



IELTS Podcast



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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

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Ben: How to become an IELTS trainer. Hello there, IELTS students. In this tutorial, Daphne and myself will be sharing how we became involved in IELTS and this tutorial is also for the tutors who are listening; both the native English speakers and the non-native English speakers because we do have a lot of them. We used to have a course and a forum as well for the IELTS teachers.



We've closed it temporarily, but we'll probably be reopening that later. Anyway, how are you doing, Daphne?

Daphne: I'm really well, thank you, Ben. We're going well. Lots of the test centers are re-opening so it's busy-busy at the moment which is fantastic.

Ben: Yes, it seems like we're really around the corner in Europe at least. I think in some countries, coronavirus is still having a massive impact, but at least in Europe, it seems normality is slowly returning. Would you agree?

Daphne: Absolutely. It's a different kind of normal, but I think it's really reassuring for people to be able to do their exams again. I think-- obviously, it's nice for everybody to be able to get out again and but I think when you've been working towards an exam, for a goal, and everything and you're kind of-- you're stuck, you're suspended for three months, it's a long, long time, but



we have test centers reopening and students taking exams again and getting great results. So, it's good.

Ben: Exactly, exactly and I think one thing that I keep telling myself during all of this is that with all this frustration because it is frustrating for us here at ielts.com because we're correcting students' essays. Lots of students are emailing us saying the test centers are closed. I don't know what to do.

There's a lot of frustration around at the moment and one thing I keep telling myself is just like move forward. Just keep moving forward and that's how you're going to get answers. You're not going to get answers just sat there thinking and thinking and thinking and getting yourself worked up. Usually, action and moving forward is the best way to deal with these issues.



So, Daphne, as you know, we're going to be talking about IELTS training and it's basically aimed-- this tutorial as I said is aimed at the tutors who listen to IELTS Podcast, so we might be speaking a little bit faster than normal.

Daphne: Good practice. Ben, how did you get into IELTS?

Ben: Good question actually. Well, I did my Erasmus in Spain and after university-- well, during university and then I did the last year as an Erasmus student which is an exchange program and basically, I ended up in Valencia and there was a lot of demand for English teachers. And I thought okay, I'll give it a try and basically I just got thrown into a classroom with a textbook and I was like what?

But fortunately, I kind of-- I just had this inner feeling that I really like this. At first, it was a challenge. I was a little bit lost, but soon I was really enjoying it. I loved getting the results for



students and so yes, I was really pleased and then eventually, I started in an elite business school in Valencia called ADEN.

Daphne: Yes, that's good, yes.

Ben: This is what kind of opened up the door for me for IELTS because I realized that with exam preparation you're judged by results, not by how many students like you, which is the usual standard in a lot of private academies. Get along with the students, make them smile, and you keep your job; which I thought was pathetic because if you're results orientated, you want to get your students to pass. You want to give them results. You want to get them speaking the language and exam preparation is the best way to find out like which strategies are working, what's getting results for the students and what isn't.



So, when I was doing this exam preparation, that kind of led into IELTS. First, it led me to specialize in the exam preparation. Then it led me to specializing in IELTS and I just wanted to get better and better. So, that's how I started the podcast because I was like okay, if I do a podcast I can reach all the experts.

Daphne: Oh, that was really good.

Ben: Yes, and the first episodes I was interviewing lots of the experts and we still do that and it's just a case of just getting better. It's more specialization until I got all the knowledge that I-- I still want more knowledge of course, but I got enough knowledge to build a course and I discovered enough sort of like secrets and techniques from all these tutors and eventually, I just put it all into one course which I'm remaking at the moment actually.

Daphne: Oh, good and it's a huge exam, isn't it?



Ben: Oh, it's humongous, yes. IELTS is the biggest English exam globally, isn't it?

Daphne: Yes. I read the other day 3.5 million tests were taken last year. I assume that's last year and not this year, but 3.5 million tests and 1,600 test centers all over the world. So, it's a huge business, isn't it?

Ben: Yes, there are countries with less population than 3.5 million. Before we jump into it, before we go any further, Daphne, how did you get involved in IELTS?

