

Ben: Wow! So, thanks to lockdown and Daphne who is excellent and me who is helpful, you got--

Vinod: It was not like that.

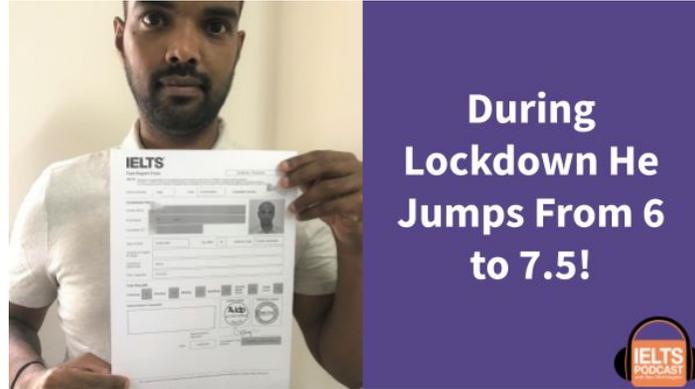
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Female Voice: You are now listening to the IELTS podcast. Learn from tutors and ex-examiners who are masters of IELTS preparation. Your host, Ben Worthington.

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INTRODUCTION

Ben: Hello there, IELTS students. In this tutorial-- actually, it's an interview. We're going to be talking with Vinod who recently got the grades he wanted and will soon be going to Canada. So,



welcome to the podcast, Vinod. You're welcome. So, can you tell us, you're taking the test for immigration reasons. Is that right?

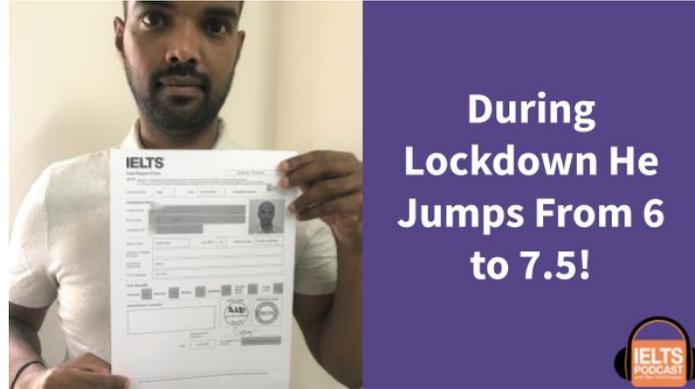
Vinod: Yes, that's true. I applied for a Canadian PR. That's why I wanted to get 8 triple 7 score in IELTS.

Ben: Got you. So, you needed-- did you say you needed four sevens? Is that right?

Vinod: 8 triple 7; listening 8, and the others 7.

Ben: Okay. Got you, got you. Interesting and how long have you been preparing for this exam, Vinod?

Vinod: For the last three months and this COVID-19 it gave a little bit more time so that I can focus more on my weaker side; that was on the writing and I contacted you regarding my writing and it all went well after that.



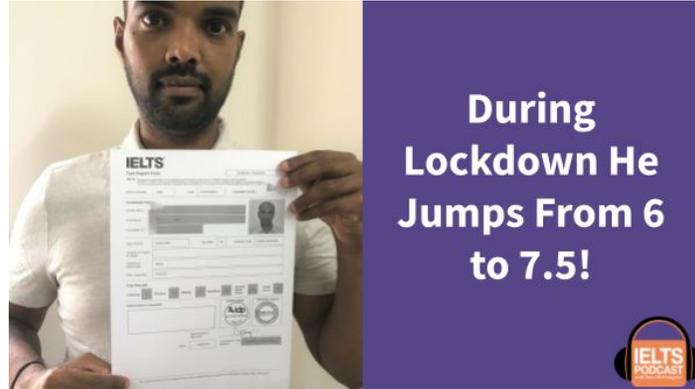
Ben: Excellent. All right. So, you've been preparing for three months. COVID-19 kind of-- did you say worked in your favor?

Vinod: Yes, because I got a better chance to spend more hours. If it was a regular day, I can spend at most one or two hours at most a day, but during that time, I was able to take more like six to eight hours a day. So, it helped.

Ben: Wow! Amazing, amazing and were you working from home? Is that why you had the extra time?

Vinod: That time it was completely lockdown and we were not functioning. It was a pharmaceutical industry, so in our case, there was no work from home. It was all paid leave during that month.

Ben: Interesting and so you utilized this time to focus entirely on your IELTS preparation.



Vinod: Yes, that's true.

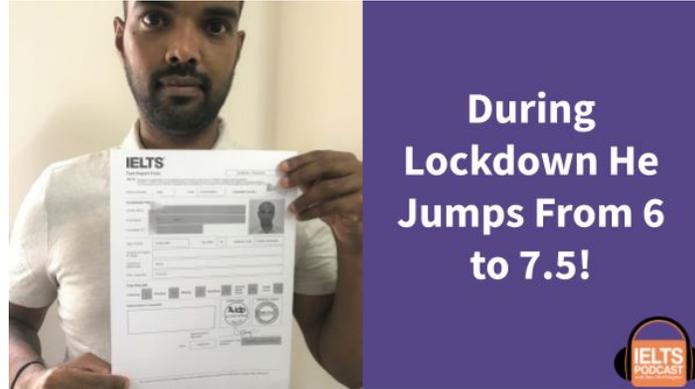
Ben: Interesting. Wow! Wow! Okay. So, normally you are a pharmacist. Is that right? Like an over-the-counter pharmacist or is it just a pharmaceutical industry you're working in?

Vinod: I'm working in pharmaceutical industry analytical research and development. I did my PhD in chemistry so I am more kind of a scientist.

Ben: Beautiful. Wow! That's very interesting and you will be applying to go to Canada on I guess the skilled visa program. Is that right?

Vinod: Yes, that's true.

Ben: Right and where about in Canada do you want to go?



