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INTRODUCTION

[Music]

Ben: Hello there, IELTS students. In this tutorial, Daphne and myself will be focusing on how to write an IELTS essay. How are you doing this morning, Daphne?

Daphne: I'm great thanks, Ben. I'm doing really, really well. I hope you are, too.



Ben: Yes, yes I'm doing great. Cheers. Okay. So, can you give us an outline about what we will be covering and learning in this tutorial, please?

Daphne: Yes, absolutely. So, today, everybody, we are going to be looking at how to write a really good Task 2 academic essay and the way we're going to do it is by looking at this essay like a process or a system. So, rather than just looking at the title and panicking and writing, we're just going to go through quite methodically the whole start-to-finish process looking at the different stages and explaining to you why we think this is really, really important.

Ben: Beautiful, beautiful. Right then, although there isn't a magic formula-- this sounds kind of contradictory maybe a little bit-- but although there isn't a magic formula, I think we did come reasonably close with the Sentence Guide, but let me just qualify that. It's not really a formula we've got in the Sentence Guide. It's more of a system and even then, there is still work to be



done i.e. getting feedback and working on your own grammar and your own vocabulary and we can give you help in that area just like we can give you feedback-- just like we can give you the system for writing essays.

What we're doing here is similar to what we're doing in the Sentence Guide except with the Sentence Guide it's a little bit more hands-on and it's broken down a little bit more granular because we've got the luxury of having the tutorials, of having a screen and you're watching it then you're doing the exercises, sending them in whereas in this episode or this podcast-- in this tutorial, it's more of an overview of a similar process.

Daphne: Yes, exactly, Ben. I think you're right and I think the ideas between the two things for me actually link up because I think having a process-- I think if you step back from your writing in a way, for me, this is-- you have to think and part of the process is actually thinking. You have



to understand what you're doing. You're given a title. You have to understand the whole process of the brainstorming and the planning-- we'll go into this in more detail-- but it's how you get from step to step to step.

The course that we offer especially with the 12 Sentence Guide takes you through the steps of getting your essay as best as it can possibly be to get the grade you want. So, we take you through, as Ben says, this whole idea of writing and feedback, giving you the chance to improve. That's a process as well. I think it's understanding that it takes time, but also you need to complete each step of the process in order to get the best result. There aren't any shortcuts on this I'm afraid.

Ben: Absolutely. Absolutely and I find a lot of students get frustrated because it just seems so overwhelming and I know so many students will just read a question and then they're like my



mind goes blank or they get a nuclear bomb explosion of ideas and they don't know where to start.

With a process, when it's broken down into the smallest components and then the student is given the opportunity to master each of those components, it becomes infinitely easier, more straightforward and it's just a radical boost in confidence.

Daphne: Yes, Ben, you are so right and literally you'll laugh because step one of the process is read the question.

Ben: Exactly. Exactly. All right. Can you elaborate more on this one, please?

Daphne: Yes. Let's go through this. So, this is before you even start to write. It's literally step one: read the question and understand what the examiner is asking. That in itself has two parts to



it. Read the question, number one and this gives me a flashback. This makes me think back to my childhood because my father made us work very hard when we were children.

There were no excuses for bad grades, but when we were doing an exam he always used to say to us rule number zero: read the question and that has stuck in my mind through the rest of my life and I say to my students now read the question-- rule number zero: read the question because it's easy to see a few words in the question.

You might see the word pollution or you might see the word environmental problem or you might see the word loneliness and you think oh, great. Okay. Off I go, but that would be a fatal error.



Ben: Absolutely, absolutely. You just reminded me actually when I was working with my dad. We used to work in the shop because we have a supermarket back home in England and it wasn't question zero, it was just every 10 minutes. Are you winning? Are you winning, son?

Daphne: I love that.

Ben: Yes, but also just as a side note it used to drive me crazy working there because it was all about communication and the instructions were like put that over there under the other ones and it used to drive me absolutely crazy because I had no idea what was going on, but anyway.

