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INTRODUCTION

Hello there, IELTS students. In this episode, we're going to be talking with Anu from Nigeria and so, welcome to the podcast, Anu. How are you doing today?

Anu: I am very well. Thank you, Ben, and I'm excited to be speaking to you right now.

Ben: Me too. Me too. Anu and I we had some difficulties meeting online. We had some complications. This seems to be happening a lot to me recently. I think it's because I've been changing time zones that's why, but anyway, Anu, can you tell us please whereabouts in Nigeria you're from like your job and why you're taking IELTS and where you want to go?

Anu: Okay. I live in Lagos like I mentioned to you earlier and I work as a quality engineer. I carry out audits on systems particularly for companies. I help them improve. Where there are gaps, I

help them close it out and particularly we work with templates which you also introduced me to on your podcast course and that really was an attraction to me. That's basically what I do.

I want to relocate to Canada particularly for my children because I'm not on the young side, but I know it's an opportunity I'm creating for them if I'm able to relocate. That was why I went through the rigor of the IELTS examination.

Ben: Got you. Got you. That's interesting and you said you're a quality engineer. What types of systems do you work with?

Anu: When I say systems, I mean like projects. We look at a project as a system. I take it from scratch. I help people understand what their tasks are like they have to create a procedure which I help them ensure that they follow up with to meet with the objective of the project particularly the objective of the client, which is to repeat business, make more money, and-- how do I put it-- success generally of the project.

Ben: Very interesting. Very interesting. Wow! And are you going to do the same career? Are you going to pursue the same career in Canada?

Anu: I wish to continue as a quality engineer particularly the inspections aspect because quality engineering has to do with two aspects. We're looking at quality assurance and quality control

and then when we say quality assurance, we are looking at the management part, the audit aspect and then the quality control part looks at the inspections, how to ensure corrections are made and how to prevent issues from happening on projects or on construction sites. So, I wish to continue with it. I really wish to though I have a feeling for now that getting into Canada is not an easy business for us to just work with the career paths we've already started with, but it's my wish to continue with quality engineering.

Ben: Got you. Interesting. You want to go to Canada, so you need to take the IELTS exam. So, before we jump into IELTS, can you tell us how you've been preparing for the IELTS exam, what you've been doing?

Anu: My preparation had to happen in two months.

Ben: Wow!

Anu: After writing the first exam and I wasn't okay with my scores, so I gave myself a target of first developing my vocabs, having the right vocabs, working on my spelling, looking at my writing where the gaps were. From the results I got, I could see that I had issues with my thought process; how to organize it. So, I had to work on that.

I made Google my friend like you usually say on your IELTS podcast. I made Google my friend yes. For topics I didn't understand, I had to go dig it up. I had a book where I was jotting in what I was discovering and yes, I read books, my children's books. I read comics. I had to follow up with-- what's it called now-- the TED Talk shows. When driving to work, I was always listening to IELTS podcast and I had to learn to speak like a native speaker and to think like a native speaker generally.

Ben: Very good. Excellent. Excellent. When you were improving your vocabulary, you must have had a system. If you're a quality engineer for systems, you must have had a system.

Anu: Yes.

Ben: What system did you use, Anu, for improving your vocabulary?

Anu: Okay. Like I mentioned initially, I went to Google. I first of all highlighted the key topic areas for IELTS; technology, education, all of that. So, while working in Google, I knew what I was working with and then I had a book I used to jot down and to track my progress and I communicated more with friends.

I made sure I was conscious of what I was speaking or communicating when I'm talking to a friend and then on my phone, for example, I took off the auto spelling. I made sure I

understood what I was spelling, where issues were. I tried to track the gaps. Where gaps were, I tried to close them out and I had to be focused throughout my preparation period [unintelligible 00:06:30.15].

Ben: How did you identify that you had errors-- not errors, gaps in your vocabulary?

