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## INTRODUCTION

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**Ben:** Hello there, IELTS students. In this tutorial, we will look at IELTS IDP and British Council IELTS. We're going to look at both of them and we're going to help you just get



orientated and to understand the origin and why there's two different types and if there's any difference between them. And in this tutorial, we have Daphne. How are you today, Daphne?

**Daphne:** Hi, Ben. Hi, everyone. I'm really good, thank you. I'm really glad we're going to be talking about this today because I've heard students talk about IDP or British Council and I confess I haven't really done much research into this and only when Ben said right, come on. Let's get into this and talk about it that I started reading and it's been really interesting.

**Ben:** Yes, yes. I am guilty. I always thought they were very exactly the same so I never bothered to research it and we're going to talk about this more because it does seem like a common question for the students and I have heard stories of students consistently getting a certain grade-- like this student she was in Australia and she was consistently getting band 6.5 and then



she flew back to India on a holiday to see her family and everything and she said she'd do an IELTS test there. She did the British Council one and she got a band 7.

**Daphne:** Wow!

**Ben:** Yes. Have you heard stories like that before?

**Daphne:** Well, I have heard stories the other way round actually, Ben. Maybe this proves the point. I know I heard is IDP easier? So well, okay we need to move on [unintelligible 00:02:00.01] suspense building.

**Ben:** I think we're-- was it rumor mongering. We're in the rumor mill at the moment.

**Daphne:** Definitely. Oh, yes. It is definitely that kind of topic, isn't it? Lots of stories.



**Ben:** Exactly, yes. Okay, so let's cut to the chase. Are there any differences between IDP and British Council? What's the simple answer here, Daphne?

**Daphne:** The simple answer is no and we need to look at why. Okay. So, let's get into a bit of detail. The IELTS exam has three owners-- this is a bit complicated-- three owners. The Cambridge English Language Assessment who are based in Cambridge in the UK, the IDP who are based in Melbourne in Australia, and the London-based British Council. So, that's three people that own the IELTS exam.

If we break that down a bit, IDP and the British Council administer the exam and Cambridge English Language Assessment are responsible for writing and marking. So, Ben, maybe you can explain administer the exam so we can just be pretty clear.



**Ben:** Well, what came to mind immediately is too many cooks in the kitchen, but that's just-- What that means is like when you've got too many cooks in the kitchen it means like there's lots of people there or lots of people doing the job that maybe one person could do, but anyway, that's a distraction. We're going off on a tangent there.

There is a reason why there are so many stakeholders or so many owners. It's a long convoluted explanation because of the history behind the exam, but anyway, the question administer it basically means the people who deliver and who basically perform and run this exam. They set the exam dates. They train the teachers. They get the whole operation in motion. They collect the money. They basically coordinate the whole operation. That's all.



And fair enough, it's easy to say there are too many cooks in the kitchen, but also this is a massive operation that is spanning practically all the continents in the world. So, I think they can be excused for having so many cooks in the kitchen so to speak.

**Daphne:** That's so true. I like the expression cooks in the kitchen and it does seem like that, but actually when you look at how many test centers there are all over the world and how often they're trying to run this exam, the administration of it literally making sure the exam starts on time and there's somebody there in the test center on the right day, it's huge logistics, isn't it?

**Ben:** Exactly, exactly and not only do they have to get these logistics in operation, make sure it runs smoothly but all the time, they've got to make sure that it's equally valid and that the students with the same abilities are getting the same grades. The student with the same ability in London gets the same grade as a student with the same ability in Mumbai, for example.



**Daphne:** Exactly and then this is the-- sorry, I was going to say this is the Cambridge English Language Assessment people who are in charge of that. Is that right?

**Ben:** Yes, yes. Exactly, exactly and this isn't easy because there's such a big human element and humans are not-- of course every human is different, so this is why the IELTS, IDP, the British Council, the whole organization puts so much emphasis on training the tutors to make sure that the evaluation is fair globally, which is a humongous task.