Daphne: Well, I went into teaching after having worked in lots of other industries and worked in finance and in design, but then I didn't-- I'd done a degree already and then I did my CELTA. So, CELTA is the most widely recognized and the best starting to teacher qualification and you need to have a degree in order to do CELTA. CELTA is run by Cambridge and that's a qualification.



So, that was the beginning of my teaching and then I taught in a language school and I taught all sorts of levels as Ben said, but I used to watch these IELTS teachers because there was a-- IELTS was rather revered. It is still revered. So, it was that's an IELTS class. He's an IELTS teacher. So, I wanted to know what was going on.

I had a lot of Arabic students then who were studying for university and wanted to get to university in the UK. So, after a while, very [unintelligible 00:06:59.23] experience teaching I was allowed to teach these IELTS classes which I absolutely loved. It was really exciting, high pressure, but to have the challenge of really working with students who had a goal, who had a really important high stakes aim, I think that was very satisfying.

Ben: Absolutely and it's a good point that actually. That's another reason I think I kind of forgot-- not forgot, but I just didn't mention is that teaching motivated students is worlds apart from teaching a student who's been forced to go to the class. It just makes it so much more



rewarding. You can move faster. You're both on the same page. You've both going for the same goal and it just makes everything so much better when you've got a motivated student and preparing for a test such as the IELTS is really sort of like a high objective to aim for and it just makes it easier.

Daphne: Yes, absolutely.

Ben: Okay. So, what kind of teachers are the institutions looking for?

Daphne: Well, the British Council, obviously who control the whole IELTS exam, they want to make sure that anyone associated with IELTS are very well qualified teachers. So, specifically for an IELTS teacher, you should have a degree first and that shows that you've got the qualifications and the higher level academic ability. It doesn't matter-- I don't think-- what your degree is in, Ben. Does it?



Ben: No, no. In the UK and in the West actually it's quite common for students to get a degree and that degree doesn't only show that they're specialists in that subject but it also shows that they can learn to a certain ability. So, if a student has a degree in history, they can still apply for a job in marketing because they've shown that they can learn to a certain ability and I think this is a similar approach with regards to teaching English.

Obviously, if you've got a degree in linguistics or in English language, it's better. However, for most teaching jobs, you need to be at the level of degree level. That's what I wanted to say. I'm mincing my words and then you also have to complete a teacher training such as CELTA.

Daphne: Yes and the CELTA is a month's course and there are others as well. There's a Trinity run course, those other courses, but you want to get the most highly qualified one you can and CELTA is a very intensive month. On your first day, you are given a class. That was absolutely



terrifying. So, you're training and teaching all the way through that month and that gives you a really, really good start.

Ben: Absolutely, yes.

Daphne: And then after that, you need experience and that's what we were talking about before. You need to have at least three years I recommend before you start doing IELTS because you need to have the confidence of teaching various different skills and also, you need to be confident in the grammar and to know why you're teaching what you're teaching.

Ben: Exactly, exactly. This is one of the reasons why I started the IELTS podcast because I was like okay, I'm going to try and capture the knowledge, the experience that other tutors have gained over their career, and it was pretty successful. I learned an absolute lot, an absolute ton



and I'm still learning each week and all of that knowledge is going into the course and getting transferred to the students.

Anyway, for the teachers listening, if you find one of those like the career tutors, hang around those. Ask them questions. If you've got a problem with anything; with the IELTS exam or with the teaching-- it might just be discipline, it might be grammar rules-- just ask them because this is how you're going to improve and they'll share certain nuggets that you just cannot find in courses.

Daphne: That's the best advice. There was a wonderful teacher where I used to work and the best advice he gave me was make sure you know where the answers are before you walk into that classroom and I thought that was so true because if you're in a hurry or you're running late, you just don't wing it. Just make sure you absolutely know. You've read the text-- if you're going to make the students read something, make sure you've read it as well and you know where the



answers are because sure as anything somebody will say well why is that answer true or not given or false or whatever and you need to be able to say why.

