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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, we are speaking with Gabriela from the Netherlands who's got some very exciting and very interesting and inspiring news about her IELTS exam and how she got the results she wanted. So, welcome to the podcast, Gabby. Is it Gabriela or Gabby?



**Gabriela:** Well, it's actually Gabriela, but everybody calls me Gabby, so Gabby is totally fine by me.

**Ben:** Okay. I'll go with Gabriela.

**Gabriela:** Yes.

**Ben:** All right. So, Gabriela, can you tell us where you're from and why you're taking the IELTS exam, please?

**Gabriela:** Yes, sure. So, I'm from the Netherlands. I'm from Amsterdam or I've lived for four years in Amsterdam. That's really wonderful and at the moment I'm living in Australia. I did my Master's degree here. I'm a physiotherapist so at the moment I'm looking for a job as a physiotherapist.



**Ben:** Right, I see. Yes, Amsterdam is a beautiful city, isn't it? I love it there.

**Gabriela:** Yes, it is.

**Ben:** Yes, it's like a postcard city because every corner is just like a picture moment. It's an amazing place.

**Gabriela:** Yes, it's beautiful. It's beautiful, yes. I miss it.

**Ben:** And whereabouts are you in Australia?

**Gabriela:** I'm living in Stirling. So, Stirling is like a really small place pretty close to Adelaide. So, that's South Australia.

**Ben:** Right. Wow! Why did you choose Stirling?



**Gabriela:** Well, that's actually a funny story. We arrived-- me and my partner-- we arrived in Adelaide and we never really heard of Adelaide, so we were just walking around and with Christmas Eve we went into a church and we were sitting next to a couple and the couple was just asking what are you doing here and I said I want to study here, but we are looking for a place to live and they were telling us oh, we've got a really nice house in Stirling. Just check it out. Maybe you can come with us. So, we end up living in a family house.

**Ben:** Beautiful. Wow! That's quite a jump from Amsterdam; from the big city of Amsterdam to Stirling.

**Gabriela:** Yes, but I love it. It's really beautiful.

**Ben:** Yes, Australia is an amazing place, isn't it?

**Gabriela:** Yes, it is. Yes, it is.



**Ben:** What brought you to Australia? What attracted you?

**Gabriela:** I reckon the environment, the nature. There the big roads, the ocean, the sea, but mainly the nature I reckon.

**Ben:** Yes, it's amazing, isn't it? I really love that country and the Australians as well. They're quite unique, aren't they?

**Gabriela:** Yes, they are. They're pretty laid back and relaxed and they like to enjoy life. They work hard, but they also like to enjoy life.

**Ben:** Yes, definitely. I know we're going a bit off topic now, but would you say there's a big difference between Dutch people and Australians and if there is, what would that difference be?

**Gabriela:** Oh, good questions. Well, I don't think there is really a lot of difference actually.



**Ben:** No? Okay.

**Gabriela:** The Australians like to drink. The Australians like [unintelligible 00:03:51.23]. We do as well so I think we have things in common.

**Ben:** Yes, I noticed as well. I thought they were quite similar to the English when I was there, but sports; they take sports a lot more seriously and it's a bigger part of their culture than for typical English people, but yes, it's an awesome place, beautiful place and the beaches; wow! It's just another level, isn't it? Amazing.

**Gabriela:** Yes. Yes, it's incredible.

**Ben:** Wow! So, you studied as a physiotherapist in Amsterdam or in the Netherlands and then you've migrated to Australia and I'm assuming you need to take IELTS in order to sort of like start practicing physiotherapy in Australia. Is that right?



**Gabriela:** Yes, that's right. Well, I did my Bachelor's in Amsterdam, but I wanted to do my Master's degree in Adelaide and for that exactly I needed to do my IELTS, but I reckon I did my IELTS in total five times.

**Ben:** Wow!

**Gabriela:** Yes. The first two times I just got a 6 for my writing and I needed a 7.

**Ben:** Okay, what part-- sorry carry on.

**Gabriela:** No, no, no, no. I just wanted to say that at that time-- that's one and a half year ago-- I just got a 6. I couldn't get higher for my writing, so I just went to the university and I said hey, this is me. I really want to do the Master's degree, but I'm really stuck with my IELTS. I just got a 6 for my writing and they told me okay, we've seen the other results; with the reading,



speaking, and listening which were pretty okay. So, they said we are okay with your 6 for the writing part. So, you can do the Master's degree here.

