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INTRODUCTION

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Ben: A guide to improve your IELTS reading. In this tutorial, we are specifically going to look at the IELTS reading test and a lot of this knowledge that I am sharing with you in this tutorial came from the IELTS Kindle book we are going to be publishing soon and after I've gone through about eight points that I think are essential, we will look at getting a band 8.



Also in this exam, I'm going to look at doing the IELTS reading exam on the computer and doing the listening on the computer because-- actually, I might as well mention it now. Doing these exams on the computer is different from doing them, obviously, with pen and paper. A lot of students have told me that they need to learn another skill such as the ability to organize, copy-paste their writing, organize their answers.

So, I would strongly recommend that you do some research regarding this before actually doing the computer-based test and I think at ielts.org there is a simulation exercise that you can do to get used to it. However, a lot of students have told me personally that it's a different set of skills especially the ability to listen and type at the same time. I don't think it is as easy as listening and writing with a pen and paper at the same time. So, just bear that in mind.



Now, as you know, this exam consists of about 40 questions from around three sections. Now, you need to know, obviously, if you're going to be doing the general or you are going to be doing the academic. The academic has a maximum of 2,350 whereas the academic has slightly more which is logical-- about four hundred more at 2,750. It's logical because, obviously, if you're going to take an academic route after doing your IELTS exam, then you're obviously going to be doing more reading.

The skills you need. One, skimming and scanning. Now, very briefly, when we are skimming, we are looking at the text and we're looking for a specific idea-- Sorry, when we are skimming, we're just getting the gist of the paragraph whereas when we are scanning, we might be looking for something very specific and we might not just be looking for that keyword, but a synonym or a phrase that means the same to what we are looking for. Just bear that in mind.



Another skill we need is, obviously, to be able to read quickly and basically, the idea behind reading quickly is reading about three words at a go. So, instead of going one by one, we read in clusters of three to four to five so then there's just three eye movements per line rather than 11, 12, or whatever the amount of words is on the text.

So, as I've said, to read faster, train your eye to take in three words at a time and this way there's less eye movement which will obviously increase your speed. However, the key to doing this is to develop this skill and make sure you are retaining the information. So, perhaps you could develop-- spend about 10 minutes reading a few paragraphs, reading three to four words at a time, and then try and summarize the text and see if you actually did retain because we can all be there reading, doing this speed reading technique that I just shared and we can be doing it and then thinking about something completely different.



So, this is why it's a skill to be developed. I found myself doing this all the time in the past where I would just be reading and my brain would be elsewhere thinking about food, for example. So, just keep that in mind.

Another point I want to make is to follow the instructions. Make sure you read them carefully. It's just too easy especially under exam conditions to go off-piste, so to speak and just this morning in one of the online classes we were doing, one of the students developed his whole essay, but it was completely off topic. So, this is more of a question of focus and I guess it relates to what we were just saying a few seconds ago about being 100% present while you're doing the activity.



Don't just read it and think you understand and then dive in. No. Read it a few times and get used to it. Also get used to the practice test-- sorry, get used to doing practice tests and get used to the different types of questions: gap fill, underlining the key words and so on and so forth.

So, one of the most important parts of reading is the ability to read through it and then you should be able to say it in your own words. This is why summarizing is such an excellent skill. Explain to yourself what you have just read and don't just use the words that you've read; try use synonyms and this is a useful skill. It's basically paraphrasing, but as you know, paraphrasing is essential for the writing task and it's also pretty handy in the speaking especially if we are doing the reflection technique that I've spoken about in previous tutorials.

Next point: find proof in your text. Look for phrases that say the same as the one you're looking for, but they might be rephrased. Remember there's only one correct answer for the question, so



you need to find this evidence. You need to be certain and as I said, we're not only looking for rephrases. We're looking for synonyms.

Read around that specific phrase or word that you've found because there might be one of those little tricks like they do in the listening where later they contradict what they say or maybe they might have prefaced it with a certain piece of information that basically invalidates all the words afterwards. So, just read around once you've found what you think you're looking for. Let me say that again. Read around what you think you've found is what you're looking for and that's not a song lyric I promise you.