Ben: Exactly, yes, exactly. Good class preparation. I used to map my classes down, plan them down to like ten-minute intervals and I always used to over plan just to make sure that we don't-- because I wanted fast-- not fast classes, but I wanted to be punchy. I didn't want it to be slow moving. That's what I want to say. So, they were always quite fast. They were always quite packed; value-packed and I always over planned exercises. Yes, so good preparation. Good tip there from Daphne. So, Daphne, what's your opinion regarding native and non-native English speakers for teaching IELTS?

Daphne: I think this has really changed over the years actually. To be honest, I've worked with some incredible teachers who are non-native, who've done the exam, they've got that experience



of having actually taken it, incredibly good at grammar, so I think they have to have the confidence. So, I think it really depends on the standard of the teacher.

So, for me, the actual language speaking-- obviously, if you're practicing for a speaking exam, to have a native speaker is incredibly valuable, but I think in terms of the actual nitty-gritty of the exam, I think if your teacher knows what they're doing, then I would argue that it really shouldn't be an issue.

Ben: Excellent point there. Excellent and when I was teaching in Spain, I found that a lot of native English speakers from Ireland, from England basically were just wandering into the academy. They got a job because they were native English speakers, but they had no desire for teaching. They just had a desire to collect beer money; get paid and then just finish. They only got the job because they were native English speakers and I think that's terribly unfair, but in their defense, that's all the Spanish market was asking for. There was this obsession with native



English speakers, native English speakers. So, really if you are teaching and you are a non-native English speaker, personally I would focus on where I've got my advantage; maybe I know grammar rules inside out, maybe I know some good pronunciation tricks. For example, if I'm Polish and I'm teaching Polish students, then I can explain certain sounds how they should be to that Polish speaker.

Daphne: Yes. You have an inside track which is very useful especially if you've done the exam yourself. Then you know what your students are going to be facing and you can really empathize. I think that's very important. You can understand the exam from a student's perspective.

Ben: Absolutely and even like speaking for two minutes on a topic, write out your essays-- your Task 1s and your Task 2s. Just the other day, I was writing out a Task 2 essay for the course overhaul that I'm doing-- I'm just updating it, adding some new information-- and as I was



writing it out, I realized I'd gone off topic. So, it's just small things like this that are good reminders and not just do the Task 1s and forget about it but if you can, maybe do a test every couple of months or even a shorter period but it just keeps you on your toes.

Daphne: Yes, that's so true. Yes, really, really important point there, yes.

Ben: And where should a teacher sort of like start out the research?

Daphne: Well, assuming you've got your experience and you're working in a school or wherever and you're kind of happy with what you're doing, the best thing would be to start testing yourself as we were saying. So, just under exam conditions, explore some of the websites which offer practice tests and we talked about this before. British Council do it. IDP do it and you can practice your listening and your reading, so you can do an actual test; timed conditions. You can get your results on that and then you can practice writing a Task 1 in 20 minutes and a Task 2 in



40 minutes-- the essays for academic and general. Show that to one of your colleagues. See what they think. Get some feedback which is always the most important thing to do.

Ben: They could send it in to us for feedback, too.

Daphne: Yes, good idea. You'll have to say you're a teacher. Yes, send it in. That would be fantastic and then look at some of the speaking topics. So, really try and see the exam from the student's point of view and then see how good you are.

Ben: Exactly and also get familiar, not only with the format but the criteria. You need to know the criteria inside out. You need to know which grammar structures correspond to which a band scores your students are aiming for, [unintelligible 00:16:49.29] structures and this is what we've done with our online course both for the writing and the speaking. You need to have a clear map for your students and starting off with the criteria, which is official material because there's a lot



of material out there and you're best starting with the official stuff , but there are rumors that the public band criteria that IELTS IDP British Council publish is not that far away from the one that the examiners use. So, you're definitely off to a good start if you start with the official material.

Daphne: It does. You're right. It just gives you the whole-- the details of what the examiner is looking for and also then therefore what you should be aiming to encourage your students towards when you're teaching and it's been really good. Also, share that with your students. It's important that they know what they're being graded on.