**Daphne:** It is. It's a huge thing and if you think of any test you do, from the test you do at school up to something as hugely important and relevant as this, you've got to believe in the examiner. You've got to believe in the system. You've got to know that your result is valid, as Ben said, all over the world. There shouldn't be any-- I mean there isn't any discrepancy is what we're going to say, but there shouldn't be any discrepancy either if you're dealing with such an important exam.



**Ben:** Exactly, exactly and I think a lot of students in my opinion they kind of like burn and lose energy focusing on the difference and I can understand. In India, for example, there's both IDP centers and British Council centers and I can understand this like should I go to this one or should I go to this one?

**Daphne:** Yes.

**Ben:** And I can understand that. I honestly think that it's better and it's healthy for you for your mental health at least to just divert your energy into your own preparation. Divert that energy into your own preparation, into practicing, getting some feedback, and improving your own score rather than going around in this loop and trying to research online which is better? Is it the IDP? Is it the British Council? Which is easier? I think that's just a pointless use of time and energy basically.





**Daphne:** I think that's such good advice. You can get really distracted and really heated trying to find a loophole, trying to find some little article somewhere that told you it might be easier, but the whole point is that if we look at the validity of the exam, it is valid all over the world. So, if you take your exam in Australia, it is valid in Canada. If you take it in Canada, it's valid in Australia. That has to work otherwise the system falls apart.

**Ben:** Exactly, exactly. Okay, let's move on. Let's talk about the examiners. So, all IELTS examiners-- this includes the IDP and the British Council ones-- these are experienced teachers who have received the same training. So, this goes back to what we were saying. These teachers would give the same score to the student with the same ability whether they're in London, whether they're in Delhi, whether they're in Melbourne.

So, as Daphne just said-- as we were just saying, there's not going to be any discrepancy in the scores and in their evaluation and also to add to this, they're all following the same criteria to



assess the students. It's not like they've got different criteria. It's all the same criteria given to them by Cambridge English Language Assessment.

**Daphne:** Yes and so if you've ever looked at the band descriptors and we really recommend that you look at the band descriptors especially if you're aiming for this magic band 7 and even above. Download them. You can get the public band descriptors anywhere. It's something I share with my students quite a lot and I know Ellen, my colleague, does as well.

You need to know what you're aiming for and the examiners obviously have that, but then they have the private ones which are more detailed and they know exactly what they are looking for when they mark your essay or when they're marking your speaking and they're very regularly trained and monitored as well.

**Ben:** Exactly, yes. Exactly and what about should a student worry about an examiner's accent?



**Daphne:** We thought about accents before, Ben, haven't we? Because you and me have different English accents. No and actually, I would argue this on a kind of a bigger level. When you speak English-- English is a global language and when you speak English in India or Canada or Mexico or wherever, you're going to hear fantastic English, but it might not be the same as my English or Ben's English, but it's still English and I think it's really important that you can understand all sorts of different accents. I think you should be embracing that idea that you get used to understanding lots of different accents.

So, the examiner may indeed come from a number of different English-speaking countries. So, that could be UK, Australia, USA, Ireland, or even be a bilingual non-native speaker. So, accents are going to be different, aren't they?

**Ben:** Absolutely, yes. Absolutely and I remember when I was in Spain, I honestly think my accent is quite easy to understand especially since I've stopped living in the UK. When I go back



to the UK, I speed up and my Yorkshire accent starts coming back because obviously I'm around my family again and it gets faster, it gets more close, it gets closer to the standard English accent, but I think when you start teaching English, you slow down.

You start enunciating. You start pronouncing every single syllable in the word instead of eating them like we do in England because we just get used to it and things are moving a little bit faster. You're not in a teaching environment. It's an exchange of information. You're more relaxed. It's going to be faster.

But anyway, I'm mentioning this because sometimes in Spain, I would be talking with somebody in English and I could see on their face that they don't understand me and they said it was my accent and in my back of my mind, I was like it could be my accent, but I don't really think so because it's quite clear now.