Vinod: Right now, I don't have any preferences, so once I get that Canadian PR, then I will plan accordingly.

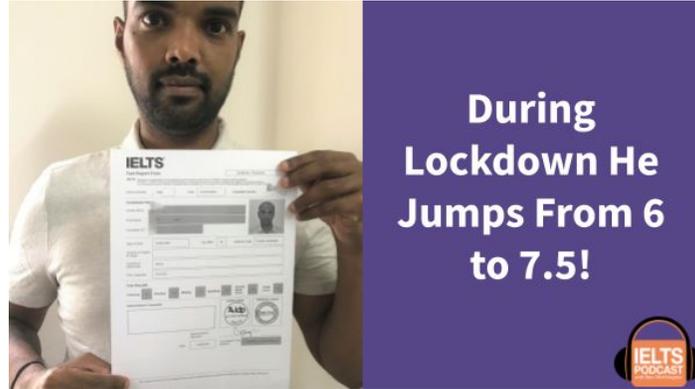
Ben: Interesting. Wow! Okay. So, what happened? Did your immigration advisor tell you that you needed to take the IELTS exam?

Vinod: Yes.

Ben: Right and can you talk us through your journey? Like how did you start your preparation?

Vinod: So, from the beginning, I started working on the Cambridge books 7-14. On my first attempt, I got listening 8.5, reading 6.5-- but I know like reading was okay-- speaking 7.5. That was okay, but writing 6. That was the only thing I worried most.

Ben: Right. So, just to summarize, you bought a load of practice test books, worked through those books, took the test, and got the grades that you just mentioned. Is that right?



Vinod: Yes.

Ben: Right. I see. I see. Wow! Well done for 8.5 in listening. That's fantastic, Vinod.

Vinod: Thank you.

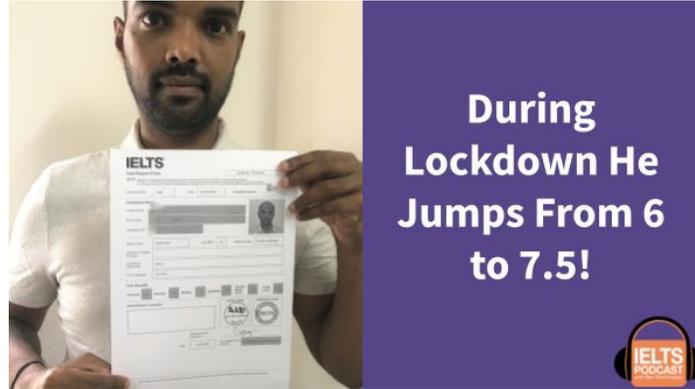
Ben: You said you were worried about the writing.

Vinod: Yes.

Ben: Okay. How were you preparing for the writing before?

Vinod: Earlier on, I had a structure at that time, so I was writing through this structure, but I was getting similar score like 6 and then I asked some other like [unintelligible 00:05:27.11] my friends some advice. They are saying it is about 7 or 7.5, but in the real exam it is equal to 6.

Ben: Ouch. Ouch. That's not good, is it?



Vinod: Yes.

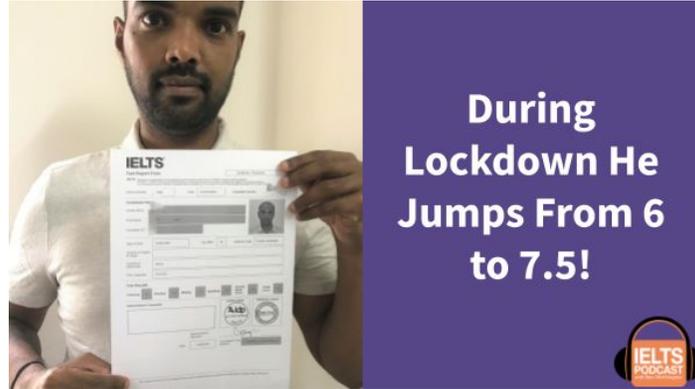
Ben: That's pretty bad. Wow! So, this must have been disappointing.

Vinod: Yes, that's true and at some time I thought like it's not going to happen. After [unintelligible 00:05:50.29] I realized it's going to work because I believe in the process actually.

Ben: Excellent and when you got your-- so you're taking the exam a few times and each time, you thought you were going to get a 7 in the writing and you ended up with a six or a lower than 7 grade.

Vinod: Yes, that's true.

Ben: Right. Right. I see and in the meantime, you were still practicing for the listening, the reading, and the speaking. Is that right?



Vinod: Yes.

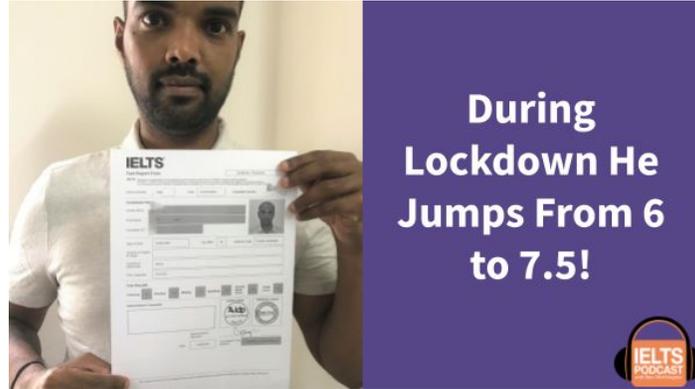
Ben: Got you and you just kept doing practice tests?

Vinod: Yes. I plan it like one day if it is listening, the other day it is going to be reading and I try to write at least-- write an essay or a letter every day.

Ben: Interesting. Good. Good. Yes, I said in other podcasts that the winning strategy is the one which is going to be a routine. It's going to be a habit. It's going to be structured. It's going to be organized and scheduled and this way, it's much easier to move forward. So, with your reading and your listening, I guess you were doing practice tests. Is that right?