Anu: Yes, I was able to identify it basically because I worked with Daphne on the Sentence Completion-- is it Sentence Completion Guide and she made me realize that I was working more on-- what did she call it now-- phrasal verbs and she wanted me to work with more active real verbs. So, I knew I had a gap there. I was using words like carry out, put in. So, she wanted me to use more higher-level verbs.

So, I went on Google. I googled-- what's it called now-- academic collocations, yes. I wrote a list of them. There are several of them and I realized I knew some of these vocabs only that they were passive. So, I had to-- yes, I had to consciously make them active.

Ben: Interesting. Very interesting. It's ironic because I remember when I was teaching IELTS and I was saying to one of the students it's probably better if we use slightly-- especially for the academic IELTS if we use less phrasal verbs and more academic constructions, more academic collocations and they were really disappointed because they were like what! For the last three or five years, we've been learning these horrible phrasal verbs, all these different variations and

different nuances and now they are useless for this IELTS academic test, for the essay writing? It was a very frustrating experience.

So, you jumped on to Google and you started researching academic collocations and then you pulled up the list and you identified some that you knew. What about the ones that you didn't know about? How did you tackle those?

Anu: Yes. What I did was I kept mentioning them. I kept bringing them to my active memory. I kept working with them. I looked for their meanings. I looked up their meanings. I made sure I understood them and I was conscious of the spelling because I know in IELTS spelling is also a very important aspect the examiner wants to see that student is aware of because I noticed them in my first exam I had many spelling errors.

I was so shocked that in an exam condition I couldn't spell some words even though in the second one I found myself confused with winter; did it have the H or not? Little things like that you just over look really matters in that examination.

Ben: Wow! Okay. So, what were the scores you got in your first test?

Anu: Okay. The first test I took was on September 28, 2019. I had a 5.5 in writing, a 6.0 in reading, 7.5 in speaking, and 6.5 in listening. I was able to see where I was doing well and I could put in more work on those part to improve my scores in a future examination.

Ben: Wow! And what scores did you need for your Canada application?

Anu: I needed CLB 9. That is high. In fact, my agent wanted me to have 8.0 overall.

Ben: Wow!

Anu: So, she didn't want to know how I would get there, but that was what she wanted.

Ben: Right. I see and then she just-- I remember you said at the beginning of the call she just gave you a list of resources and on that list, fortunately, was myself and you saw the link for free IELTS materials. Is that right?

Anu: Yes, yes and I thought it as actually free. I always look for the free things, but that was a good one and I was able to listen to your interview with a lady. I think she was the one trying to buy for her husband for his birthday gift. So, I listened to her and that really excited me.

Ben: Oh, wow! That's interesting. That's good. That's good and so you got these free material and then you joined the Sentence Guide Course and also, just to remind the listeners that you

were listening in the car to the IELTS podcast and you were also watching the TED Talks. Is that right?

Anu: Yes, very true. Very true.

Ben: Got you. Did you watch the TED Talk-- Why did you watch the TED Talks? I don't want to put answers into your mouth.

Anu: I've always heard of TED Talks, but I didn't know how to use it as a tool for the examination, but the Sentence Guide there was the first course you introduced that had to take course into a TED Talk show maybe on family cause or family guide where we have to understand how living as a family should be; the bedroom culture and things like that. I can't remember clearly.

So, that was the first time I had access to the TED Talk show and I realized they had several topics. So, I used it to my advantage in the sense that I looked at the IELTS topic areas and then I'll go on YouTube, I will search those areas particularly under the TED Talk shows and there was always something coming out for every topic. Someone always had information to give and I mimic some of the way they spoke, I listened to them. It was like an ear worm to me. It helps

me on the way I speak. Even though I thought I could speak English so well, I knew that there was a part that I needed to work on like keep improving. That was it.

Ben: Wow! That's fantastic. Well done. So, you were watching these TED Talks and using YouTube to basically get ideas and get opinions and learn about topics.

Anu: Yes and get vocabs. Yes, particularly vocabs.

Ben: Yes, yes, that's really important and just for the listeners, what we usually do on the online course is we will send out a question and on the question, there'll be a video so you can get ideas for your essay; so you can get ideas, vocabulary, and sometimes an opinion if maybe that's what you need about the topic.