Daphne: Yes, so read the question and understand what the examiner is asking. So, let's break that down. So, make sure you understand what question is being asked. Make sure you understand what question is being asked and one of the worst mistakes you can make is, as Ben



said before, going off on a tangent, going off on a different path and forgetting to answer the question or failing to answer the question.

I think we need to remind everybody that IELTS questions are very precisely worded and this is part of the challenge for me is actually understanding what does the examiner want me to say here? So, understanding that they're very precise and they therefore-- these questions require a really specific answer. So, I think step one is read the question, but also it's okay to spend a bit of time understanding it, reading it, and thinking just what you have to do.

Ben: Exactly and this reminds me of one of the modules we have in the Sentence Guide which is basically the CTRT method was basically cohesive task response method where we break down the question. We dissect it and then from there we can make a coherent paragraph plan and it's



just so much easier and this is what I was saying before about breaking it down to the smallest components.

Daphne: Yes, and actually, I was going to add to that one, Ben. This is something that we say to students. When you see the question, take a pencil and just highlight the key words or circle the key words in that question. The most common errors we see when we're doing the essay correcting is students who've very sadly misunderstood the question and if you misunderstood the question, so if you're not succeeding on step one of this process, then you are more likely-- you won't be able to get a good grade on the task response because you've written a lovely essay, but to the wrong question.

Ben: Got you. Yes, I remember actually when I was teaching IELTS that this used to be-- and also correcting the essays, I saw this day-in day-out and the worst is when you get excited and



you think you've got it and you race off and you start planning your ideas and you're like ah this is really good and then you review the question again and you're like oh, I am way off topic.

Even in the online classes this would happen. So, we were always going back to the question two, three, four, five, six times just to make sure we are completely on topic. Okay. Step two.

Daphne: Step two is thinking. You cannot write an IELTS essay without thinking. So, this is part of your brainstorming, your planning which we talk about a lot on the online course is just getting ready for this whole writing. So, step one, you've read the question, you've understood what you're being asked. Step two is thinking what are you going to write?

So, this is when you're going to activate all the ideas you've had. This is when you're going to use all the practice that we're giving you. When you divide your piece of paper into two, you're



going to write down as many ideas as you can for your advantages, for your disadvantages, for your problems, for your possible solutions, depending on what type of essay it is.

So, you don't react with a ready-made essay. I know quite a lot of students like writing essays in advance and they think oh, great. I'll learn that essay and I'll use that essay again, but I really want to stress this strategy does not work. We would strongly advise against it. You need to think.

Ben: Yes. I've heard stories about students as soon as they see any question they just reproduce this memorized essay and it might be about solar energy and it's-- just because they've memorized an essay about environmental issues and then they'll reproduce that essay for any question about environmental issues which is basically an absolute train crash doing that.



Daphne: It is. You are absolutely right and when you're doing that little brainstorming stage at the beginning, it's three minutes. Honestly, it does not need to take you long, but you're activating your language. You're activating your experience, your knowledge. You can then transform the examples you're thinking of into academic examples. The fragments of language you've learned before, the amazing collocations you've got in your head, all that stuff is working in your brain and this will help you write this fantastic essay. So, this step to think what you're going to write is really, really important in this process.

Ben: Excellent point there and I'll just repeat what Daphne said there. At this stage, when those phrases pop into your mind, catch them and write them down and then you can start maybe either bending your essay around those phrases-- it's one possible way-- or you start bending your language around your ideas. There's two ways depending on your ability and this is a tutorial that we're going to go into later, but depending on your ability, you've got to catch the phrases that



come into your mind, catch those collocations, write them down because it's very unlikely that they might reappear. So, you got to get them while they're there. [unintelligible 00:25:52.16].

Daphne: That's so true and actually the best essays I read, the ones that are most fluent, so the ones that score really highly on, not only lexical resource obviously because collocations are all about lexis but also about coherence are the ones that are using these collocations. So, these are words which naturally sit together in English.

To an English person, these are instinctive and we are very lucky. It's normal for us as it would be in your language. So, the collocations that work well are ones that are totally natural and as Ben says, write them down quickly because then you've got them. You've done the hard work. You've done this thinking and then when you get into the flow of writing, you can just pick them out and use them.