Vinod: Yes.

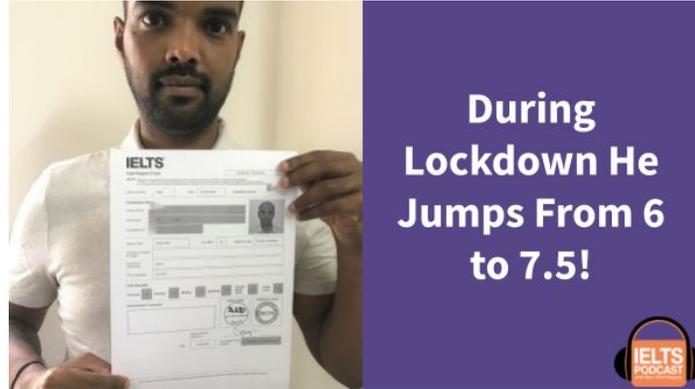
Ben: Did you have any strategy for those practice tests that you could possibly share with us?



Vinod: Yes. The first thing is concentration because it is difficult to concentrate over a period of time. So, I try to perfect only smaller amounts of time like the first ten questions. I go there about 11-40. Once I go to 11-20, I concentrate only on that portion. [Unintelligible 00:07:39.12] the best thing in my power is whenever I do one test, I try to get 39 or 40 in each test and if it needed like 6-7 times, I do the test. At the same time, I write down all the synonyms that were in the test because that kind of audio is not going to have the same vocabulary, so I try to copy at least 20 to 25 synonyms from each test. So, I ended up around 80 to 90 that four tests, so there were plenty of synonyms and in the final exam, it's kind of duplication of those synonyms.

Ben: Wow! That is a very thorough strategy. So, let me just repeat it for the audience and just to check that we've got it right. So, you do a practice test and you might do the same practice test four or five times until you get 39 out of 40 minimum. Is that right?

Vinod: Yes, that's true.

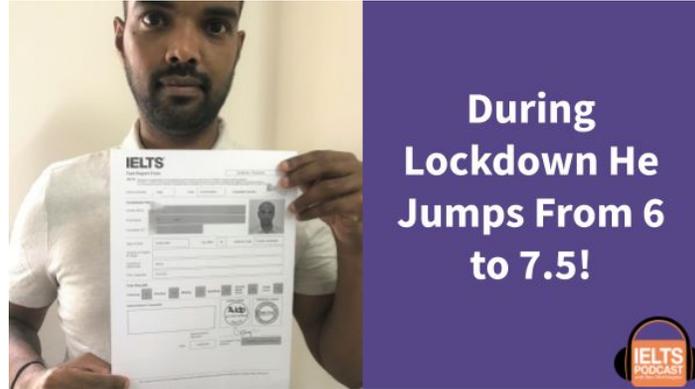


Ben: Interesting and each time you do this practice test, you are researching synonyms and looking for the synonyms in the test and possible synonyms that you could use in your answer. Is that correct?

Vinod: Yes, because once you do three to four tests, after that, they are going to be the same synonyms repeating in each and every test. So, you don't have to look for some other. So, it's kind of a duplication most of the time.

Ben: Wow! Very, very complete preparation and this is the strategy you used for your listening. Did you use a similar strategy for your reading?

Vinod: Reading I was not that much worried. In fact, I didn't do plenty of practice because whenever I-- after my first test, I got 6.5 [unintelligible 00:09:43.11]. The other thing I can say



that changed is I stopped studying the paragraph in the beginning. I start questions then I find the answer in the paragraph so that it saved me additional couple of minutes each time.

Ben: Wow! So, you just went straight to the questions and then looked in the paragraph.

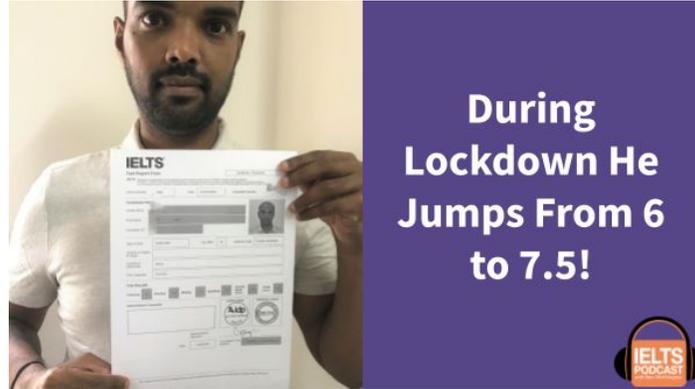
Vinod: Yes. Find the keywords and look for those keywords in the paragraph.

Ben: Look for those keywords or synonyms of those keywords. Is that right?

Vinod: That's true. Exactly.

Ben: Very interesting. So, you tried with a few different strategies until you found one that brought you or that got you your higher score. Is that right?

Vinod: Yes. Most of the time, I start by measuring [unintelligible 00:10:34.28] how much concentration we're putting in each module, but other than a new kind of technique, that's the concentration I thought is the major thing in each and every section. It's not just the idea that we

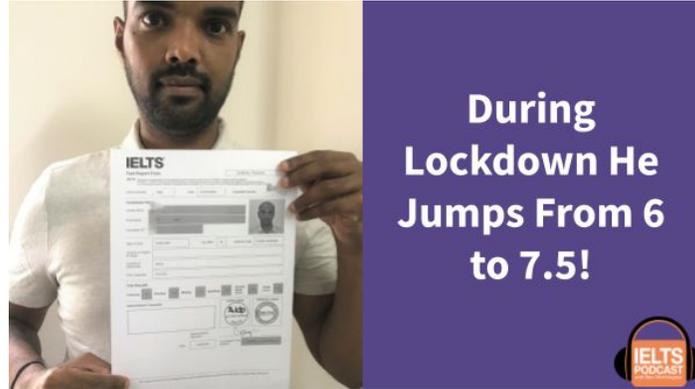


are going to implement. It's the concentration that we are going to put in the exam that is major compared to the strategies.