**Daphne:** Yes.

**Ben:** It's slow, it's clear, and it's enunciated. It is not my accent that you don't understand. It's really you've got problems listening. So, what I'm saying is that it's really important just to develop this skill and try and distinguish like okay, is it really the speaker's accent that I don't understand or-- is it because of their accent or is it because my listening skills are not developed enough?

**Daphne:** I see. That's so well put because the examiner will wherever they come from even if it's a quite distinguishable regional accent, if it's a Scottish accent or an Irish accent or something, it will still be clear what they say to you, as Ben said, and they enunciate-- which is really lovely word which just means saying your words really clearly.



They will do that because you are in a test situation. They're not trying to trick you. It's not like they're having a conversation with you down at the pub or something. There will be clarity. What you can do is to tune in to different accents as part of your preparation. I think that's really good advice anyway.

**Ben:** Yes, absolutely. This is what I was just going to mention that ideally when you're preparing, you want to be listening to a wide range of different accents. So, how do you find this? Well, you can listen to some sports commentary in the U.S. You could listen to a nature documentary that comes from Australia. You can watch a news documentary from South Africa.

There are very few excuses left now. With the arrival of the internet, you've got the whole world and all these English-speaking countries are just pumping out terabytes of information daily. There is an abundance of information and just one side note; while you're doing this, I would



recommend going for a topic that you find interesting as well because doing IELTS listening test is an excellent way to prepare. However, it could be quite easy to switch off.

So, I strongly recommend finding a topic that is of interest to you. So, if you like the English Premier League, for example-- and by the way, if you're listening to podcasts about the English Premier League or TV commentary about the Premier League on YouTube, most of the programs I've been watching there is usually a wide array of accents. There's a Scottish manager, there's a Scouse around there, there's a Mancunian. There's a real blend of different accents--

**Daphne:** You're going to have to explain Scouse, Ben. I'm not going to let you get away with that. Scouser is from New Castle?

**Ben:** What!

**Daphne:** No?



**Ben:** It's Liverpoolian.

**Daphne:** Liverpool. There you go.

**Ben:** Exactly. It's Liverpoolian, yes. So, up north, there are lots of different accents. We've got [unintelligible 00:14:31.03] Geordies, Scouses, Mancs; those are the informal way. We've got New Castle, Liverpoolian, Mancunian-- well, there's hundreds, absolutely hundreds and it's good just to get used to these.

Wow! I'm really surprised. I thought everybody knew what a Scouse-- you are from down south.

**Daphne:** Yes, I'm from down south. Sorry, everyone. [Unintelligible 00:14:53.11]

**Ben:** They are all northern monkeys to me.





**Daphne:** But sports commentary I think is a really, really good idea because you can get a bit fixated on okay, I'll listen to BBC News, but that's pretty much sort of the same. So, I think football especially when people are animated about the subject so you have to listen a bit harder to understand what they're saying and they're probably speaking quite fast, I think if you can get grips with that then you're really going to give yourself an advantage.

**Ben:** Absolutely, yes. Absolutely and just one last thing, there's a wonderful video on YouTube about the cricketer Nick Knight. There was a cricket game in Australia and the commentator is obviously getting bored, so he's just telling a joke; a really long terrible horrible joke while he's commentating and it's hilarious. So, I'll probably put a link to that in this tutorial.

**Daphne:** Oh, do. That would be great.



**Ben:** Okay then, so how do you choose then, Daphne? How do you choose between the IDP and the British Council?

**Daphne:** Okay. So, we've been saying so far there's no difference. The quality is the same. The accents you just got to get used to it. So, really it's down to personal choice. So, the IDP and the British Council have representation in over a hundred countries all over the world. So, in many places, it's a question of geography. So, in some places there's an IDP center, in other places there's a British Council one.

So, in some countries-- in India we said obviously India is enormous and there are lots of test centers. It is just going to be the one that is probably the nearest to you or suits you best, so personal choice. Yes.