Ben: Exactly. Just as a very, very quick example, I was reviewing somebody's essay the other day and they wrote about safety and health in the workplace and I was like okay, that's all right, but it's more common just to say health and safety in the workplace. That's the collocation and it sounds so much more-- it's easier for the listener because if you say health and... you're almost expecting safety, but if you say safety and... you're never expecting health. So, it's just little things like that to build your coherence, to build your fluency and are also useful for spoken English as well. Okay-- sorry

Daphne: I was going to say just as a side-- as a suggestion for everybody on that one the best way you can become more comfortable with these collocations is by listening to the radio or even when you're watching TV, just listening to how people-- just listen to the words. Being aware of the words people are using because we use this our whole time.



Ben: Absolutely. Great point there. Okay. Step three.

Daphne: Okay. So, step three is writing the essay and here I'm thinking of the 12 Sentence Guide that we use because I think that's really important that we do that on the course. It really helps you if you're not so confident in writing. This gives you your stages, your process in a way. Once you've started writing, it gives you the little stages to go through to make sure that you're going to cover all the points, to make sure that your essay is going to be really organized and coherent.

So, every essay should have three parts. So, we're going to consider each each part as a step in this process. So, your first part is going to be writing the introduction. Your second part of this writing actual process is going to be your body paragraphs and then your conclusion. So, we'll go into this in a little bit more detail, Ben, yes?



Ben: Yes. Totally, totally. So, when you're writing your introduction-- well hopefully, when you've done your planning, you have constantly referred back to the question. A common mistake when students are doing this is that their position when they're answering is not crystal clear.

Daphne: Exactly.

Ben: And a common reason for this is because the student is thinking about-- maybe they've answered the wrong question, which is one thing that we've tried to hammer home for the last 10 minutes and another reason for this mistake is that they've really gone on sort of like the quality of idea rather than the quality of the communication or the quality of the language and this can really, really mess up what could be a decent essay.



Daphne: Absolutely. The introduction is a really important step in this writing process and I think the danger I think or may be a common error is that students say okay, well I'll just get the introduction done quickly, then I'll get into the main point of the essay, but the introduction literally introduces the essay. It's very important. Your introduction is like the first impression.

Imagine you are going into a job interview. You want to be wearing your best clothes and you want to be looking really smart and you want to be ready for this interview. You want this job and an introduction is the same thing. You are showing the examiner hey, this is me. This is what I can do. I've got this exam.

Ben: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Daphne: You don't want to waste those few sentences just writing empty sentences. There are a lot of sentences that people write: this essay will discuss the advantages and disadvantages using



examples without really giving me anything. Advantages of what? Disadvantages of what? Tell me where you're going in this essay. Literally start guiding me down this path of where your essay is going.

So, the introduction is part of the writing process that we're talking about. It sets the tone and it gives the examiner the first impression of your skills and abilities. So, you don't want to get that wrong. If you get that wrong, you're starting off on the wrong foot as we say.

Ben: Absolutely and do you see this phrase-- whenever I see this phrase I groan and it's like in today's competitive world. That one just drives me crazy. When I correct essays, I see this like at least twice a week and it just drives me mad. I'm like where is this phrase coming from? It seems just copy-paste.



So, yes. Try and add that element of uniqueness as well and as Daphne said, avoid like the plague those empty sentences. I used to see those day-in day-out also. Okay. What's the next--

Daphne: This also links back to the thinking because when you've looked at that title and you've read it and you try to understand what the examiner wants from you, I know we talk about paraphrasing which is a really important way of showing the examiner different vocabulary because it's not a good idea to repeat the words in the question, but rather than just choosing a random word that looks the same as the other word, you need to show that you understand the question. We need to know-- the examiner needs to know you really know what you're going to talk about. You're not just paraphrasing empty words.



Ben: Excellent. Excellent. I think paraphrasing is such a valuable skill and yes, maybe we could do a whole-- we should do another tutorial about that soon I think in the future. All right. What's the next stage, Daphne?

