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INTRODUCTION

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Ellen: Hi, everybody. Welcome to another IELTS podcast. My name is Ellen and today I'm going to talk about band scores, not just for one particular section of the test but for the test as a whole and how those scores are calculated. So, let's work with a couple of assumptions that you



know a few things about the test, but I do want to give some basic information about the test as well.

So, we all know that there are two types of tests; the academic and the general test where the reading and the writing sections differ for the two different versions of the test and there are four parts of the test. So, you have reading, listening, writing, and speaking.

The first thing I want to say about how the score is calculated is that each section of the test has an equal weight. So, each section is worth 25% of your score. So, it's not like reading is more important than speaking or listening is less important than writing. They're all weighted the same. So, that's the first thing that's important. So, your overall score will be an average of those four individual sections. So, they'll add up the four scores; one from each of the different sections and determine the average of those four scores.



Now, let's talk about what happens when you don't really have a nice clean number because as again I'm sure a lot of you know, the band scores are in halves and wholes. So, it could start at 2, 2.5 and goes to 6, 6.5. So, this is how the scores are calculated, but what happens if you have a score where that's not possible. Say, for example, you get three 7s and one 6, how does that affect your score?

Well, if we're talking about the overall test score, your band score for the entire test will be rounded up. What do I mean? Let's say you get a 7 in reading, a 7 in listening, a 7 in speaking, but you get a 6 in writing. This comes out to be 6.75. So, what would happen is the people at IELTS would then round your score up to the nearest whole number giving you the overall band score of 7. That's great news, right? Well, sure it is. Now, if it comes out to be a 6.25, it again is



rounded up to a 6.5. So, it's also good news and this is great when you need an overall band score of a certain level. This helps you.

However, what happened with the individual tests themselves is something different and this is something I've talked about in some of the other podcasts that I've done. What happens in the individual sections is that your number is rounded down. So, what do I mean? Let's imagine that for writing where your score is again marked on four different criteria, you get a 7, a 7, a 7, and a 6. Well suddenly, this 6.75 doesn't give you a 7, but instead it gives you a 6.5 and this is why so many people get this dreaded number even though they need a 7.

This is why it's a really common number because there actually are a ton of different calculations that can bring your number out to a 6.75 and that's one of the things we're going to talk about in this podcast today a little later.



So, that's a couple of things that you need to know. The overall score is rounded up, but the individual sections are rounded down. So, keep that in mind. Don't assume that the individual sections are rounded up just because the overall score is. So, that's the first thing.

Now, in the actual sections themselves, some parts of the test are kind of objectively scored meaning that there's a definite right answer and a definite wrong answer and that's what happens with reading and with listening. There is an answer key that the scorer has and that's how the person determines well, this is a correct answer, this is an incorrect answer. You do need to know that spelling mistakes are counted wrong. If you don't follow instructions, it's also counted wrong. So, if it says no more than four words, but you write five, that's the wrong answer. You're not going to be given the full points for that.



So, these are some things you need to know, but like I said, it is an objective scoring. So, there's a right answer, a wrong answer and that will determine your score. There are a number of correct answers for each band scores. In other words, to get a 9 in your reading, you would need to have either all right or maybe one mistake. If you need a 7, for example, then you need to get 30-32 answers correct and this information is all really readily available on the internet.

You can find it, so I don't want to spend too much time talking about it, but if you know the score that you need for your particular aim, be familiar with which number correct kind of apply to the band score that you need and then that score should be your aim. So, if you need that 7, you should be aiming for at least 30 right.

Of course, my suggestion to students is always aim a band higher or a half band higher. So, if you need a 7, your goal should be at least a 7.5 or an 8. Always aim higher than what you



actually need. Having that information will help you prepare, kind of get you in the mindset like okay, this is my goal, so this is what I'm working towards.

So, as I said, the scoring is really rather objective for academic reading. Now, if you look at the scoring for academic reading, you'll see that it differs slightly from general reading because academic reading is a little more challenging, it's a little more complex and so the scoring is a little different. So, you can take a look at that. To give you an example of what I mean, if you get one wrong in academic reading, that still gives you a band 9 score, but if you get one wrong in general reading, that puts you all of a sudden down to an 8.5 and again it's because of the complexity of the reading text. So, academic is a little more challenging and so they allow you even with one wrong to get a 9.



Now, if you look at listening, listening is pretty much the same as the reading. There are ranges. So, this range of scores will give you a 9. This range of scores will give you an 8 or a 7.5 or a 7 and so forth. So, be familiar with these so that you know what your goal is and what you have to get.

Now to talk a little bit about speaking. Speaking unlike reading and listening is not quite as objective, but instead it's rather subjective. So, what do I mean? I mean that the examiner is going to have to do some interpretation in order to give you your band score. There is a band descriptor table that each examiner has throughout the test. The examiner retrains very often and the examiner is also reviewed and monitored in order to make sure that his or her grading is correct. Despite that, there is still some subjectivity to the examiner's grading in speaking. Again, it's all about interpretation.