**Ben:** Wow!

**Gabriela:** But now I want to work as a physio and I need a 7 for my IELTS and they were not really compromising with the 6 or whatever. So, I really needed a 7.

**Ben:** Right. I see and let me just highlight this fact to a lot of students because I said this before in previous podcasts that in the West, there is a little bit of room for maneuver especially with universities. So, if you're not getting the scores that they say they want on paper or that they say they want on their website, do exactly what Gabriela did, which is approach them and start a conversation and this has never been better advice because right now, there is so much going on in the world with COVID. There are universities that are empty. It's just a completely different



situation to what it was last year and I'm pretty confident that there's a little bit more leniency and flexibility involved when you're approaching these institutions. So, a massive lesson there already from Gabriela. So, thanks for sharing that, Gabriela. Well, I'm pretty confident we've inspired a lot of students already, but could you tell us what specific parts of the writing you were struggling with?

**Gabriela:** Well, it's always hard to tell because if you're doing your writing exam, you only get a score so you're not really sure on which parts you lack and that's why I really like the course-- the IELTS Podcast writing course because you get feedback from pretty good educators. With me I had Ellen and Ellen was really, really helpful. She was really strict, but she gave me really good advice and she told me your vocabulary and your grammar in general it's pretty okay, but I was a bit lacking on the task response and cohesion and coherence.



**Ben:** Interesting.

**Gabriela:** So, she helped me with that.

**Ben:** Interesting. So, in your case, it was more a case of exam skills that you needed to improve, you needed to work on.

**Gabriela:** Yes.

**Ben:** Interesting and how were you preparing before because you said you'd done it five times and each time, you were stuck with a 6. So, what were you doing beforehand?

**Gabriela:** Yes, when I finished my Master's degree, I immediately did my IELTS exam because I thought I'm pretty confident with my English right now; I did my Master's, I graduated, so I'm able to do the IELTS exam, but then instead of a 6, I had a 6.5 and I was like ah, goddamn it and how can I get a 7? I don't know. How can I improve it? So, that's why I was listening a lot to



podcasts and I found your podcast and that was really helpful. I reckon-- I don't really remember which one it was, but I reckon it was about how to write an IELTS writing Task 2 and there was also a podcast about IELTS band scores which was also really helpful to listen to. I also saw the quote Jump to a Band 7 or It's Free and I thought well, let's give it a try.

**Ben:** Exactly, yes. Nothing to lose. Nothing to lose especially in your case you've already got a 6.5. We do enforce this guarantee. Occasionally, we will have to refund the students, but most of the time we're getting results and we're moving forward. So, were you just a self-study student on your own or did you actually go to like a preparation center before you found the course?

**Gabriela:** No, I was just learning by myself. I reckon I'm pretty okay with that. The only thing is with the IELTS writing exam. You don't know what you're doing in a way. You're writing the writing task, the essays, but I don't have the capacity to check if my grammar is good enough or if I'm really answering the question and most of the time if Ellen was looking at my essay, she



was saying yes, it's fine, but you're not really on topic and I was like okay, I need to practice that more; being on topic.

**Ben:** Yes, yes. It's such good advice because I've been revamping-- sort of like redoing the online course we've got and I was writing out a new essay to show to the students and I checked it and I've written hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of essays and when I was checking and I was like wow! You've gone off topic. So, it's such a-- sort of like a hidden error because as you said, you could be writing it in perfect grammar, but if you're off topic, you're not going to be answering the question. So, the examiner can't give you the points. It sounds like basic advice, but it really is so important and I think as well it definitely helps if you've got an expert who can sort of like look at it with a fresh pair of eyes because when you're in the middle and writing it, it's easy, it's too easy in fact just to get off topic.



**Gabriela:** Yes, I remember you and I reckon it was Daphne, you also made a podcast about planning your essay and that one was also really helpful that really plan your essay and think about the points that you want to write during your exam and stick to it because sometimes I was just making my planning and then I was writing my essay and I was like oh, but this is maybe a better argument. Oh, this is a nice example and then again, you're off topic. So, stick to your planning.