Ben: Very interesting and how did you improve your concentration levels?

Vinod: I listen to podcasts, sometimes do yoga and do meditation so that I can at least focus on better time like 10-15 minutes or sometimes it may be lesser. I've not mastered it, but it was at least enough practice so I make it past the exam.

Ben: Very interesting. I also meditate, Vinod and I can say to the listeners that when I meditate, I can focus on tasks so much easier and if I don't focus, then my mind is jumping all over the place. I'm thinking about breakfast. I'm thinking about what my brother said to me yesterday. I'm thinking about what I'm going to do at the weekend whereas if I meditate, I can block everything out.



For example, if I meditate in the morning, I can work for 4 or 5 hours and I can just block everything out and I can get some real progress done. How often do you meditate, Vinod?

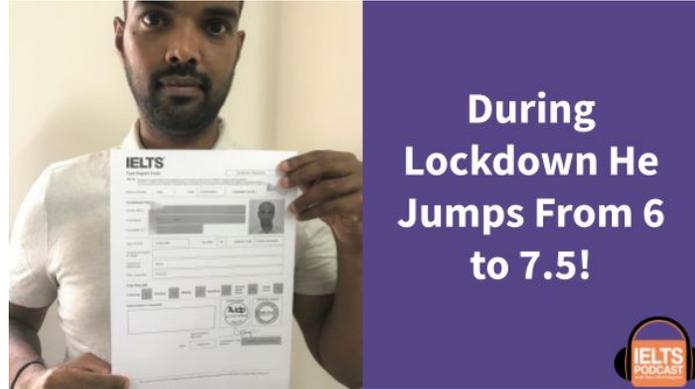
Vinod: In the morning, maybe 10-15 minutes at most.

Ben: Me too, me too and it just makes the day smoother. So, you found this to be a big factor for your concentration levels while you were doing the practice exams.

Vinod: Yes.

Ben: Very interesting. It was so much more important for you that it exceeded looking at strategies. It wasn't so much the strategies. It was more the concentration or focus level. Is that right?

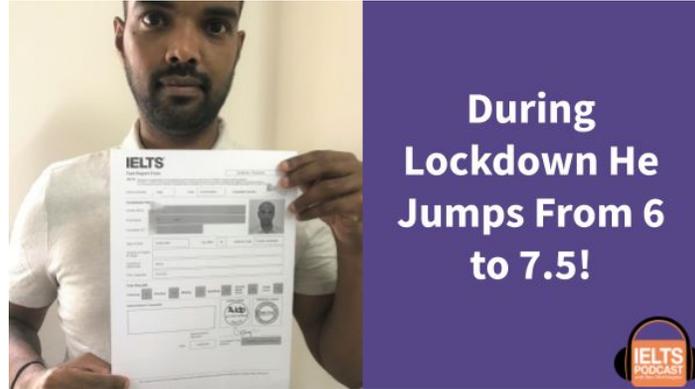
Vinod: Yes.



Ben: Beautiful, beautiful. Now, a lot of students will be listening and think okay, I've got to go and meditate. This is a perfectly logical thought or oh, now I'm not going to pay any attention to studies. I'm just going to meditate. That's also logical, but I think the true essence here or the true lesson is you have to find what works for you. There are some students they cannot meditate. There are some students looking at the text first and then looking at the questions works. You have to find the best strategy by testing different strategies and then finding which gets the best results for you.

Vinod: And it's also like keeping the balance. It's not like I don't follow any strategies. I'm following strategies, but I kept more focus on concentrating on what I'm doing.

Ben: Very interesting, very interesting. So, you used this obviously for your listening and for your reading. Would you say concentration helps you in the speaking?

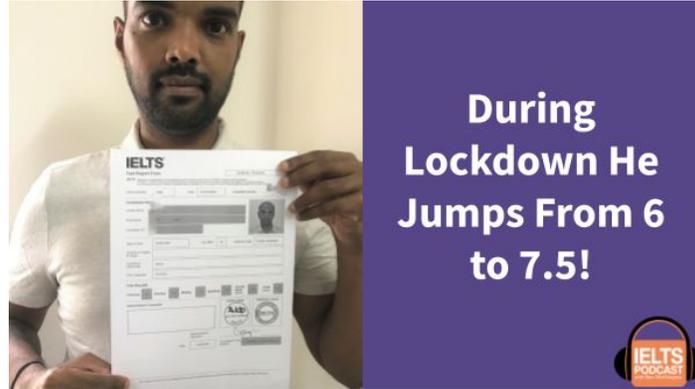


Vinod: Speaking, actually I can't say my concentration was different. It was so spontaneous. All the times when I go into that room, I know like I had to do well, but I don't know how those 10-15 minutes are going to spend. It was like just a fraction of a second. By the time I get out of that room, I realized like oh, [unintelligible 00:14:27.02] and sometimes, most of the answers those were not prepared. They were like spontaneous.

Ben: Interesting, interesting. Were you nervous?

Vinod: A little bit, but whenever I go to exam hall, the only thing I tell to myself is I've got a number of attempts. I don't have to worry. So, that's another way of relieving my stress a little bit, that anyway, there's going to be the next time session.

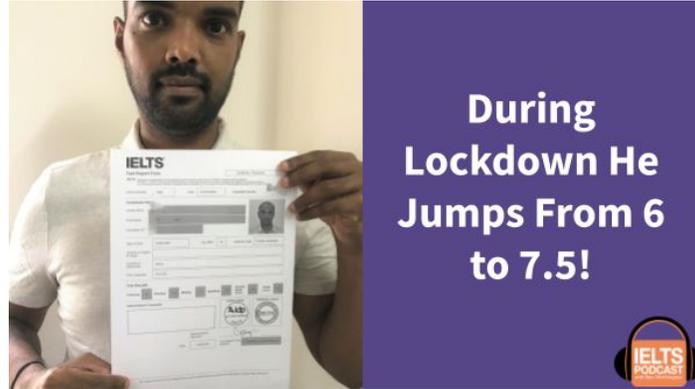
Ben: Can you say that again, Vinod?