Daphne: Okay, so the next stage-- so, you've done your introduction. You've set the tone. You've got a fantastically good impression. You've made your position clear. So, this is important. You've made your position clear; you agree, you disagree. And then the next stage you're going to develop the essay. So, you're going to develop the essay and this is your sort of approach to the subject and you're going to give your explanations.

So, when you're talking about the main body, these two body paragraphs that we talk about, you need to ensure that your answer is clear and accurate and coherent and well-structured. These are a lot of things you've got to be thinking about in those few sentences.



Ben: Absolutely and I think this is where the Sentence Guide comes in because we give you the structure. We give you the formula for this plan and you can't just read the formula then write a perfect essay. You do need to test it out a few times and this is why we offer feedback on the course just to make sure you've got this system mastered before you go and do the exam.

I'll just mention some-- I'm not going to go into detail about how to develop the ideas. We've got full tutorials on that in the library-- previous episodes, but what I'm going to mention is just some common mistakes that I've seen where we may have gone into a lot of detail, but we haven't really linked those details to the question.

When I was doing the online classes, I used to see this day in day out and there was a disconnect. There would be like lots of details maybe about going on holiday or the benefits of going on holiday whereas the question was should workers take their family with them on a work holiday



and I was getting lots of ideas about the details and the benefits of holidays, but it wasn't really answering and they weren't really directly connected with the question.

Another common mistake was that the student would come out with ideas related to the question, but they couldn't develop it with examples or they couldn't give reasons and I think this is a really important exam skill to develop.

Daphne: Absolutely. I completely agree, Ben, and this is something that I say to everybody who I'm working with on the course is give me more and I know Ellen, our colleague, she says to the students be ambitious. Come on. Give me more. So, yes, you've written a great sentence. You're absolutely talking about the right topic whatever it is, but explain that to me in more depth. Don't just give me one sentence and then say for example. I need you to develop it.



So, in the structure of your essay, in the process of this paragraph building, you've got your topic sentence and then you need to develop your topic sentence. So, in the Sentence Guide where we use a phrase like this is because, this absolutely automatically helps you to give this development, give this extra because you have to think okay, why is this? And then you are developing those ideas. This is a really, really important part of this paragraph building.

Ben: Absolutely, yes, absolutely. Okay moving on no. 5. What is step no. 5? By the way students, I hope you have-- it's a bit late now, but you can always listen to it again. I was going to say I hope you're taking notes. So, anyway sorry. Step no. 5, Daphne.

Daphne: Yes, we can recap this, Ben. It's okay. We don't have to be too mean to everybody.

Ben: Okay. I prefer to be mean, but whatever.



Daphne: I'll be the nice one.

Ben: Good cop bad cop. Sorry, let's go. Step five.

Daphne: Okay. So, when you've done your step four, you've developed your paragraphs, you've given your examples, you've got your lovely coherent well-structured paragraphs. Step five is going to be your conclusion. So, you conclude your essay with a summary and this is like completing the circle. If you imagine your essay like a process diagram almost you might see in the Academic Task 1 going round in a circle. The end of your circle is your conclusion and the conclusion should be a summary.

Don't give me any new ideas in your conclusion. Don't throw something at me about physical health or hospital numbers or something like that because I'm thinking where has that come



from? You haven't talked about that before in the essay. Why are you suddenly saying that now? It should be just making sure that you round off your ideas and it should complete it.

So, you're just summarizing the main points that you've made and you are, as Ben keeps on saying, you're reflecting the connection between-- you're going back to what you said in the introduction and then back to what you said in the question. So, you're making sure that a good conclusion summarizes the content of that essay.

Ben: Absolutely, absolutely and it takes discipline to ignore these wonderful ideas that pop into your mind at the last minute of writing and they might be a perfect fit and there might be a better quality idea than the ones you've put in your essay-- in your body paragraph. Still, it's usually better just to ignore them and just stick to the plan because as I keep saying almost every episode



it's not really the quality of your ideas. It's the quality of your communication. This is a language exam, not a test of your intelligence. So, yes.