**Ben:** Exactly, yes, exactly. Also, paper or computer? Now, I didn't know this; that the IDP was offering computer ones before the British Council. I didn't know that. I thought it was quite interesting, but it looks as though now both centers are offering-- well, some centers are not offering computer ones. They are still offering paper ones, but I think the computer one is available now in both IDP and British Council centers.

**Daphne:** Yes, I was quite surprised by that actually because I was thinking the IDP began offering computer tests in December 2017--

**Ben:** Exactly, yes.

**Daphne:** --in 20 countries and that just gives you a bit of an idea that they were obviously quite forward-thinking and maybe responding to demand that people are more comfortable-- a lot of people are more comfortable writing on computers rather than on paper, but the British Council



also are doing computer IELTS. So, this gives you an alternative in a lot of centers. So, usually you can choose, can't you, Ben?

**Ben:** Absolutely, yes, absolutely and for the students in our course, they all have to send in their essays typed up on the computer and send us a doc-- Google Doc, Word Doc or just copy-paste it. It doesn't really matter, but we insist that it is typed up on the computer, not written out pen-and-paper because we don't want to use our time to decipher, to try and understand people's handwriting when we could be using the same time to be giving valuable advice, valuable feedback to improve their writing.

**Daphne:** I think that's really important and actually there are some people who say I'm not really used to writing on computer or who have time issues, but actually as you practice more and



more, this is part of the whole process, isn't it, of practicing essays and getting feedback and a lot of it is timing as well.

I could do this in 40 minutes, but when you get used to maybe just even typing faster or just controlling your planning or whatever it is that you're doing, yes, I think it's a good idea to type this obviously. It's much easier for the examiner to read through your essay and then really concentrate on what you're writing rather than trying to wade through an awful scroll of handwriting.

**Ben:** Absolutely. Totally. I totally agree there and also, the way we teach students who pass the writing is we put a lot of emphasis on the planning first and we say basically okay, you want to start out with your body paragraphs and this really helps a student when they are doing a computer-based one or the vice-versa.



The computer-based exam really helps the students because you can start writing out your body paragraphs and then you can copy-paste it further down and then start on your introduction later and then finish off with the conclusion rather than having to start off with your introduction which would probably be the case with your writing.

So, what I'm saying is that when you're doing the computer-based, one you can move your paragraphs around. You can maybe delete an entire sentence without destroying your essay because if you are hand writing out an essay and you decide that you want to put in a better sentence or that sentence is completely off-topic, if you do this with pen and paper, it is very risky because you're going to absolutely butcher your essay whereas in the computer-based one, obviously there's not as much risk.

**Daphne:** It's such a good point. I hadn't really thought about that flexibility you're going to have doing that and that is such a good point because a handwritten essay with lots of crossing out,



however neatly you do it, it's quite difficult to restructure a whole paragraph under pressure, but if you're doing that on your computer, actually as you said, it's very easy. You can move sentences around and just a quick side note, it's so important that you make sure you answer the question and stay on the question because I know how easy it is for people to get excited about the question and think yes, I'm on it and disappear down a different path, but if you're on the computer and you've got that question and you look at it again and you say oh, hang on a minute. I've gone off topic. You can pull yourself around very quickly, can't you?

**Ben:** Absolutely, yes, absolutely and in the new online course that we'll be launching soon, there's a little module about rescuing paragraphs where it was like two sentences you can rescue a paragraph which could be a useful exam skill if you find that you are way off topic-- not way off topic, but considerably off topic, but you don't have time to rewrite the entire thing. There's a



new module about rescuing a paragraph and twisting it round and making it relevant, but we'll talk about that later.

Just one other thing that I want to mention is that even though you're doing your paper-based one, your exam will be scanned and then it's sent to the UK to be marked online. So, this adds another layer of complexity for the examiner because now they don't have the paper-based exam that you wrote in front of them. They've got a picture of it on the screen which makes it even harder I think.

**Daphne:** I agree and we don't want to kind of worry you because, of course, there is a huge system of checking and validation and-- obviously, some checking and double-checking and everything, but it's going to be harder, isn't it, to see a scanned document than to just have something neatly typed in front of you.