Ben: Excellent point there. Excellent point. That brings us to the next point which is when you start out teaching IELTS, a great place to start is to identify what your students are struggling with. This is exactly what we do with our online course and one of the first things we do is we give them a few tutorials, a few exercises, but then we get them writing essays because this way



we can identify where they are losing points. We can work on those points and we find the students through this feedback improve significantly faster.

Daphne: Absolutely. This is like a little lead analysis which you would do with your students anyway. So, by working out what mistakes they're making, what they're really strong at because a lot of students have an amazing vocabulary and yet lack the coherence of getting the essay in the right formula for an IELTS exam and I find that often actually some really, really impressive vocabulary, but it's a little bit all over the place with the organization. And then once you identify that that is a problem area, it's not too difficult to sort of work it back into the right shape.

And I think for the students as well, as you say, to have that pointed out-- you're really, really strong at this, but this is something that you need to work at or you need to get more grammar into the essay or you're making grammar mistakes which you really shouldn't be at this level.



This identifying their needs is very important because then you can orientate the course and orientate your feedback towards meeting those needs.

Ben: Absolutely and just one thing that we do emphasize here at IELTS Podcast when we're giving corrections back is we identify what the student did right and this is incredibly important because I remember vividly I would get my Spanish essays back when I was learning Spanish and I was writing an essay in Spanish, I'd get it back and it would just be a document and just red pen crosses, this is wrong, question marks saying I don't understand this and it was just an absolute mess and everything that was wrong had been pointed out, but nothing that was being done right had been shown. I'd put a lot of effort into a grammar structure and some beautiful vocabulary and it just went unnoticed. So, I didn't know if it was great. I didn't know whether I should do it again. It just went unnoticed and I thought this is horrendous especially in exam condition-- not exam conditions but especially when we've got the frustration and the stress of



the test on the horizon and all your tutor is doing is saying this is rubbish. This is rubbish. You need this. You need that. It's not a good way to study. It's not a good way to prepare students.

Daphne: Yes, that is so demoralizing. You need to highlight the good stuff.

Ben: Exactly, yes.

Daphne: Correction is not about red pen.

Ben: Exactly. That's a good succinct way of putting it. So, this is why when we give our feedback to our students, we are really highlighting not only what they've done wrong, but really emphasizing what they've done right just to make sure that they do it again and again and again.

Daphne: Yes. Positive feedback. Absolutely. It's what you need.



Ben: Exactly and just one other thing, when you are in an academy, you're probably going to be surrounded by tutors and use that resource. Ask them. Ask them for help. Ask them how they teach this grammar point. You will be surprised and this is what got me started with IELTS podcast was at first I was asking a few tutors in the academy I was teaching and I got some great feedback and I was like right, I can get more of this if I start interviewing more tutors and this is exactly what I did. I started interviewing them and I still do it-- various subject matter experts-- and all this knowledge eventually went into the online course. So, use these resources.

Daphne: Yes, absolutely.

Ben: Take advantage of it.

Daphne: And also teachers you're working with; they've all got a lot of experience as well and everyone's happy to share and I learnt very early on that it's absolutely okay to say that you don't



understand something or how could you do it better and I think people really want-- a collaborative teacher is the best. People want to be able to share their experience and I'm always really happy to learn. It's a really important part of the teaching.

Ben: Exactly, exactly and it's honest as well and if you're honest and open with your students, most of them will give you sort of like the time and they'll be understanding especially if you go back and you research that grammar point and you come back with some prepared material. It comes down to sort of like the honesty and the trust that you've got with your students.

Daphne: Yes, totally, yes.

Ben: Okay. So, let's move on to professional development or financial considerations of becoming an IELTS trainer. So, one resource that's really good is again from ielts.org. What they do is they offer scholarships for students and researchers to look into elements of the language



and the tests and how they can be improved; what's working right now and these are a really good resource to improve your teaching.