**Ben:** Exactly. Yes, excellent point there. Excellent. I remember when I was first writing essays, just sample essays for my students and even some of my essays, I know exactly what you mean because this idea pops into your mind and you're like wow! That's so much more powerful, but I'm halfway through my body paragraph already. Maybe I can just integrate it in somehow and it ends up getting more confusing and more frustrating. So, that is wonderful advice you've recalled there of just ignoring those ideas that pop into your mind and stick to the plan. So,



Gabriela, how did it feel when you were getting these band 6s and band 6.5 from your previous exams?

**Gabriela:** Frustrating.

**Ben:** Yes, yes.

**Gabriela:** Well, to be honest, with my sixth I was-- I already knew that my English wasn't good enough to get a 7, so I was okay with that, but it felt really frustrating with the 6.5 because I couldn't really put my finger on it like what is the thing that I need to improve? What is it? That's why the course was really helpful. It gives a bit of a framework with also some sentence and words that you can learn, but the feedback was really, really helpful. Really helpful.

**Ben:** That's good. I'm glad that you've mentioned that because when I started designing the course, I was like okay, I could give them all this exam advice about staying on topic and writing



with this framework, checking that it's on topic and all of this. However, unless there is feedback, unless we can check that the student is actually implementing this and is actually using perfect grammar structures, then we're not going to get any results. I'm not going to get the improvement that we're aiming for. We're definitely not going to get enough improvement to confidently say jump to band 7 or it's free. So, yes, excellent points and you did your exams in Holland-- in the Netherlands. Your initial exams; you did those in the Netherlands. Is that right?

**Gabriela:** No, no, no. I did all my exams in Australia.

**Ben:** Oh, okay, okay. Misunderstanding there.

**Gabriela:** No, no, no. No worries. I was already in Australia. Before I went to Australia, I was just traveling around for 10 months and when I was in the Netherlands, I didn't have any clue what I wanted to do.



**Ben:** Interesting. All right and what about the other subjects like the reading, the listening, and the speaking?

**Gabriela:** Well, listening was not really problem for me. I reckon I had an 8.5, but it really helped to listen to podcasts. Podcasts are really amazing. Just listen to a lot of podcasts and it will help to improve your listening. And my speaking was-- it's also okay. It was always around 7.5 or an 8, so that was okay and the reading in the beginning it was a little bit tricky more because of the questions; is it true, false, not given. You're like I'm not really sure if it's true or false or not given, but that was also okay. It was always a little bit around 6.57. So, that was okay.

**Ben:** Okay. I see. I see. So, when you were listening to podcasts, did you just listen to IELTS podcasts or did you go further? Did you go wider?



**Gabriela:** I went wide. I reckon first I was listening to E2. E2 is an Australian-- it's not a podcast. It's more YouTube.

**Ben:** Yes, yes, yes.

**Gabriela:** [unintelligible 00:15:44.29] I was getting a little bit confused because he was-- for every kind of writing, for example, like your opinion or discussion or advantage/disadvantage, he had his own framework and there were so many frameworks and after a while I was getting so confused, [unintelligible 00:16:03.03]. I was also listening to-- his name is Adam. He was also giving a little bit of advice. What also really helped me was just discussing it with my partner. So, you gave us a-- or you gave me a list with 16 topics I reckon.

**Ben:** Yes, yes.



**Gabriela:** And I was just also discussing it with my partner like okay, what are your arguments? What are my arguments? How can we discuss this? How can we see this? What do you mean by that? And are you really on topic? So, that also was really helpful for me; try to talk with people about topics because it gives you so much new views.

**Ben:** Yes. Yes, definitely. This is great advice and did you struggle getting ideas, Gabriela, for your essays?

**Gabriela:** Yes, yes.

**Ben:** Really?

**Gabriela:** Yes. If you read a question like error, error, error.



**Ben:** Wow! So, one of your ways of getting ideas was to basically take all the questions we asked from the online course and you just talked those through and you got different viewpoints and different arguments for each of these essay ideas.