Now, another thing that I want you to know is that it's not really easy to become an IELTS examiner. The selection process is really very strict. There are very specific rules and very specific requirements that each person needs to fulfill and again, they go through really demanding, really rigorous training and retraining and retraining and monitoring. So, even though I tell you that there is some subjectivity, what I'm trying to say is that it's subjectivity on how they interpret the descriptors and your score, but again to become an IELTS examiner, the people who are doing this are typically teachers who have a lot of years of experience, who have trained as ESL teachers. So, it's a pretty well-trained well-educated group of people who are behind the scoring.

Now, for the scoring itself, you will be scored on four criteria: fluency and coherence, lexical resource, grammatical range and accuracy, and pronunciation. For each of those criteria, there are band scores starting with 9 going down to 0 and again when you are preparing for IELTS, it



is really, really important to familiarize yourself with those band descriptors. They are available all over the internet. You just have to know how to search for them. All you need to do is search speaking band descriptors IELTS in the search engine of your choice and you'll find them on multiple websites, but it is really important to familiarize yourself with those scores.

Now, as I mentioned, speaking like the other test is one of those sections where you need to-- the score is rounded down. So again, if you get three 7s; so you get a 7 in fluency and coherence, a 7 in lexical resource, and a 7 in grammatical range and accuracy, but you get a 6 in pronunciation, your score is going to be a 6.5. I know a lot of people don't think that's particularly fair, but that's the way they've designed the test.

Now, the other thing that I think a lot of people might not know is about how to get a certain band. So, since we've been talking about a 7, let's see what we mean. If you look at the band



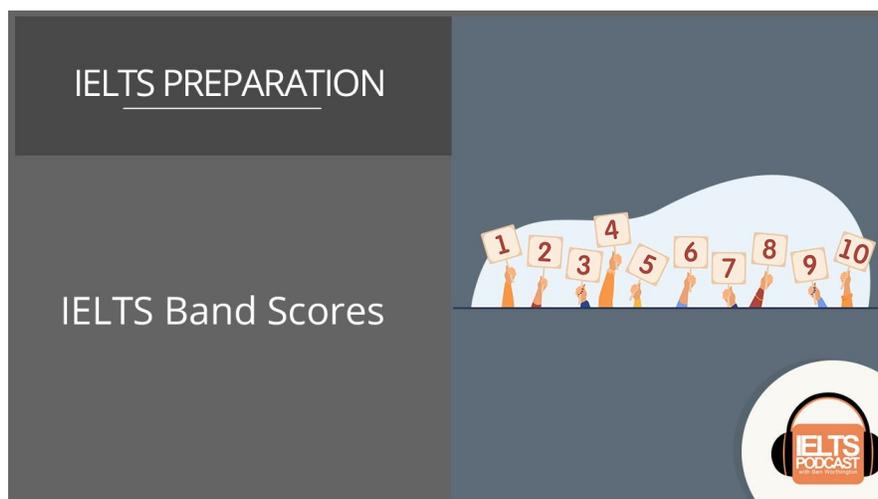
descriptors and I really encourage you to do so, you'll see that there are certain bullets under each score. Now of course, what's available to us as lay people is the public version. The examiners have one that's a little different. It's a little more detailed. There's not only information about what the candidate can do but also a little bit about what the candidate is not capable of doing and so like I said it's a little more detailed.

Let's talk about this individual bands in the individual section and a couple of details about those. Since we talked about a 7, let's think about the 7 briefly for a minute. As I said, each band has a number of bullets and what I want you to understand is that in order to get, for example, a 7, you have to fulfill not just some of those bullets but all of them i.e. you have to fulfill all of the positive descriptors.



So, let me just read to you for a moment what the positive descriptors are for fluency and coherence at band 7. The band descriptors say speaks at length without noticeable effort or loss of coherence, may demonstrate language-related hesitation at times or some repetition and/or self-correction. And the third one is uses ranges of connectives and discourse markers with some flexibility.

So, to get a 7, you need to do all of those things. It's not an approximation. It's not well, I got two of them right, so I guess that makes me a 7. No. If you don't fulfill all of them, the examiner automatically has to look at the next one in line which is obviously a 6 and see if you fulfill those completely. So, this is kind of some of the thinking that the examiner does when scoring your speaking test.



A couple of more words about this. I told you earlier that there is some subjectivity to speaking and what I meant is if you look with me again at some of the language in the band descriptor, it says language related hesitation at times. Well, what do we mean at times? Do we mean once or twice? Do we mean four or five times? Do we mean from Part 1 all the way to Part 3? This is where it's really the judgment call of the examiner. The examiner is going to have to kind of look at your entire test holistically to interpret whether it was just at times or whether it was something a little more sustained throughout your test. This is why the examiner really has to pay a lot of attention to the entire test even though sometimes test-takers say it didn't look like the examiner was paying attention. The examiner is paying attention. The examiner has to. So, like I said, there is some subjectivity. There is some interpretation here that is necessary.