Now, don't panic if you don't understand some of the words. When you started learning English, you probably realized you didn't need to understand 100% of what was being said to you. This happened to me when I was learning Spanish. I just finished my university education in



Manchester, sorry, and then I had my final university year in Murcia in Spain. When I got over there, I couldn't understand hardly anybody and then I tuned into how they were speaking Spanish-- quite a unique Spanish actually in Murcia or Murcia as I kept getting corrected.

Anyway, I quickly learned just to identify key words and from that plus the context, I could grasp what was being said and then eventually by the time I'd formulated my answer, the conversation had moved on. Anyway, it's a start. I got the key words, I understood the context, and from those key words, I could start formulating my answer. Eventually, I got fast enough to reply in a group conversation and that was a very happy day.

So, if you're at that stage with your English where your answers are still not fast enough, do not worry. It will come. It just needs a little bit of patience and a little bit of dedication.



Now, back to the reading. If you don't understand a word, it doesn't matter. Carry on. Maybe put a circle around it. Maybe star it with an asterisk. Get into the habit of doing this. It's called active reading and sometimes you can logically deduce what it means. I know people who know Greek-- also known as Greek people or the Greeks-- they have a tremendous advantage because a lot of vocabulary in English came from the Greeks basically. There are a lot of Latin words in English and a lot of the Latin words came from Greek and they can understand and they've got a very easy job when it comes to deducing meaning.

Anyway, just guess. Guess the words and put them in context and it's not as bad as you may think. What is terrible though and is completely inexcusable is to leave an answer blank. So, always put an answer there. You are not going to lose points, so it's ridiculous not to have a shot



anyway. For example, if it's multiple choice, there are four options. You've got at least a 1 in 4 chance and it could just be the point that pushes you from 6.5 to 7.

Next point is understanding your weakness. This is why I said if you've got about 30 days to prepare, you need to be doing practice tests and you need to be isolating where you're losing points. If you've got 10 days, follow the same strategy and just focus on those areas of the exam where you tend to lose your points.

If you've got three or four months to prepare, then perhaps you may have the luxury just to start reading what you enjoy and then nearer the exam start doing the practice tests. I'm saying this because it can take a lot of motivation to do these practice tests and you don't want to burn out before the test.



Another strategy is if you've got your exam coming up in a few months, just do a practice test every week, but I would strongly recommend taking the same approach i.e. isolating the areas where you lose points. It might be gap fill. It might be time management. Identify that and then work on that specific area or that specific skill.

Now, if you're aiming for an 8-- this is the second part of the tutorial-- if you're aiming for a band 8, then you need to be improving your vocabulary and this is why if you can work on your language skills while you're focusing on a certain part of the exam, it's really handy and I mention this because in the online courses-- sorry, in the online course, we recently covered a tutorial about how to get ideas and there's a process I shared where you not only get ideas-- where you go online, you search for ideas, but while you're doing it, you're acquiring topic-specific vocabulary. You're on the lookout for collocations. You're on the lookout for



certain phrases that you would only find in this topic and also, if you're especially aware of this, you can also find phrases that you can later use in your writing.

Anyway, to cut a long story short, improve your vocabulary. Look at academic text and start building your vocabulary bank and translate it into your own language and then later in the day, translate that list back into English. If you develop the daily habit of doing this, you will quickly find your vocabulary expanding.

As I've said before, summarizing and paraphrasing is essential. How can you get better at this? Well, start building your synonyms. Start introducing this into your speaking conversation. I was basically on a group call the other day and I became aware of a technique a friend uses when he wants to understand the situation and it made him sound really intelligent.



Basically, somebody would describe the problem in this group call and then the other person would basically summarize it and give it back to that person. If you can do that when you're talking with someone, it shows that you've got a high level in the language because, not only are you they are able to take those ideas on board but you can reproduce something similar in the same words.

So, get into the habit-- not into the habit, but at least be on the lookout for the opportunity to use this skill. So, for example, if someone's telling you they've got a big problem; my mom's really angry with me because I left the kitchen in a bit of a mess last night. I don't know why she's so angry. She also leaves it in a mess. When you're talking to that person, you can say so you think your mother treats you unfairly regarding the condition of the kitchen. You just summarized it and basically rephrased it.