Vinod: Yes. I didn't worry too much about passing or failing the exam because I know I can take however times it needs to take to pass in the exam because that is not the only exam time in my lifetime. So, that's how I feel like. Once I go into the room, I feel like this is not the end of the road. You have another chance if needed, but try to do your best on this day [unintelligible 00:15:23.25].

Ben: Very healthy, very healthy. So, just to summarize, you went in there quite relaxed and you took the stress off yourself by reminding yourself that you can always take the test again if necessary.

Vinod: That's exactly true.

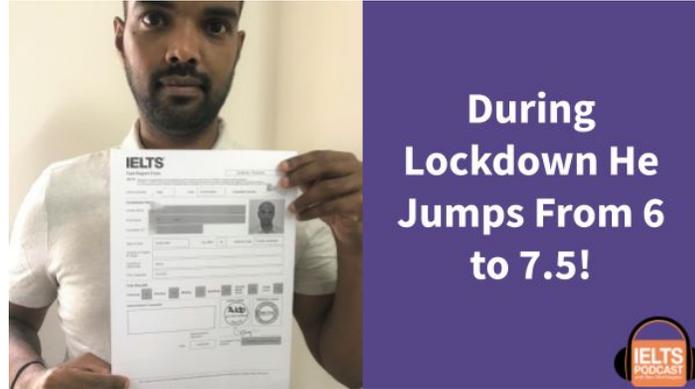


Ben: Very interesting and also, you found that spontaneous answers obviously-- well, when you went in with that mindset, you're more likely to give spontaneous answers, which is what the examiner wants.

Vinod: I planned a lot, actually. I tried to put some structures. I planned a lot like writing, but it didn't pan out as much as I planned in speaking. It's too much spontaneous and there was something happening in the room. So, it's just like fraction of seconds all those 10-15 minutes.

Ben: Wow! Very interesting and what were you-- even though you said you were preparing for the speaking and it didn't help you that much the preparation because it was all spontaneous, even so, what preparation did you do, Vinod?

Vinod: I got these Cambridge books. So, what I did was I asked my wife to ask me questions like in an actual exam and so I did reply in actual examination manner. That's one of the way and I got some feedback from you guys. So, I use [unintelligible 00:17:03.21] such as using



conditional structures, if, but, even though, although, some grammatical structures, those kind of things.

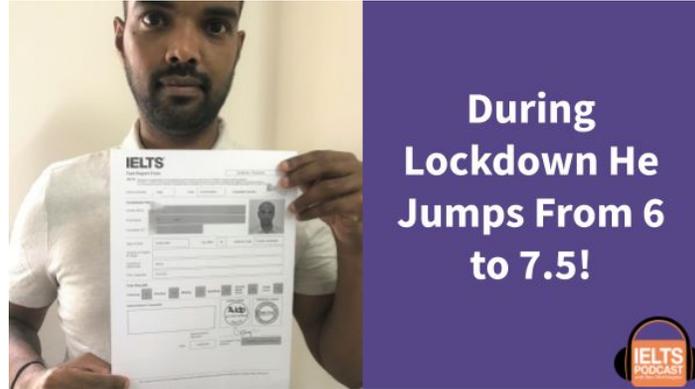
Ben: Wow! Okay. Good. Good. Do you remember if you used those in your speaking test?

Vinod: Yes, I use.

Ben: Super and you used them in a spontaneous fashion, too.

Vinod: For the few minutes, I planned it like an essay. So, I know like exactly what I'm going to say for this one. So, I try to use that tactic as much as possible, but most of the part it's not like too much planned activity.

Ben: Very interesting. Good. Good. Vinod, I think when you said you used the structure and you planned it like an essay, is that the stuff we covered in the course and in the classes?

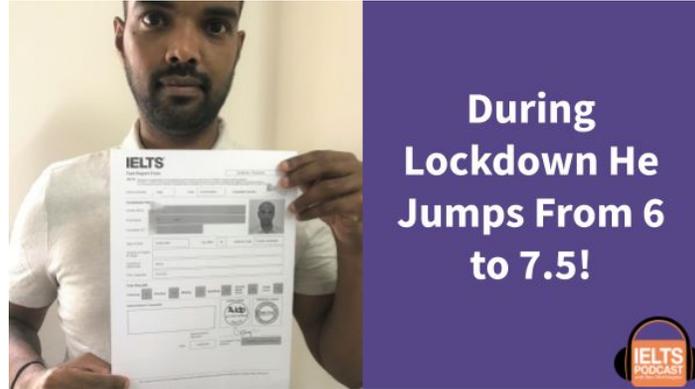


Vinod: Yes. Earlier, I was answering all the four bullet points everything 30-35 seconds [unintelligible 00:18:12.11] I was trying to come up with some story, but Daphne in her review, she said like don't go very fast. Use each question and spend at least 20-30 seconds. So, by the time I answer all my four questions, I'm going to use most of the time.

Ben: Absolutely. Very interesting. So, just to summarize, you had the cue card, you had those four bullet points, you spent around 20-30 seconds on each bullet point and did you say you added an anecdote, a story? Did you have time to?

Vinod: Part of the reason why as you mentioned, I said like okay I have two reasons. Firstly, secondly-- in this fashion I tried to follow.

Ben: Beautiful, beautiful. Okay. Did you find that the structure helped you a little bit or was it restrictive?



Vinod: I believe it helped me because earlier I tried to fill something to spend my time. Right now, I was not worried about time because I was running out of time each and every time. By the time I stop, my cue card is already two-and-a-half to three minutes. So, in this way, my job is to cover four bullet points at least in two minutes. It doesn't mean that I have to complete it.