**Gabriela:** Yes.

**Ben:** Beautiful, beautiful.

**Gabriela:** Yes and try to read a little bit on the internet, but mainly talk with people. I reckon that's really important. It's also a nice way to improve your speaking part.

**Ben:** Yes, absolutely. I'm so pleased that you mentioned that because I always say to my students here are your questions. Try and answer them. If you can't answer them, go online and research it and I never suggest to them that they talk with somebody about it, but this is genius advice because when you talk about it, you're not only going to get new ideas, you're going to get



some feedback. It's like okay, that idea is amazing or that idea is ridiculous and also, you're more likely to remember it because you've had this interaction.

**Gabriela:** Yes and especially-- you talked about examples are pretty important especially with writing Task 2 and I was a bit struggling with examples. So, that was also really helpful for me like okay, but this is the topic, but what kind of examples can I use and after a while, you know how to implement all the examples or just [unintelligible 00:18:33.23].

**Ben:** Yes, it's quite a good skill, isn't it? I love teaching this part because once you get it, you can think of examples for anything that proves your point, within reason of course, within the IELTS exam. Did you find that? Did you enjoy giving examples by the end of the course?

**Gabriela:** Yes. No, no, no. I felt really more confident just overall with everything; with introduction, body paragraphs, examples, like conclusion, everything.



**Ben:** Beautiful, beautiful. Fair enough, you don't have to enjoy it, but I think building your confidence is obviously much more important than enjoying it. So, wow! That's fantastic and just to go back about what you said about talking about the topics, when you were talking with your partner, did you get a lot of new ideas? Did you get a lot of new viewpoints?

**Gabriela:** Yes, I did. I did. Nothing really popped up in my mind right now, but sometimes it's really simple. Oh, yes. I've remembered something. For example, about cars. We were just discussing something about cars and he said something about safety and cars and I was like traffic and cars. It's not really a good example, but he was just saying really small things that are really obvious and I was like oh, of course. I was thinking too difficult about the topic.

**Ben:** Yes, that's a really good point because a lot of students their mind goes blank because they're overthinking it and it's like I'm trying to find this really complex elegant solution and



these beautiful examples and then if you get another viewpoint, it's just like actually, it could just be this argument. It could just be cost argument or as you said a safety argument.

**Gabriela:** Yes, just keep it simple.

**Ben:** Exactly, yes and this is a really good point because a lot of students will get really confused and bogged down thinking about the quality of their ideas, but that doesn't really matter. As we keep saying, it's the quality of the communication used to explain those ideas.

**Gabriela:** Yes and I really also like what you did in the course about T process or a T thing you remember--

**Ben:** The CTRT method.



**Gabriela:** Yes, exactly. I also really like that. So, before I started, I was just drawing that and try to make points like pros, cons, and the opposites from each other. That was really helpful for me.

**Ben:** Yes, just breaking it down into smaller steps I think makes it so much easier and also, if there's like a system involved behind those steps, it just makes it into a smoother process. So, in the exam did you use the CTRT method?

**Gabriela:** Yes. So, what I just did was try to read the question; take your time by reading really the question and what they're asking you. Then I was making the T and then I was trying to make like arguments or examples and then I was just trying to figure out okay, I put this in my body paragraph one, body paragraph two, this will be my conclusion, and then I was just writing it out.

**Ben:** Beautiful. Yes, that's amazing. Great work and this is it. When I started teaching IELTS, I was a little bit lost, but over the years I found that if I could break it down into smaller



components and then we tested those components, those steps on the students, we started getting some feedback and yes, this is how we got to the CTRT method. So, thanks for sharing that and I love this tip as well about talking through the ideas-- talking through the topics, so we're definitely going to integrate that into the new course that's coming out soon.

**Gabriela:** Yes, and that was also something that Ellen did because I just asked her sometimes like okay, I've got this topic, but I don't know what kind of ideas. So, sometimes she was giving me helpful ideas and that was helpful. She was brainstorming with me.

**Ben:** Exactly. Yes, that's the word we're looking for. The ability just to brainstorm and chuck out the ideas that are in your mind. Yes, it's a very important skill to develop and it's not as complex or as intimidating as we might imagine at first.