It works really well we've found and this is why we do it because we found a lot of students were struggling with coming up with ideas. So, by giving them a tutorial, a TED Talk and usually, the TED Talks are pretty interesting, don't you think, Anu?

Anu: Very well. They are. They are very interesting and eye-opening.

Ben: Exactly. Very good adjective there to describe them. Yes, they're very eye-opening. So, although it might be a topic that you're not too interested in, the TED Talk can make it more

interesting than say Wikipedia or other resources. That's why we include them. So, you took the test, right?

Anu: Yes.

Ben: And then two months later, you took the test again because you didn't get the grades you wanted. Is that right?

Anu: Yes, very well. That's right.

Ben: Got you. Okay and when you were preparing, what other sites or resources did you use apart from the online course?

Anu: Okay. I used the Cambridge-- is it Cambridge examinations or-- what is it called now-- There's this general training for Cambridge tests. I used that basically for my listening and for my reading.

Ben: That's interesting.

Anu: Yes, I think that was what I used because I needed to work on my speed.

Ben: Why did you use the Cambridge ones and not the IELTS ones?

Anu: Okay. I think I preferred it because having written the first test, I saw they mimicked the test I just wrote and I needed to get used to the listening tracks. I needed to get used to how the exam is in real life and I was more comfortable using the Cambridge test.

Ben: Interesting. Were you doing practice tests for the Cambridge first or Cambridge proficiency exam or were you doing practice tests for the IELTS exam, but written by Cambridge? Which one were you--

Anu: Okay, that's it. IELTS exam written by Cambridge.

Ben: Got you. Just for the--

Anu: I worked with Cambridge 10, test 10 to test 15. I did all that.

Ben: Oh, you did all of those tests.

Anu: Yes, yes. I did.

Ben: Genius. Wow! And you saw a big improvement in your grade from doing those practice tests.

Anu: Yes, in my listening. In fact, there were some tests I was scoring 40-40 for the listening test. Minimum I was getting 36. So, the confidence was there to face the examination.

Ben: Wow! And how did you get time to do all of these listening tests and reading tests because you said you got two-- how many children?

Anu: I have three boys and my husband.

Ben: Three boys.

Anu: Yes. Well, I had to focus like I designed this system that will work. I make sure when they have what to eat-- I have a helper in the house and then when in the office, I dedicate four hours of my time-- break time and then I make sure four hours every day I was putting in something into IELTS. That was what I did.

Ben: Wow! That is amazing. That is amazing. So, while you were at the office, every break you had, you just went back or you just studied for the IELTS exam?

Anu: Yes. So, that was what I did and like I said I had two months to prepare. So, the first one month I used to develop my vocabs, get my spellings right, going to topic areas I wasn't used to. For one month, I knew I had to do that and then this second month, I started my Sentence Guide Course and I started writing. I used two weeks for my writing. That was it.

Ben: Oh, my word!

Anu: I'm telling you. I was lucky I had Daphne and she was just there even into the exams, I could still hear her warn me, talk to me and that was it. Whenever I was in the office, I would do my assignments and then I could always hear you warn that two weeks was just enough to finish on the writing course so that way we don't forget what one was learning and I did that.

I did that. I followed-- after two weeks, I was done with writing. I got confident. I followed up with my listening maybe another one week. My listening and reading as well I was running with it and within the last two weeks, I picked up my speaking. Thank God for your course once again. You had this perfect structure that really helped me; helped my thinking process. You did general, the personal, and the example.

That was it and after because I heard you say after this, if you're still having problems, then you could go to YouTube. I said no. I'm not having problems anymore. I know what to do. I know just what to do. I know what the examiner is expecting me to do and that was it.

Ben: Wow!

Anu: I could now face the exams, yes.

Ben: Wow! That is amazing, Anu. Well done. Well done.

Anu: Thank you.