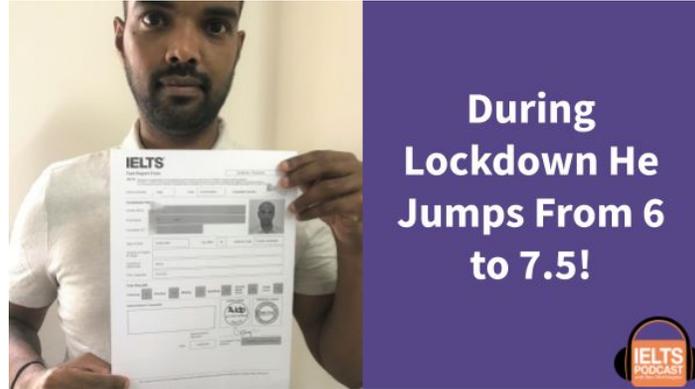
Ben: Yes, excellent. Very interesting, very interesting and let's move on to the writing now. For the writing, you were following our online course. Is that right?

Vinod: Yes, that's true.

Ben: Right. I see and it was Daphne who was giving you feedback on your essay or was at Ellen?

Vinod: It was Daphne.

Ben: Daphne. Got you and you also joined a few online classes with me, didn't you?



Vinod: Yes, we did a few online classes.

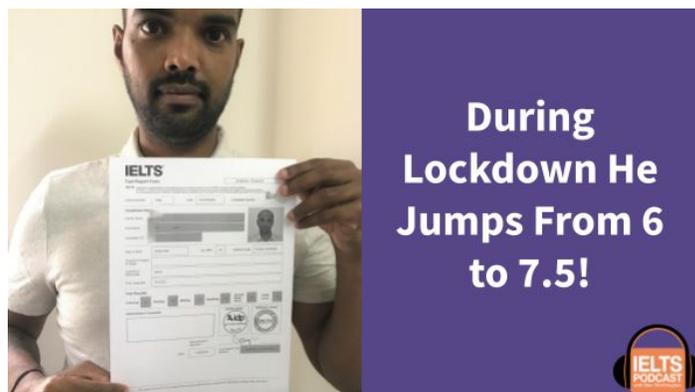
Ben: Were those helpful, Vinod? What did you think of those classes?

Vinod: Those classes were helpful and one more thing, Daphne was excellent actually.

Ben: Okay. So, I get helpful and Daphne gets excellent.

Vinod: You were kind of more generalized for all of us. It's not like you don't know what kind of mistakes I do in my essay. So, whatever services you are giving, it was kind of more structured. You were letting me know this is the way you need to follow, but Daphne was there holding my hand and telling me like no, no, you don't have to do this mistake. You have to write it in this fashion. She was actually tailor-made for my mistakes.

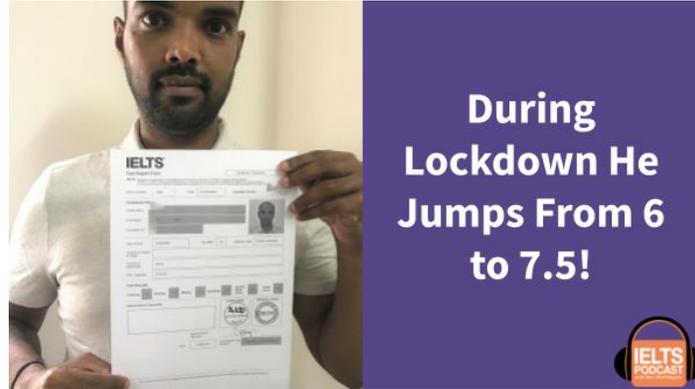
Ben: Of course, yes. Of course, yes. I was just kidding. I was just kidding there because-- Vinod joined the online classes we were doing while there was lockdown and there was between 10, 15,



sometimes about 19 students on the call so we had to sort of like do a class that was suitable for everybody whereas Daphne actually got to see the essays Vinod was submitting and she dived in there and she gave advice about this mistake, about that mistake, about doing this well, about doing this structure, whereas our classes were mainly focused on essay structure, a little bit of mindset, but mainly essay structure and question development if I remember correctly. Is that right, Vinod?

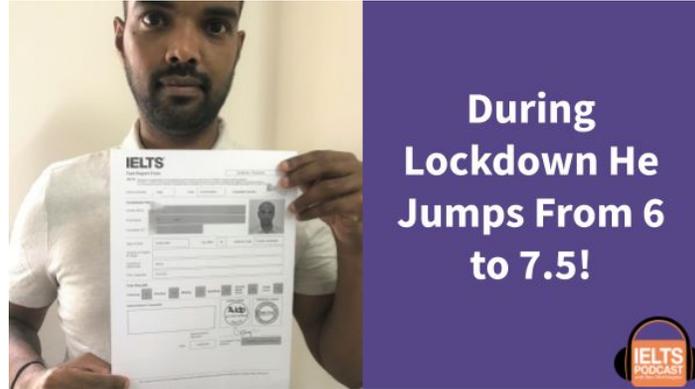
Vinod: Yes, that's true.

Ben: Yes. It was quite good fun, actually. We would divide the class up and then give them an essay question and then divide the group up into teams and then we would together develop each paragraph and give each other feedback and I would ask the class for ideas to start the paragraph and to organize the paragraph around and it was-- yes, I thought it was quite-- it was good fun. You enjoyed them as well, didn't you, Vinod?



Vinod: Yes, I did and one more [unintelligible 00:22:37.12] for me from the class, I was always trying to write the introduction in one fitting and conclusion, but from our coaching, I thought like it was not necessary to write the introduction or start with the introduction. We planned our p1, p2s, then the conclusion introduction. So, in the final exam, actually I wrote p1, p2, introduction, and conclusion. That's how I managed because it's computer-based test, I can write it in the fashion I wanted then.