**Gabriela:** No, no. Definitely not. No.



**Ben:** So, on exam day how was it? How did that go? Were you feeling confident? Were you feeling better or nervous?

**Gabriela:** Well, I was starting with listening and my listening went really well. Then I was doing my reading. My reading also went really well. I even had time to go to the toilet--

**Ben:** Oh, wow!

**Gabriela:** --which never happened before. I was like doing breathing exercise in the toilet like yes, I can do it with my writing.

**Ben:** Wow! Awesome.

**Gabriela:** And then I went into my writing and Task 1 was pretty okay. I reckon I had a flow chart something like that [unintelligible 00:23:57.03], but my Task 2 I just did it and afterwards I spoke with my partner and he was like I'm not really sure about your examples and your



arguments and I was like don't say that. So, I felt really awful and then he said I think it's a 6.5 and I was like I don't know, I don't know.

**Ben:** Wow!

**Gabriela:** But I think it was a 7, so I was really really really happy when I received my 7.

**Ben:** Wow! That is fantastic. Well done. Well done, Gabriela. That is awesome and what did you get in the other areas of the exam; listening, reading, and speaking?

**Gabriela:** I reckon I have for my speaking 7.5. My listening this time an 8 and my reading a 7 which I thought would be higher, but no. It was a 7.

**Ben:** Wow! Those are great grades. Well done there. Well done.

**Gabriela:** Thanks.



**Ben:** So, now you're going to start-- you've done your Masters already; that's right, yes?

**Gabriela:** Yes, [unintelligible 00:24:58.22].

**Ben:** And now you're going to-- you needed the IELTS so you could start practicing physiotherapy or do you have to do another course?

**Gabriela:** No, no, no. I can practice as a physiotherapist, but I'm looking for a job right now, but there are not a lot of jobs available because of the COVID, so I'm looking and applying.

**Ben:** Wow! That's interesting. Yes, my brother's a physiotherapist and because of COVID he had to shut down his practice. His practice has only been open for like six months, but he had to close it and turn away all the clients, but fortunately, he could still do his personal training and being a physiotherapist and a personal trainer, it's a really good position because I think a lot of personal trainers they don't need a qualification and he says he gets all his physiotherapist



customers or patients from personal trainers because they've gone to the personal trainers, they've ripped all the muscles because the personal trainer didn't know how to train them and he gets the clients.

**Gabriela:** [unintelligible 00:26:07.13].

**Ben:** Sorry?

**Gabriela:** So, the personal trainers they give him the clients.

**Ben:** Business partner.

**Gabriela:** Yes. [unintelligible 00:26:15.23].

**Ben:** Wow!

**Gabriela:** I help you to give them the injuries and you help me.



**Ben:** So, this is why he got into personal training and I guess you're looking to start immediately. Is that right? As soon as possible.

**Gabriela:** Yes, as soon as possible. Yes, yes, yes. At the moment I'm doing something totally different. So, I'm working at an apple orchard.

**Ben:** Wow!

**Gabriela:** So, I was picking apples and pruning, but that's finished, but meanwhile, I'm also looking for a job as a physiotherapist. I had a job interview this morning which went pretty okay.

**Ben:** Wow! Well done.

**Gabriela:** Thank you. Hopefully they offer me something. We'll see.



**Ben:** Fingers crossed and if you need a recommendation, we can give you one. I don't know how you [unintelligible 00:27:09.06].

**Gabriela:** Thank you.

**Ben:** Okay then. Well, I think that's everything. Do you have anything that you would like to share before we finish maybe for the other students some advice? If not, no worries.

**Gabriela:** Well, what I said like the course was really helpful for me to get from a 6.5 to a 7 and the framework that you give was really helpful, but especially the feedback from the examiners or ex IELTS examiners was really, really helpful. So it's perfect to buy the course.

**Ben:** Beautiful. Thank you so much, Gabriela for that.

**Gabriela:** [unintelligible 00:27:49.24].



**Ben:** And I'm so happy you got the results that you needed and I wish you all the best for Australia and I'm pretty confident you'll get a job soon. It's a matter of time. Things are changing. The economy is coming back, so we'll get back to normal soon.

**Gabriela:** Well, thank you for the invitation. It was lovely to speak with you.

**Ben:** Yes, it was great. Thank you, Gabriela.

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