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INTRODUCTION

Daphne: Hello, students. Thank you for tuning in to this podcast from ieltspodcast.com. My name is Daphne and today we are--

Hi, IELTS students. This is Daphne from ieltspodcast.com. Thank you for tuning in to this podcast. Today, we're going to be talking about IELTS writing tips and we're going to learn the



importance in IELTS writing tasks of knowing what you need help with and also where and how to receive expert feedback.

And why is this important? Why do you need to know what you need help with and why do you need to know about expert feedback because this will help you learn exam skills and also learn language skills and those two are not the same. We need to make a distinction between exam skills and language skills and when you know the difference, you'll know exactly how to handle IELTS writing tasks, how to score better in your exam and those are obviously things that you want to be able to do.

So, let's just start with looking at the writing skill. The writing is something that I know many of you find the hardest out of all the four skills. I think a lot of people are quite confident in speaking. They're okay on reading and listening generally or they feel that's something that they can work on themselves, but writing is something that time and time again people come to us and



say, I'm really finding this hard. I really need some help. We have so many examples of students who've taken their test many times and just say I really, really need some help.

So, what we're going to do as well today is look at some student examples and I hope this will inspire you and motivate you to achieve your very best and to keep on working because it's hard, takes a long time. We know that. Let's just go back a step and thinking about writing in general, what is your writing like in your language? Writing proficiency in a second language for most people is very difficult to achieve and harder than speaking, listening, or reading.

How many times have you heard someone say yes, I understand everything in Spanish or I understand Italian, but actually writing in Italian or Spanish is a totally different game. Maybe it's hard because your script is different from English; Chinese or Arabic students that's particularly challenging. Maybe it's hard because when we write it's permanent that means that



we might often need a more formal style. You may be quite confident in writing emails in English, for example, but writing an academic essay is a totally different skill set.

You need a different kind of control. You need different language. You need a different formula and also, when we're speaking, we can go backwards. We can say sorry, I got that wrong. Let me just correct myself whereas in writing, we have to be accurate and also in an IELTS exam, we have very little time to go back. So, you need to be careful on the grammatical structures, how we organize the writing, the conventions that are needed for academic, the conventions that means what that is needed for letter writing. For example, that means how do we do a letter of complaint, how do we do a cover letter for a job. We need to have knowledge of this before we start.

So, some of us find this hard in our native language and then as I say, doing it in the second language is even more challenging. So, let's have a look. Ask yourself these questions. So, be



really honest here. How would you rate your writing skills in your first language? It may be a long time since you were in school, it may be a long time since you did exams. So, I think that's a really important thing to just be aware of; this whole difficulty in writing in general and then also have to think about the academic writing.

So, for Task 1 in particular, academic writing for the Task 1 is a report on a graph or a pie chart or a map; something like that. It is much more mathematical or scientific. It's like a very formal kind of report, doesn't need much chat in it compared to a letter. In the general exam where you might be writing a letter to a family you're going to stay with, obviously you're going to show a totally different range of skills doing that.

So, know your strengths and know your weaknesses. So, what kind of mistakes do you commonly make? Is it vocabulary that lets you down? Is it a lack of grammar? I've been working recently with a couple of Russian students and for them, they don't need articles in



Russian, but obviously we do need articles the, a, an, in English. It's a complex area. It's an area where there are a lot of mistakes that if you know that that's something you need to work on, then acknowledge that and then you can start preparing.

Plan to write and write a plan. How well do you plan your writing and do you follow the plan? So, what is your difficulty? What goes wrong for you? In order to identify what goes wrong, you may need expert feedback. Now, feedback is something that we do at IELTS Podcast. I don't know if or I know that many of you are working with us currently on essay corrections and this is something that you can easily access through the website.

You can get a sample essay corrected and that will give you expert feedback and we'll highlight to you what your strengths are which is super important to know what the good bits are, but also where your weaknesses might be and what you can do to address those because this is how you're going to improve and this is how you're going to move forward. So, getting some kind of



help, getting some kind of feedback is really, really useful and really important. This can give you guidance on IELTS Task 1 and Task 2 and show you how you can prepare.

I also want to give you an example of a lovely student, a great success story, Aline. So, she's a Brazilian nutritionist working in London and she has just completed her IELTS and done incredibly well. And she was working in a language school before, so in a group of students which she enjoyed, but she felt that it wasn't helping her specifically. Sometimes the class was focused on something that she already felt confident in, so she came away thinking well, that's a wasted class. I need to focus on what I need help.

So, she came to us and worked with us and we could easily say to her okay, you're great at this. Keep going on there, but you need to spend more time-- for her, it was more like building her



vocabulary and becoming more confident and expanding her vocabulary. So, that's something that we particularly worked on with her.