Ben: Let me just summarize. You decided that you were going to improve your grades in two months since the first time you took the test and for the first one, you were focusing on filling your head up with ideas, improving your vocabulary, improving your spelling and a big part of this was TED Talks and also, I loved this that you had a system and you had basically a promise of doing four hours every day. Was that four hours seven days a week?

Anu: Four hours every day; like every day including Sundays.

Ben: Wow!

Anu: Including Sundays, yes.

Ben: Genius. Absolute genius.

Anu: I knew it needed a lot of work and I had to give it that much work.

Ben: Yes and you got your three boys-- three little boys at home as well.

Anu: Yes.

Ben: Wow! That's impressive. I'm very impressed, Anu. Excellent and then--

Anu: Thank you.

Ben: So, you studied the four weeks, as we just said, vocabulary, spelling, ideas, research and then you jumped into the Sentence Guide Online Writing Course.

Anu: Yes, yes.

Ben: And you completed it in two weeks working with Daphne. Is that right?

Anu: Yes.

Ben: And she's correcting your essays and giving you feedback.

Anu: Yes, yes.

Ben: Got you.

Anu: Yes, she was always correcting me and it was something I needed to know where my gaps were.

Ben: Right. So, she helped you identify your errors, your mistakes, where you needed to improve.

Anu: Yes. The error list really helped.

Ben: Right. Yes, yes, this is an important part of the of the whole process. I'll just share it for the audience. When you send in your essays to us, we will correct it, but then we'll also ask you to make a list of all the mistakes that we've highlighted and then the next time you write an essay, you check that essay for the mistakes that you made previously and this way, you can easily just pick up some points. We strongly encourage all our students on the course to do this each and every time and we've seen some good results. We've seen some fast improvements.

So, what would happen? You would get your essay back from Daphne. Did you implement all the corrections that she asked you to?

Anu: Yes. I always did. I followed through with every instruction. I had faith in the course especially since it was a template. That gave me more confidence that I was on the right path. So, I would correct it and I would try return it as soon as I could. That was it.

Ben: Awesome. Awesome. How long did it take you usually? So, for example, you got your essays back and then how long would it take you to correct them and then to write some more essays and send them back to Daphne? How long would that take you?

Anu: I think it took me like two days, max three days. Two days usually, max three days because it's always in my brain when I'm sleeping like you've got work to do and I start thinking of the essay, the topic. I start trying to-- the template helps to put an essay out in minutes. That was it.

Ben: Yes, yes. It certainly does, doesn't it? It takes-- like a lot of thinking energy it just takes care of that so you just need to drop your ideas in and it's straightforward. So, what happened on your test day, Anu? Can you explain that?

Anu: Okay. On my test day I-- or let's say day before, I stopped my practices. I stopped it a day before and I took long walks. I tried to put in oxygen in my brain. That morning, I woke up and I ate one heavy breakfast because I needed all the energy. Heavy breakfast you need to know it's one local dish like that and then I was good to go. I took snacks, too. I took water with me and I went for the examination.

I got there. I ate my snacks because they wouldn't allow me to go in with my snacks. I needed more fuel in my system. I got checked in, I sat down, and one thing I did for myself was I put on my-- what's it called now-- my earpiece. There's this video that plays where they try to talk about what's going on with the British Council, what their achievements are. So, I wanted to be in the listening mode. I put it on so I could be hearing the natives speakers speak. I put myself in

that mode. Once in a while, I would just go to the loo, stretch. I was just trying to put myself in that mode of concentration. That was it.

Ben: Very good, but just tell us more about this listening exercise. You brought in your own headphones and you were listening--

Anu: No, no. It's given in the exam hall. They don't play it-- or how do they do it over there? What we do here is we put on our headphones. They give each person a headphone to use and it's just on the table. You come in and you have access to it immediately you are allowed into the exam hall. You put it on and listen to a video clip. That's what they do here.

Ben: But are we talking-- this is for the listening or?

Anu: Yes, this is just for the examination center. The center has-- before they put in everybody-- I mean before everybody is seated for the exam proper, they just play these videos on British Council achievements particularly in West Africa. They try to tell us what they've been achieving so far, what area of concentration they-- how they've been following up with the locals. The British man is speaking, the locals are speaking.