**Ben:** Absolutely, yes. Absolutely. This is where when I started doing these corrections online, I started giving feedback, within a week, I just made the rule. I was like okay, no more hand-written essays.

**Daphne:** Thanks, Ben. I'm so grateful.

**Ben:** Because I would see these essays and I would be like this is impossible and also, the student maybe they got the wrong angle and sometimes I would get a shot of the desk and I'd be like I don't want to be doing this. I want to be focusing on the text. I want to be focusing on the essay.

**Daphne:** On content.

**Ben:** Exactly, yes. I don't want to be wasting time just trying to figure out what this is and the scan or the photo comes in upside down and it's just-- it's not worth it. So, that brings us on to the



Indicator Test which a lot of our students who are going through our course have recently done the Indicator Test and what have they been saying? It's been quite positive, hasn't it?

**Daphne:** Really positive. This has been a really good thing. Just to recap, this is the IELTS Indicator Test that has been launched just during this awful virus COVID time because the test centers are closed. So, the IELTS Indicator is for academic purposes only. It is not for immigration. That's really important to stress, but if you need to get the IELTS results for studying in a different country and you want to start in September, this is a test that is delivered to your house online. You do not need to move from the safety of your kitchen or whatever. You can do your IELTS test on computer and then your speaking test is face-to-face on Zoom with the examiner. So, this is brilliant.

**Ben:** Yes, totally. We have a full tutorial about this. We'll link to the tutorial we did. We talked about the software you use, the format, the procedure, and all of this and I just want to mention



that I honestly believe that this is probably going to be the future. Ideally, they would roll this out internationally and it would become the standard and they closed down the centers. Ideally, obviously as well, it's easier said than done.

**Daphne:** Well, as you said, there are so many test centers around the world. That's a lot of-- that's a big change, isn't it?

**Ben:** Exactly, exactly and plus as we said, there's a lot of cooks in the kitchen, so it would take a massive, massive effort to overhaul this whole structure and before COVID, it was going pretty well. It worked. They had a very complex system, a very complex procedure or the whole logistics and they had it working and it was a finely tuned engine. COVID came along and it totally turned it upside down and this has basically forced and pushed them to start putting the tests online.



But personally, ideally once they ironed out all the creases, I would love this to be standard because it's so much fairer for the students who are in the countryside. I've heard stories-- you've probably as well, Daphne, of students having to take a six-hour train ride to the center of the country, to the capital to take this test. Three days two nights' accommodation. They've got all this travel, all these people when ideally they could get a decent internet connection, do the test at home. It's so much less stress.

**Daphne:** I know. Do you remember we had a lovely student, Ben, he was in India, he had to take a day's train journey to get to his nearest test center, stay in a hotel, and he spent the whole train journey and I think half of the night listening again to all the essay corrections we've done with him and he'd worked really hard. We had a lot of corrections and he went through every single essay correction all over again and then he aced it and when he did so well in the exam, but the stress and the exhaustion of having to do that travel--



**Ben:** Exactly.

**Daphne:** --it's not right.

**Ben:** Exactly. He was smart and he made the best use of his time, but sometimes it's not possible to do that. Just yesterday, I was coming back into the center on a train, the air conditioning hadn't worked. This big lady had taken our seats and refused to move. I had to speak the local language to get her to move or to get the ticket inspector. So, we're there and everybody's just absolutely just dripping in sweat and I would hate to take an IELTS test that evening or that afternoon after that ordeal.

**Daphne:** That's not great exam preparation, is it?

**Ben:** Exactly, yes, exactly. You're just there in a rut thinking about this woman who took your place. It's not fair. You want to be at your best and for doing it from the comfort of your own



home I think would facilitate that assuming that your own home is comfortable. It could be absolute pandemonium. In this case, you probably want to get to a test center.

**Daphne:** Yes, give me a test center. Two other benefits of the Indicator: it is a lot cheaper than the traditional test centers and you get your results in a week. That's good, too.