Ben: I see. I see. Yes, this is so true. This is what we covered a lot-- this is what we have in the online course, but in the classes, we were doing it each lesson. We would have a sample question and we would just dive straight into p1 and p2 and then later come back and think about introductions and conclusions. And I think it really helps just doing this with question after question after question because you start to automate the process and it becomes much, much

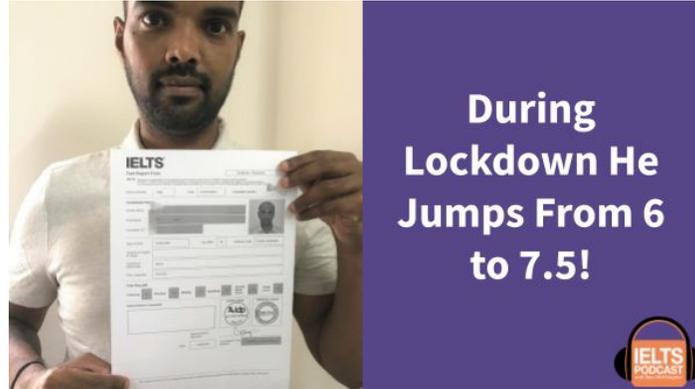


more straightforward. So, Vinod, what happened on exam day when you had your writing test? You did it computer- based. Is that right?

Vinod: Yes. I thought that I'm going to overrun the time, but it was good. It was after listening and reading as usual, but that was the first time I was writing the computer-based test and I thought like I didn't go in to pass that exam because of the pressure and one more major thing, writing the paper-based test and the computer-based test they are completely different. So, we should have the mindset of writing a computer-based test. Even though I was prepared, it was-- I don't say it's difficult, but it is different than computer-based test.

Ben: Yes, totally agree there. Totally. So, what does a student who is used to doing the pen-and-paper test, what do they need to know if they're going to do the computer test?

Vinod: They have to practice each and everything on the computer and one more thing when I was there writing ideas for p1 and p2, at least I prepared in such a way I'm going to write my p1



and p2 ideas even in the essay itself. So, when I write my actual essay, I'm going to use them in the process rather than wasting additional time to write this p1 and p2 again.

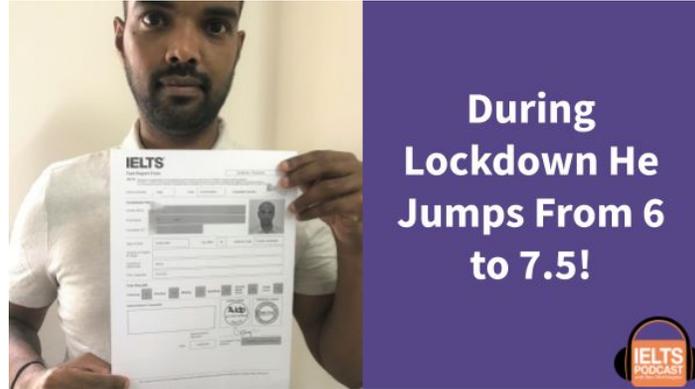
Ben: I see. So, let me just summarize. So, you look at the question and then you directly start writing your p1 and your p2; your ideas. Is that right?

Vinod: Yes, under [unintelligible 00:25:44.03] rather than under additional time they gave us.

Ben: Got you, got you and then once you finish your body paragraphs, then you start with the introduction and then finish with the conclusion. Is that right?

Vinod: Yes.

Ben: Beautiful, beautiful whereas when it's pen and paper, you probably need to do a lot of planning first and then start writing the introduction and then get on to body paragraph 1 and body paragraph 2.

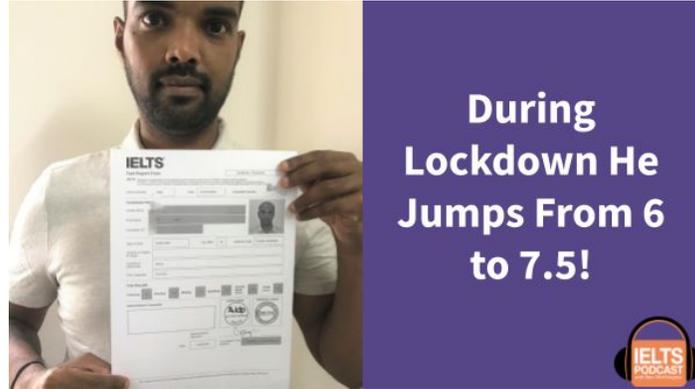


Vinod: Yes.

Ben: Interesting. Very interesting. Would you say-- it sounds like it is easier on the computer.

Vinod: Yes. It's very easy on computer in terms of writing because you can write and you can edit as the way you want. That's one of the major advantage. Actually, the first few minutes like 2-3 minutes, I misunderstood the question and I wrote it in some other fashion. Then I realized then I thought like okay, problem with few seconds then I read the question properly and then I re-planned again and everything went well after that.

Ben: Wow! Yes, I remember actually in the classes that we would read the question then reread it and reread it and even then when we were generating ideas, sometimes the whole class would be off topic and maybe a student would realize or maybe I would realize and we would have to go back and scrap some ideas and start again. So, yes, this is really important when you're doing your test just to keep checking the p1s correspond with your essay question, with the task



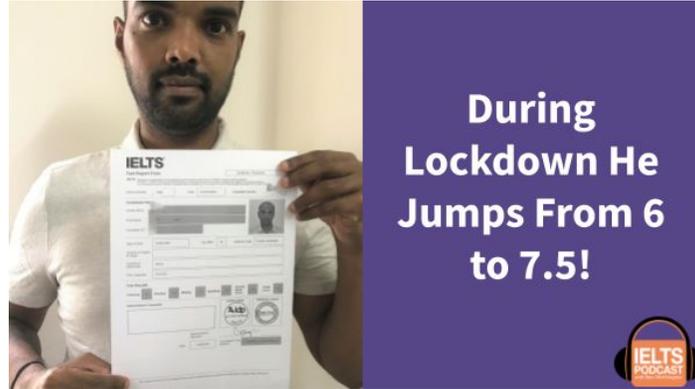
response. Interesting. So, it's very fortunate that you actually caught that mini mistake. Would you agree?