So, I just try to concentrate. I used it as a concentration technic or tool for myself. So, I just put it so that I'm not distracted by movements around me. That was it.

Ben: Wow! That's interesting. So, you were saying like Anu, concentrate on the British Council and concentrate how good they are.

Anu: Concentrate on listening; just be in the listening mode. That will be the first exam they will share or send out or save, so I just needed to be in the right mood for it.

Ben: Fantastic. Yes, that's a really good idea and then what happens after you've watched this video about the British Council?

Anu: Okay and then I think about 9:45 a.m. the listening test proper will start or started. So, I was ready for it. I was prepared for it. I didn't move any part of my body. I don't know. I just needed to put in all the energy and that was it. I listened all through from beginning to the end. I can't remember missing any question and one thing I discovered I had to do was to write in cap lock, so I didn't have the issue of maybe knowing what proper nouns should be capital letters for first case or first letters. I don't know if you understand what I'm trying to say.

Ben: Yes, yes, yes, yes I do. I do understand.

Anu: Yes. So, doing my question paper I was writing in lower case because you think better or I think better when I write in lower case. There's ten minutes to transfer to my answer sheet and

make sure everything was written in cap lock and that was it-- in capital letters. I misstated that.

Then for my reading, I used the skimming and scanning method. I first scanned-- for every paragraph, I read the first sentence just to get an idea of what the passage is talking about. Then I go to the question. I pick key words like dates, nouns. I go back to the question paper, to the passage. I scan for these words, get my answer, quickly write directly in my answer sheet and I was writing in cap lock, too.

Ben: Very interesting. So, you're writing the capitals and where did you get this strategy from? How did you develop this strategy?

Anu: I think I picked it from one YouTube course or so by Liz or so. She mentioned that it was okay to write-- I wanted firstly to write all my listening answers in capital letters because I didn't want to be in a situation where the examiner is saying I have written a proper noun using lowercase letters or an address using lowercase letters. So, I wanted to avoid that pit hole.

Ben: Got you. Got you.

Anu: And Liz said it was okay to still write in capital letters for the reading, so I just used that.

Ben: Okay. That's very good. Interesting and the strategy of reading the first sentence, where did you get that from?

Anu: Okay, I got that from one IELTS video that was teaching students how to approach the exam particularly for reading and it helped me understand faster what the passage was talking about. In my first exam, I just went straight to the questions, picked the key words, and then came back to the passage to start looking for them and so I had an issue of not even knowing what the passage was about.

Ben: Right. I see.

Anu: Yes, using the skimming really helped me understand what I was dealing with.

Ben: Got you. Got you. Okay that's very interesting and then for the speaking, can you quickly tell us what happened in your speaking?

Anu: Okay. For speaking, that was very interesting. Your course really helped me. It gave me a structure for part 1, for part 2, and for part 3 and I used that method throughout where you have to give a general statement, a personal statement, and an example and I made sure my examples were personal throughout.

Ben: Very good. Excellent. Excellent work. Wow! What did it feel like having that structure or that framework?

Anu: It felt exciting. I was confident even though those 11-14 minutes, man, it's one horrible period of one's life no matter how-- Even though I was so prepared and confident, I was still shaking and the anxiety was coming from where I couldn't describe, but I had a tool to work with. So, that really helped me.

Ben: Wow! Okay, that's a very descriptive way of explaining the whole process, but I'm glad though that you-- I'm more than glad. I'm very happy that you did push through because, Anu, when you're sharing stories like this about being anxious and nervous in the exam and how you dealt with it, and how you came through, it really is inspiring. So, I'd like to thank you for that.

So, you did the writing and the writing was straightforward as well for you?

Anu: The writing was straightforward, but I had a challenge of trying to get it right. I used your method of dissecting the question. So, I knew where my BP 1 and BP 2 was. I got points for them and then I found myself trying to get my introduction right. So, I spent time on it. I wanted to write on point. I didn't want to go off point and I wanted to paraphrase properly. So, all of that was in me. I got it right and I went for the next paragraph.