Another kind of subjective piece here is the last one where it says uses a range of connectives and discourse markers with some flexibility. So, what's some flexibility as opposed to great



flexibility or inflexibility? So, these again are some of the decisions the examiner has to make when listening to you.

Now, as with the other sections of the test in total, the individual portions of the speaking test all are weighted the same. So, fluency and coherence has as much weight as grammar does as pronunciation does and as lexical resource does. So, they're all 25% of your grade. You get an average of those four scores for speaking.

Now, let's move on to writing. Writing is a whole different situation. Why? Because your writing score is made up of two different writing tasks and those writing tasks are not equal in weight. So, Task 2 is worth twice as much as Task 1 is. In other words, Task 2 is 66% of your score whereas Task 1 is only 33% of your score. This is an interesting kind of division because even though this is the case and I know a lot of people put a ton of weight into Task 2 preparation,



what they don't realize is that because the scores are rounded down for the individual section, even one poor so to speak score in Task 1 can really, really lower your overall score.

So, what do I mean? I mean let's say for example you get four 7s in Task 2. Great, right? Let's say you get three 7s in Task 1, but you get one 6. So, if you get just one 6, one on Task 1, it gives you a 6.91 and what does that mean now that we know the scores are rounded down? It means that your writing score will be lowered to a 6.5. As I said, there are a ton of different calculations that can be used. This for me is the most tragic one. If you get 7s everywhere, but just one 6 on Task 1, it will give you a 6.9 which is lowered to a 6.5.

Probably the one that is the most “fair” and I say that kind of like in quotes so to speak is if you get two 7s and two 6s in Task 2; two 7s and two 6s in Task 1. There there's absolutely no question about it. This is a straightforward 6.5, but in those other instances, if you get even just



like one or two 6s in all these scores then yes. Sometimes it feels a little unfair, so I understand a lot of people's frustration, but this also explains why there is such a huge range of differences in performance as to 6.5 because the scores that can create that 6.5 really vary.

So, they can go from just one 6 or they can go to six 6s like in the case I mentioned where you've got two 6s in Task 2 and two 6s in Task 1. And again, I said that Task 2 counts double so that's why I come up with six different 6s. So, this is something about how these scores are calculated for writing.

Now, writing as with speaking also has some subjective element in its scoring. So, if you have the band descriptors out and you're looking at them, take a look at task achievement for Task 2 and we can start at a band 9. It says fully addresses all parts of the task. Then the 8 says sufficiently addresses and then band 7 just says addresses all parts of the task. Oh, and then look



at a band 6. That even says addresses all parts of the task as the 7 does, but it also says although some parts may be more fully covered than others.

So, this is really up to the discretion of the examiner what is fully addressed and what is sufficiently addressed or in the difference between a 7 and a 6, what is all parts are addressed and what is all parts are addressed, but some weren't actually covered? So, this is where even in writing Task 2 the examiner has to make some judgment calls here.

So looking really briefly at how Task 1 is scored. Task 1 is a part that I know I have said many times I think that not enough emphasis is given to. I think it's really challenging in a lot of ways and I think a lot of students really struggle with it because they're just not really sure how to approach it. I also think that the scoring leaves a lot of unknown for the test takers. There's some language in the band descriptors that unless you have an experienced IELTS tutor or you have an



examiner or an ex examiner guiding you, you might have some trouble understanding what exactly they expect from you.

So, let me give you one quick example of what I mean. Take a look again at task achievement and I want to look at the difference between the band 6 and the band 7. So, if you look at academic descriptor, it says under task achievement 7 presents a clear overview of main trends, differences, or stages. On the other hand, at band 6 it says presents an overview with information appropriately selected.

So again, it's a little tricky for the test taker who is probably wondering okay, well is my overview just appropriately selected or is it a clear overview of main trends differences or stages? And this is where the guidance of a skilled experienced person with lots of IELTS experience and maybe some examining background can really, really make the difference



because that's when someone will say to you well, you know what, you had an overview, but you really didn't select the right information for your overview. You really didn't pinpoint the main trends, the main differences, the things that were really most important in this graph.

So, that's the kind of thing that's really important to prepare and you can see that, as I said before, even if just your overview is not the descriptor for a band 7, all of a sudden you're going to get a band 6 for task achievement and as I've already highlighted, that can have huge consequences. So again, great if you can prepare on your own and you're doing fine then great, but it really is important to have somebody who knows the ins and outs of the exam guiding you. IELTS it's a really worthwhile investment. So, that's some other information that I want you to keep in mind.

So, that brings us to the end of this tutorial on how IELTS is scored. I hope that you can take away some information from this that will help you in your preparation and help you all get the



scores that you need. Remember always that you can come to us the team here at ieltpodcast.com to help you prepare.

The online course provides a wealth of information. The essay corrections are done by a team of us who are really, really experienced in IELTS; ex examiners, very familiar with the exam, so consider signing up and working with us so we can help you reach your goal. So, with that I bid you good bye for now and good luck with your IELTS preparation.

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