Daphne: Absolutely.

Ben: All right. Step six.

Daphne: Okay. Step six is our final step. Step six: read your essay. Now, I know that you don't have much time. I know in this exam you are under serious pressure to do something fantastic in a very, very short amount of time. You are nervous. The adrenaline is going crazy. It is terrifying and we totally understand that, but please, please, please take two minutes at the end to re-read your essay. This is the most important thing, very easy to forget.



You get one chance doing this exam. You don't want to do it again. It's annoying. It's expensive. It's boring. So, read your essay through. As you go through it, just check back on that paragraph you've just done. Am I on the right track here because if you're not on the right track, it's better to change it there and then than go all the way to the conclusion and then realize you've written the wrong essay.

So, keep re-reading, not re-reading every word but keep checking back to make sure you are on the right track. If you leave the whole essay till the very end, it might be a bit too late if you've answered the wrong question. So, check it as you're going through and then check it again as a whole at the end and make sure that you have answered the question. Make sure your introduction is doing what it should making sure you develop your paragraphs and the essay is coherent; that it makes sense.



Ben: Absolutely. Absolutely. One final point before we go into the final-- well the practice suggestion that we're going to make in a minute, one final point is that hopefully or ideally, you're getting feedback on your work because this is the fastest way to improve. We do have a feedback service. So, if you go to ieltspodcast.com you can look at the essay correction service. We're so confident of this. We include it in the online course as well. That's why we can offer the guarantee of jump to band 7 or it's free.

What I want to say is that getting feedback will enable you to identify your own mistakes and this is insanely valuable because you've probably got no idea of the mistakes you're making. I mention it now because when you're doing this review of your essay, you need to be looking for mistakes that you have made in your previous essays. This way you're more likely to spot a mistake.



If you know that past participles are a weak spot or a weak area for you, then you know to hone in on those areas and just pay special attention and maybe double check all the past participles you've used in your essay. This is an easy way to boost your score.

Daphne: Yes, sorry. I completely agree. I think it's a really, really important point. I think you can write lots of essays and we give you feedback and the feedback is so important and our students really enjoy that we're really helping them identify errors.

Again, part of this whole process may be-- part of this whole thinking is understanding your errors. So, we encourage people to write down their error list and thank you to all the students who take time to do that, who really write me a very lovely long list of this is a mistake I make. This is what it should have been, whatever. As you are doing that, you are learning and you are



consciously making sure that you won't make that mistake again. That mistake is now-- you've noticed it. I mean if you've noticed it, then you're much less likely to do it again.

Ben: Absolutely, absolutely and just being aware of these mistakes and nipping them in the bud so to speak will just make you a better writer overall and very importantly, if you catch them now, they are less likely to become what we call fossilized errors in that they are just part of your-- you become so used to writing like this that it becomes part of your everyday language in English and it becomes much difficult to correct a fossilized error than it is to nip it in the bud before it becomes calcified so to speak.

Daphne: Exactly. Fossilized errors always make me think of dinosaurs.



Ben: Exactly, yes, exactly. Okay. So, the next one: practice. How can a student put all what we've said into practice? What's a good exercise a student could do, Daphne?

Daphne: Okay. The easiest thing for you to do is to take an essay title that you've done before. So, don't frighten yourself with a new essay title, but take an essay you've done before and go through these stages and in a minute we'll recap on these stages for you, but go through these stages and rewrite the essay.

So, look at it as if you were looking at it with fresh eyes. Look at that title again. Make sure you absolutely understand those key words in that title. Make sure you know what is the examiner asking me and then go through the next stage of the thinking, go through how you're going to write it, go through getting ideas for it.



So, it's not an exercise in correcting errors, but it's almost the opportunity to understand the process and see your whole essay writing in a new light and the reason why we say use an old essay is because the ideas and the vocabulary are already there, but what you're doing is fine-tuning. So, you can really analyze yourself.