Daphne: Yes, that's a really good idea, Ben, and that's something that I'm going to look at because it was something-- it was on my radar, but I don't know much about it, but I do read a lot about the exam and I think use the professional journals and there's a lot of stuff online or even actual magazines. Reading about what other teachers are doing, what's working for the teacher, your style, your class, how to challenge yourself. There has been a lot about this as we've all been teaching remotely recently. And there's webinars, there's all sorts of stuff you can get involved in just to keep yourself on track and to learn obviously.

Ben: Exactly. There is a big community and they're very active. There's a ton of teachers on Twitter and on LinkedIn as well and as I said, very active. A lot of them are very keen to share



and we're talking native English-speakers, non-native English speakers. There's a mix of everybody there.

So, next point I want to mention was that after teaching IELTS, you can go into being an examiner. You can go into becoming an examiner, but there is one catch. Once you become an examiner is that you cannot teach IELTS when you are an examiner.

Daphne: Exactly because there's a conflict of interest there. Obviously, you know too much about the inside track and I think it's fair enough.

Ben: Yes, but there is one little sort of like you cannot be an examiner-- well, you cannot say you're an examiner and teach at the same time or you cannot say you're a teacher and be an examiner. I know for a fact that some IELTS examiners are teaching, but they just cannot mention it.



Daphne: They can't mention the fact that they are examiners as well.

Ben: Exactly, yes, exactly.

Daphne: Being an examiner is hard and so it should be. You get a lot of training. It takes a long time to be an examiner. You get a lot of training. You're tested on obviously how good you are at grading and it's really important to reassure everybody that the examiners are very well-qualified. The essays are double marked. The speaking examining is rigorously checked as well to make sure the examiner is fair and marking it correctly and the examiners have to recertify every two years. So, the standards are high and that gives you the reassurance that it's valid.

Ben: Exactly, exactly, yes. I think reassurance is the right word there for the students because a lot of them can get frustrated and they start looking for reasons why they're not getting this band 7 and I've heard stories about certain exam centers being easier or being harder than others, but I



think that is just going to drain your energy if you take that route. I think the best way forward is just to trust in the system and put your energy into your own preparation rather than searching online for myths of easier exam centers and so on and so forth. It's just a waste of energy. Just trust the system and divert your energy to your own preparation.

Daphne: Exactly, yes. That's like looking for excuses, isn't it?

Ben: Exactly, exactly, yes. And just moving on to the last thing, once you become an IELTS teacher, in my opinion, you're head and shoulders above the rest because I was saying to Daphne before that or we were saying before in the tutorial that a lot of English teachers they'll be teaching children in the morning, Business English midday and IELTS in the evening and doing it this way, you're only going to be average in all three teaching aspects whereas if you specialize in one of them, which is what we've all done here at ieltspodcast.com-- day in day out, you're getting deeper into the subject. You're learning it to a higher level of confidence. You're making



much more progress. You're getting feedback from the students and you're going to be able to teach much more effectively by specializing in one area.

Daphne: Yes, I think that's absolutely right and when you need to travel, you can travel all over the world and you've got that qualification, you can say I specialize in IELTS and a lot of people want this exam and it's great to be able to help them on their journey.

Ben: Exactly, exactly. Great point there. Great point. Okay. That's everything from Daphne and myself for today but remember to check out ieltpodcast.com. You can sign up for some IELTS materials there and there's the online course as well and soon, I think we might be reopening our teacher training course. We closed it because it was full and we didn't have enough time with the teachers, but that will be reopening some point this year. And also, we are relaunching the online course as well. So, keep an eye out for that.



And if you're in lockdown, it seems we're around the corner-- not around the corner, but it does seem like here in Europe we've kind of gone through lockdown and there's sort of a light at the end of the tunnel and we're seeing that right now. So, if you're in India or any other countries that are still in strict lockdown and it seems like complete chaos, just keep moving forward. There is a light at the end of the tunnel and you will get there. It's just a matter of time.

Daphne: Brilliant. Yes, absolutely right and keep going everyone. We're here. We're going to work with you all the time.

Ben: Exactly. Good luck. Bye-bye.

Daphne: Thank you.

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IELTS Podcast



Female Voice: Thanks for listening to ieltpodcast.com