I read through after writing that paragraph, but for the third and the fourth paragraph, already I've been writing other essays. I wrote about four essays on your course, so I was able to know where to put my thoughts and how to organize them. So, for those last-- the third and the fourth, I didn't read through. I just wrote and then at the end of the day, I had ten minutes more because I started with my Task 2. I had ten minutes more. What! Thank God it was a formal letter. Having worked in a formal environment so that is more exciting and easy to write. And with the Sentence Guide again, I had the right vocabs, the right words, the right tone; the tone of language to use.

Ben: Yes, very important.

Anu: That really helped me, yes. So, in ten minutes I was done with the writing-- the letter writing. I just knew what my prompts were and I used the method I needed to-- I used the right method and the right tone. The right tool. That was it. The right tool and I got it right to the end.

Ben: That is fantastic. Well done there, Anu. Wow! It's amazing. To just knock out a formal letter in ten minutes, that's genius. So, well done there and what grades did you get in each section the second time you took the test?

Anu: Okay. For my writing, which excites me most, I got 7.0.

Ben: Wow! What did you get the first time for the writing?

Anu: 5.5.

Ben: Wow! Oh, my word! What an improvement! In two weeks?

Anu: Yes.

Ben: That's insane. Well done. Well done.

Anu: Thank you. Thank you and then for my reading, I had 7.0, too.

Ben: Excellent. Excellent. Very strong and for the-- what was that the first time you took the test?

Anu: That was a 6.0.

Ben: Oh, wow! So, you jumped a whole band score for that, too.

Anu: Yes.

Ben: Genius. Wow! And then for the listening, what was the score you got the first time?

Anu: For the first time, I got 6.5.

Ben: And then this time?

Anu: 8.5.

Ben: Wow! Oh my word! And in speaking, what happened there?

Anu: Speaking I got 8.0.

Ben: Wow! Well done, Anu, and what did you get in the first speaking?

Anu: In the first one, I had 7.5.

Ben: Okay, but the important thing is you improved across every single discipline. That is excellent and overall, what did you get?

Anu: I got 7.5 overall.

Ben: Wow! Your immigration agent they must be very happy, no?

Anu: Yes, they are. They are. Now, they have a better score to work with.

Ben: Yes, definitely.

Anu: We're all excited.

Ben: Wow! That is fantastic. Well done there, Anu, and before we finish, two more questions. What would you say to somebody who's thinking about joining the course?

Anu: I would say it's the right thing to do and I would say it is a course that is tested and approved and it is a course that helps even a beginner to get to his desired band score.

Ben: Excellent. Okay. Thank you for that and then before we finish, anything that you would like to add? Anything that you'd like to mention?

Anu: Thinking about it now for the course, after finishing, I noticed that I still have access to it. I think there should be a control on it after completing the course. Maybe to stop them from accessing it. I don't know. Maybe [unintelligible 00:36:18.25].

Ben: Okay, okay. I don't think the students are going to like you for that.

Anu: I'm an auditor they should remember.

Ben: Okay. We'll delete you tomorrow, Anu, don't you worry. Okay, but thank you very much there, Anu, and we can finish there. I'll just say to the students listening that although Anu did improve her grades incredibly quickly, she did put in a lot of work. This wasn't overnight. It was



like writing essays-- a good two weeks of solid work and a good month before that of improving vocabulary and improving spelling; all these different areas.

So, she did work hard and she got the results and now, she'll be going to Canada. So, well done there and if you want to join us on the online course, then come to ieltspodcast.com. We can give you some feedback, you can pick up the free IELTS materials that Anu mentioned earlier and just remember if you're struggling with IELTS that you're not alone and we can help you and that's why we're here. That's why we exist. Daphne, Ellen, or myself can look at your work and give you feedback so you improve faster and overcome this IELTS frustration. So, thank you very much for listening and all the best.

[Music]

Female Voice: Thanks for listening to ieltspodcast.com