Obviously, we want to be spell checking our answers. Having poor spelling for the IELTS exam is inexcusable and that may sound harsh. However, we've got technology nowadays, so when we are typing up our answers and sending them to an examiner for feedback as you can do at ieltspodcast.com, as you know, you will see the words that you are spelling incorrectly.

When you see those, you want to obviously take a note, correct them, put them down in your list-- in your vocab journal, for example, or in your spelling journal and start doing those translation exercises back and forth, back and forth until it's mastered.

Another exercise you can do to improve your reading is obviously challenge yourself to doing reading tests faster than you normally would do them. Only do this though once you've got familiar with the exam and basically, you're hitting the target grade that you want to. I remember I used to work with a teacher who used to only give the students like 30 minutes to do the



reading the exam when officially they could do it in 40 and his argument was hey, if they can do it in 30, they can easily do it in 40.

I took a different approach. I wanted them to master each-- and I think you should, too-- where by you master each section. You do it in an hour, an hour-and-twenty and then you slowly start working down the time towards doing it in the target time of 40 minutes. Then once you've got it done in 40 minutes and you've mastered each section, then look at doing it even faster to 30 minutes if you've got the same time, for example.

One final point that's probably often overlooked is keeping track of your performance. Make a note of what mistakes you're doing, what scores you're getting; put the dates in there and you will be more motivated to practice because you can see your improvement. You'll also be aware of the mistakes you're making especially if you're noting them down. Like yes/no/not given was



an absolute train crash this time. When you write that down, you know to pay more attention or even allocate more time on that for the next exam.

Right. That's everything from me today. In a few days, we're going to have a student who scored 8.5 and we're also going to be talking about the IELTS indicator test and Canadian immigration. So, that's coming up in a few days.

If you're still in lockdown, then make the most of it. A lot of students who are already on our course they just keep buying more essay corrections because it's like hey, my exams have been stalled. I don't want to lose the skill I've got, so I want to keep on moving. I want to keep on improving. So, they're just buying essay checks and I think it's a very smart idea.

So, if you are in lockdown and you want to make the most of it especially if you're frustrated with your IELTS improvement and you want to be moving forward faster and improving faster,



then now is a good opportunity to take advantage of this lockdown and get your work, get your study plan, and get you get your IELTS preparation into a structured format where you can move forward and improve much faster.

That's everything from me today and by the way, if you're on our email list and you're on the online course, then you probably picked up the bonus that we were offering. We were offering some discounted speaking feedback reviews which are going well. I offered them to the students on the email list. So, that's another reason why joining the email list is a good idea.

For the students who are already on the online course, we offered this feedback for free and it went pretty good actually and that's another episode that's coming up in a few days. So, if you've got any questions, don't hesitate to contact us.



If you're under lockdown and you're suffering, you're struggling, and you're finding it hard, a couple of weeks ago, I did a corona IELTS podcast which I think will help you. We talked about strategies of organizing your day, getting a routine, taking charge, putting in a schedule, and self-study exercises you can do where you don't need a teacher and you can just sit down and jump straight into them rather than saying, for example, Tuesday I'm going to do IELTS writing and then figuring out what to do. These were all very actionable, very practical, and valuable exercises to do.

That's everything from me today. Finally, we finished and remember if you've got any friends struggling, tell them to get in contact with us at ieltspodcast.com. Remember we've got the IELTS forum now. We've got a teacher in their daily answering your questions and the online



classes are going really well. Just as an example, today, we dissected a question. We developed our positions. We came up with arguments. We developed our ideas.

Actually, I'm saying we. I didn't actually do anything. I was just challenging the students to do it and giving them feedback and that's why they're going well because everybody is pitching in and we're reviewing each other's ideas. We're learning from each other and I think it's just a really good way to start the day for myself or a really good part of the day especially with the most of us being in lockdown-- in lovely lockdown.

My name is Ben Worthington. We're now finishing. Have a great day and remember to make the most of the situation. Take care. Bye-bye.

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