen-- to be honest, at the beginning I thought she was very tough and hard and when I was listening to her videos-- I think there is a bit of echo now, sorry, I because I'm moving. So, when she gave me the first correction, I said oh, my God! I'm never going to get the score I need. I'm awful.



I'm really bad, but with time, she basically work on my mistakes once and again and I remember the way she corrected me the articles. Oh, my God. I can't remember them now. I can't think of an example now.

Ben: Yes, don't worry. It's hard to think of examples.

Laura: Probably it was something like increase in or she tended to be with a different intonation when she was saying increase in or correcting me these kind of mistakes and I was okay, this is something I need to memorize, but my memory is awful.

Ben: Okay.

Laura: So, it was very hard for me.

Ben: So, let me get this straight. You were remembering the way she was pronouncing certain phrases and that helped you remember for the next time you wrote them?



Laura: Yes. Like to know what I needed to double-check because I have a really bad memory. My memory is the worst memory someone could have. So, I need to associate things to be able to learn them and every time I was listening to the feedback, I was basing my self-studying time on the aspect that she was emphasizing or given me with a different intonation, but you know when you're correcting someone and you tell them you have done this mistake seven times. So, why don't you learn? So, I was feeling it like that and that actually helped me. I appreciate that every single point that she was pointing out at me I was trying to work hard in it.

Ben: Wow! That's fantastic.

Laura: But I can't say that-- I don't know if all the students have felt the same, but at the beginning, I felt really bad. I was like oh, my God. I'm awful. I can't communicate in this language. I need to go and speak German or something different, but then with time, I think she was very patient as well because I was literally doing the same mistakes.



Ben: Yes, but this is how we learn, Laura, isn't it? This is how we learn and you've got to make mistakes in order to learn. If you don't make any mistakes, you're not learning and I love the fact that you know yourself and you know how to start remembering. Not only do you know that memory is your weak spot, but you've kind of worked and deduced that you need to associate things to the past that you have to learn and I love this. It's about just knowing your weak spots and overcoming them.

I'm glad that there was a good fit for you with Ellen and the fact-- I'm sorry that she did make you feel a bit rough at the beginning. I will apologize, but at the end of the day, the important thing is that you pushed through and you got this--

Laura: No, I don't think you need to apologize. I say it's worse when someone tells you like oh, yes, everything is all right. You're doing well. No, I think she's a really good tutor and the way she corrects your essays and give you the feedback is appropriate. She is not rude or offending. I wasn't offended. I was just down because I have taken the exam loads of times and I'm in a



position where I really want to start working in what I studied for eight years, but I can't complain about her feedback.

Ben: Okay. Got you. Got you. Okay. Okay. I misunderstood. I misunderstood. All right then. So, what happened on-- what scores were you getting in the previous ones? You said-- was it--

Laura: 7

Ben: 7. Got you and you needed 7.5.

Laura: 7.5

Ben: Wow! Okay and what happened on the test day?

Laura: The first one or the second one?

Ben: The most recent one.



Laura: The most recent one. Well, recently, the GMC released that there is going to be another English test that they are going to accept called OET and I [unintelligible 00:22:59.17] maybe that just clicked in my mind and I was more relaxed on the exam. I was like hey, this is the last time I give IELTS for whatever reason. If I get this score that's fine, if I don't get it that's fine. I'm not doing IELTS again.

I think-- when I mentioned earlier that every time you repeat the test, you build up a mental wall, I think that kind of helped me and relaxed on the exam day because I was really worried in the previous attempt about my time management. I was having really, really tough time managing the time because I was getting so many ideas in my mind and I didn't know how to organize and I was writing a whole Task 1 and 2 in an hour and a half. I was like okay, this is half an hour. I need to cut down. How the hell am I going to do it?

I was panicking every time I was going into the exam and at the end of the day, I felt that I was rushing. Every time I took the exam, I was rushing to put all the ideas, but in the last attempt, I



said to myself okay, this is the last time I do IELTS. I'm going to follow all the recommendations and I'm going to follow the template, adapt it that is kind of modify it with things that I liked, but I was literally following the template and I had at the end ten minutes of spare which I use correcting these article mistakes or the subject-verb agreement and I think that's what made a big difference.

Ben: Wow! Okay. So, just to summarize you were kind of going in there a bit carefree and you're like whatever happens happens. I don't really mind. This is the last time I'm going to take this horrible test and if I don't get the grades I want to, I'm going to take the new one that the GMC has started to accept. Is that right?

Laura: Yes.

Ben: Got you. Okay and then you said I'm going to follow-- well, I'm going to sort out my time management problem and I'm going to-- I need to write this in an hour and I'm going to use all the information that I've learned from the other courses and from Ben's course as well and the



templates. I'm going to follow the template and I'm also going to learn from my previous essay corrections and the previous feedback. So, you had your error list. Is that right? And you were using that after you finished writing.

Laura: Yes and the other thing I forgot to mention is that I think my weakest part was Task 1. That's another great thing that I got from the feedbacks. I was working only on my Task 2 a lot, but I left on the side the Task 1 because when you start preparing for IELTS you think okay, Task 2 is worth double the marks then I need to prepare more for that, but actually, I was having more troubles with task achievement in my Task 1 than on my Task 2.

I was putting the wrong information in my Task 1 and even if you have a good Task 2 and you don't have a good Task 1, then your score is going to probably be a 6.5 or a 7 or a 6 even though if you work on hard on your Task 2. So, that's something else.

Ben: Interesting. How did you work on your Task 1? How did you improve in that?



Laura: With the own line course I did the Task 1. I don't remember the name how you call it in the course. I did that part of the module and then I was getting the feedback from Ellen as well. She was telling me I wouldn't have chosen this or that. This is not relevant information. If you are going to compare something, then do some meaningful comparisons instead of just comparing two random data or if it's a bar, then give the appropriate things, something like that.

Ben: Interesting. Interesting and before we say-- actually, let's just jump straight into it. What scores did you get in the end-- in your most recent test, Laura?

Laura: So, I got 8.5 in reading, 8.5 in listening, 8 in speaking, and then 7.5 in writing.

Ben: Genius. Well done. Well done. Those are fantastic scores and you didn't cough in that last speaking exam.

Laura: I didn't, but it was the same examiner.



Ben: That's quite interesting. Did she recognize you?

Laura: I don't think so or maybe or maybe she recognized me. I'm not sure. When you're an examiner you can't show your expressions. She hid it well.

Ben: Yes, yes. Wow! But those are fantastic grades and did you go out and buy some coats afterwards? Did you buy yourself a new coat?

Laura: No, I didn't, but I did borrow a laptop.

Ben: Okay, that's fantastic. Genius. Now then, what are your plans now that you've got IELTS out of the way and you've ended this frustration?

Laura: So, this year, the applications for the foundation trainings are in June until August, so I'm going to apply for that. Hopefully, everything is going to be all right with that and then if everything goes well, start working in 2021.



Ben: Fantastic. That is amazing. Well done, Laura. Well done and thank you very much for sharing all your advice with us in this call-- in this podcast.

Laura: It's a pleasure. No, thank you. Your course helped me and pushed me to get through IELTS.

Ben: Yes, I think we made a good team.

Laura: The IELTS jungle as you call it.

[Music]

Female Voice: Thanks for listening to ieltspodcast.com