Actually, I thought of that idea, but now I'm just giving myself that stage two brainstorming thinking time. Could I have another idea? Could I make it a bit different? So, you're using the ideas and the vocabulary that you've got. You're supplementing them, but you're paying attention to how you write the essay; the actual process of doing it, the steps you have to go through to take you from that very beginning looking at the title to right at the end checking it and then pressing submit.



So, it might take a long time, but it doesn't matter. It's important that you can embed this process into how you write every single essay going forward. So, pay attention to each of these phases and then ask yourself what are you trying to achieve? What are you doing here? Why are you doing it like this? So, it's really to do with being very aware of what you're doing, isn't it? And this cognitive process I think.

Ben: Yes, absolutely. I love this piece of advice of rewriting your old work and I think we could and we probably should incorporate it into the next Sentence Guide that's going to be launched this year probably in a month or two, but I really like this idea because while I was listening to you I was like writing an essay from scratch can be quite a daunting and mentally taxing process whereas rewriting an essay is going to be a lot more fulfilling. It's going to be a lighter mental



load and I think it would be a bit-- not a bit more-- I think it would be more enjoyable as well.

Don't you think?

Daphne: Yes, completely and it's actually very satisfying. If you think of these stages from start to finish actually ending up with something that you're really, really happy with and that you know is correct in terms of the grammar or the vocabulary and it's got lovely rich vocabulary and you've developed your answers and it's coherent. To have that final product at the end of this process is really very satisfying. Yes, you know you can do it.

Ben: Exactly, exactly. So, what do you think, Daphne? We should incorporate this into the next online course, the next Sentence Guide?

Daphne: I think that's a really, really good idea. We encourage people to look at the corrections and rewrite certain paragraphs, but I think rewriting it so that you've got your own model of that



essay--not that you're going to use that model again because that's something that we know you can't do, but you've got in there the great bits of language, you know you've got good paragraphs. I think for your own satisfaction exactly, I think it's a really, really good thing to do.

Ben: Super, super. Okay. Before we finish, let's just review these six stages. 1) We make sure we read the question and we understand what the examiner is asking.

Daphne: Exactly. 2) Think about what you are going to write. Think this is your brainstorm and your planning. You must think.

Ben: Beautiful. Step 3 we're going to write the introduction. We're going to make sure that we're answering the question quite clearly and we're going to make sure that the question links properly and it's just going to set the right tone and give a stellar first impression.



Daphne: Good word. Step 4 we're going to develop the essay ideas into your body paragraphs. So, your essay ideas, your whole coherence, the lovely structure is going to come through in those body paragraphs.

Ben: Super and step 5 we're going to write a summary that ignores any of these ideas that pop into our mind and basically, we're going to complete this cycle of the essay writing process.

Daphne: Final one step 6: you're going to read your essay and remember we said not just read it at the end. Keep on checking. Keep on checking back after the end of each paragraph. Am I on task? Am I answering the right question and make sure you're using the lovely note you wrote when you were brainstorming. Those are there fresh in your mind. You should be constantly checking on those. So, making sure that by the end of your essay when you've read it, it makes sense and it's a coherent whole piece of writing.



Ben: Beautiful, beautiful. Okay. That's everything from Daphne and myself today and remember you're not alone when you're preparing for IELTS. Just remember you can reach out to us at ieltspodcast.com. You can sign up and get a whole big PDF. We have lots of sample essays and advice and tutorials there.

Also remember when you download the podcast app that we have the IELTS podcast app, you get the full transcript of these tutorials and you get access to more special offers. So, have a look. For those in the App Store and the Google Play Store, I think it's something like bwenglishieltspodcast.com and you'll see the logo there; the orange and white one. Download those and then start reading along. Read those transcripts while listening to our tutorials.

So, thank you very much for listening and all the best with your IELTS preparation. Daphne, do you want to add anything?



Daphne: Yes, thanks everybody and keep listening to this podcast. There are a really, really good way to just make sure you are on top of everything IELTS. Thanks, Ben.

Ben: Awesome.

[Music]

Female Voice: Thanks for listening to ieltpodcast.com