**Ben:** That's beautiful. Yes, beautiful. Just one last thing before we wrap this up; reading and listening though, even though you might have great skills in those, you do need to learn a new set of exam skills specifically for the reading and listening because it takes new exam skills to listen and type at the same time and move around and take notes in the software. It's not as straightforward as the paper-based one. In the paper-based one, you can scribble notes, circle, and stuff like that. You do not have that dexterity when you're doing the computer one. So, it's



definitely worth doing some of the simulation computer-based tests you can get at the official IELTS test website.

**Daphne:** Yes and actually one other lovely thing one of my students said to me is this is great because I like reading out loud. So, obviously in an exam center you couldn't read out loud, but at home, she said it's fantastic. I can read out loud. I thought that was interesting.

**Ben:** Yes, totally, totally and plus you can get the room to your liking. If you prefer-- like I do I prefer writing standing up and I would much rather do that than be sat down for a good two hours. You can set it up to your ideal temperature, your ideal posture for working and as well, you're not going to waste time traveling and you could spend the whole morning getting warmed up with the English language so you're at your peak when it comes to test time.

**Daphne:** Listening to Ben's football podcast. There you go.



**Ben:** Exactly, yes, exactly. You listen to Scouses and all the rest of them. Okay. So, to conclude, the IDP, the British Council it's the same thing. Don't get in a fuss about it. It's the same thing. Divert your energy towards your preparation rather than, as Daphne said, rather than finding these loopholes.

**Daphne:** Yes, exactly. So, there's no-- one is no more lenient than the other. The examiners are the same. They go through the same training, have the same qualifications, the same testing, and the same verification process. So, it is literally a matter of convenience I think. That's really what we're saying, Ben, isn't it?

**Ben:** Yes.

**Daphne:** Whichever one is nearer you. Whichever one works for you.





**Ben:** Absolutely. Good point there. Okay. So, we have finished the tutorial for today. If you are struggling with your IELTS for example, you're out in the countryside or your language center is closed, then it's a good time to invest in yourself, to get some feedback, and start the process and if you go to [ieltspodcast.com](http://ieltspodcast.com), you can sign up for some free IELTS materials and there's also some special offers to get some discounts on getting feedback for your essays.

We focus on the writing and we are developing a new feedback service for the speaking as well. How's that going, Daphne?

**Daphne:** Oh, it's going really, really well actually. We've got lots of people who just think okay, I might as well just get some feedback on my Speaking Part 2 which is what we're starting with and I've got a couple of students who have been doing the Speaking Part 2 and are now moving



on to just Speaking Part 1. So, it's more like a conversation, but it's a really, really good idea to get some practice and I think they're finding that really useful.

**Ben:** And we've recently implemented I think-- correct me if I'm wrong, Daphne-- but we recently implemented specific exercises for students who want to develop the skill of comparing different ideas and contrasting them and talking about things hypothetically because these are key points that will help you or key skill sets that will help you score higher.

**Daphne:** Exactly. So, from the Speaking Part 1, this was particularly-- we were working with giving out the question and then saying right, in your response to this, you need to be comparing and in your response to this, we need to hear some conditionals. So, quite specific advice given with the question and this is the way to improve, isn't it, by just testing out these things and seeing what you're good at and seeing what needs improvement as well.



**Ben:** Absolutely, absolutely and professional feedback just accelerates the whole improvement process. So, just as last words, if you're in lockdown, keep moving, keep studying, no excuses. I had a beautiful phrase the other day my friend told me. He said, Ben, there's a thin line between an excuse and a reason; a very thin line. So, I don't want to just burden you all with that phrase, but just bear it in mind when you are preparing during this whole COVID pandemic moment I guess.

So, what I want to say is just keep moving. Keep moving and you will get there.

**Daphne:** And we're here and we're going to help you all the way.

**Ben:** Yes, excellent point. Okay. Thank you very much for listening and good luck. Take care.

**Daphne:** Thanks, everyone.



**Ben:** Beautiful-- oh.

[Music]

**Female Voice:** Thanks for listening to [ieltspodcast.com](http://ieltspodcast.com)