Vinod: Yes. Otherwise, I would have completely written a different essay.

Ben: Yes, yes and it's surprising-- when I correct essays, it's surprising how many essays I receive which are about a different subject to the actual question. For example, I get an essay about coal and fossil fuels and the essay might write about or the student might write about electric cars which is almost related, but not exactly related and this is going to have a negative impact on your task response score. So, Vinod, what scores did you finally get for your IELTS exam?

Vinod: I got 8.5 for the listening.

Ben: Beautiful.



Vinod: 8 for reading.

Ben: Wow!

Vinod: And 7.5 for writing.

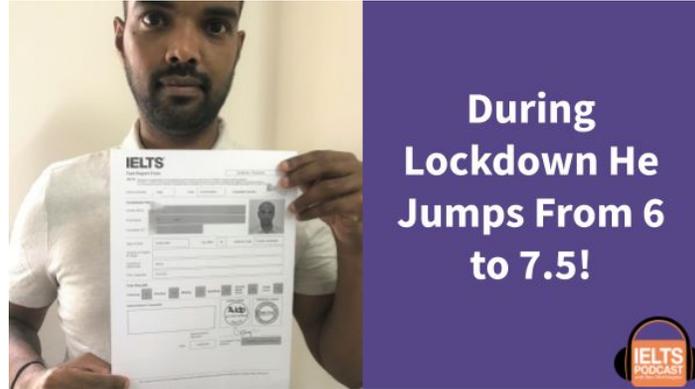
Ben: Wow!

Vinod: Yes, that was good actually and 7 for speaking.

Ben: Wow! So, you jumped-- did you say you got a 6 for the writing in the first one-- in your first test?

Vinod: Yes.

Ben: Wow! So, thanks to lockdown and Daphne, who was excellent, and me who was helpful...

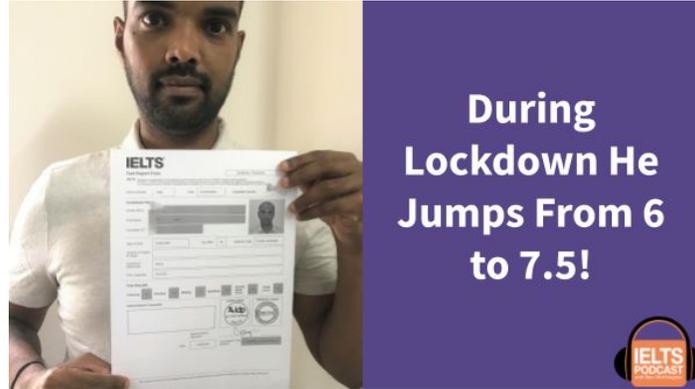


Vinod: It was not like that. Both of you guys helped me in different ways, but all together, we made it as a team.

Ben: Yes, totally, totally. I'm just pulling your leg now, but yes. So, together, we got you to 7.5 in the writing; a whole 1.5 jump and it's not just Daphne, not just me, not just the online course. Vinod, obviously if you were listening to this podcast-- if you were listening to it fully, you'll have realized that he utilized the time that he had from lockdown and put in a lot of work into this to get those amazing grades. So, we just need to bear that in mind. Those are fantastic scores, Vinod. Well done, well done.

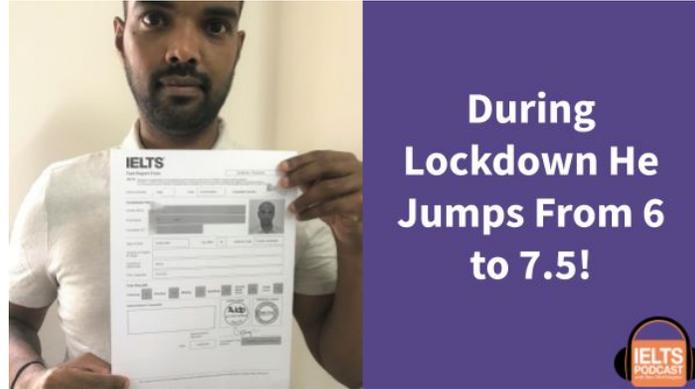
Vinod: Thank you, Ben.

Ben: Okay. Last question. What would you say to somebody who's thinking about joining the online course?



Vinod: I would highly recommend it mainly for two reasons. Firstly, as I mentioned, you are going to gain overview in the structures and what are the patterns you need to follow. So, it allows us-- gives a chance to write a good essay, but in order to correct ourselves, somebody needs to pinpoint each and every single mistake. So, that's what Daphne is going to do. So, overall, I would definitely recommend somebody to take this writing course mainly because it is tailor-made for each and every person. Outside, there are plenty of [unintelligible 00:30:53.03] centers where they tell you how to write, but we never know what are our mistakes.

Ben: Yes, this is so true. This is so true and getting that personalized feedback is perhaps the fastest way to improve and when you combine this with getting some expert tutorials and a system to follow that routinely and automatically produces coherent essays, then you become unstoppable just like Vinod. So, thank you very much, Vinod, and when are you planning to go to Canada?



Vinod: It's still on wait. Right now, I'm in my application process.

Ben: Right. I see. I see. Wow! Well, well done again and we wish you all the best for the future and good luck.

Vinod: Thank you, Ben and send my regards to Daphne as well.

Ben: I will do. I will do.

[Music]

Female Voice: Thanks for listening to ieltspodcast.com