Another student I've just been working with is in Australia. Very, very high level language already. He was working at a university, so he had no problem on that, but his writing was almost too formal and too academic and much, much too long. So, he was regularly writing essays that were 500 words long and just almost not getting the point across. So, for him, he needed to be more concise. He was actually used to writing much longer essays, so for him to come down from the dissertation length to a shorter length was a challenge.

So, as long as you learn what you need to do, then that's going to help you hugely. An expert feedback will guide you on that. We have a lot of students who are not sure about exam skills.



So, we're going to look now at exam skills. What are exam skills and what are language skills and why is it important to feel confident in both those?

So, with exam skills, the three keywords I want to mention to you are know, plan, and revise. Now, know means knowing what to do in each task, knowing what the examiner is looking for and this is a really key thing that Aline the Brazilian nutritionist highlighted to us. She said I had to understand the exam and understand what the examiner was after before I could move forward and we often recommend to our students to look at the band descriptors.

These are widely available from IELTS. Just go on the ielts.org website, look at band descriptors and they will tell you what band 9 user is meant to do, what a band 8, more realistic band 7, band 6; what are you meant to be able to do and that means what are they marking you on?



So, you should be able to know that, become familiar with that and also become familiar with the types of tasks that means the graphic descriptions of several types, so the pie charts, the bar charts, the maps, for example, in the Academic Task 1 and the different types of letters you might have to write and the purposes of those in the General Task 1.

Now, we've done lots of podcasts on those, so go back into the back catalog, search up IELTS Podcast General letter types or General Task 1 letters and you'll have a range of examples, useful language, all sorts of sentences that you can drop into your essays that gives them the structure immediately.

So, knowing what to do is really important; knowing the exam and it's a kind of step-by-step guide I think we need here with relevant examples, with model answers, with practice and feedback. So, you know what you have to do then you have to practice it and see if you can do it.



You have to get feedback so that you can see if you're doing it right and that's the way to build confidence.

I want to mention here a really lovely girl who I worked with called Laura and Laura had worked from different tutors all over. She was in London. She was in Colombia. She traveled around from various countries with her work. She was getting IELTS tuition and her teachers all told her different things about the exam, different ways to do it and you all know if you've searched online for IELTS there are a lot of resources, but I would caution you because some of these resources are not always 100% reliable.

But her tutors told her different things and she's like oh my God. I can't deal with this. So, she started working with us and we are consistent on what we say. Ben's course the writing guide the 12 Sentence Guide really, really helps you stay consistent, build up the coherence, just learn what you have to do and on her seventh attempt, she passed. She got 7.5 in her writing which



was absolutely excellent. Once she knew, once she understood what to do, she could move forward. So, knowing is something really important as an exam skill.

Second exam skill is planning. Sticking to the plan. Even let's first before we stick to it, making a plan is something that is really, really important. So, when we talk about planning, there are so many people who say to me it's okay. I don't need to plan. It's all in my head. It's absolutely fine. And I go no. Please just take 2-3 minutes at the start of your 40 minutes and plan. Make a plan.

You can do it by brainstorming. You can do it by-- which is just like writing notes on a piece of paper; crazy it doesn't matter and then choosing the best arguments. You can do it by a spider diagram. Ben and I have talked about this before on a podcast; something that a lot of people find quite useful. Just getting all the ideas out of your head to start with and then selecting the most important ones, but it is really important to do this.



Now, my colleague Ellen has just been working with a lovely physio student, so physiotherapy Gabriella and she's from the Netherlands and she had taken IELTS five times before she came to us. It's an expensive business doing this exam five times. So, she took the exam five times and Ellen identified that she was quite often going off the plan. So, she made a plan, but then got excited about one of her arguments, went off on a different track, didn't stay on task and this is really dangerous.

Very easy to do; so many students do this. Stay on the plan. Once they identified that this was a weakness for her, they managed to make a good plan. So, take time on the planning process and become comforted in that and then stick to it. So, once she started writing, she knew exactly where she was going to go and the next time she passed. She succeeded; scored a band 7 which was excellent. So, good news stories are really motivating. They can help us all keep on going and believe that success is possible.



So, following the advice that says plan for two or three minutes and that's for the writing on a pie chart, for example, have a look at it. Take your pen. Take your pencil. Look at it. Highlight or mark on the paper what are the most important features here? What is unusual? What is similar? Are there any patterns? What could I group together? So, just asking yourself those questions you are doing your planning and then make a few notes and then make sure that you cover all those points when you start writing.

In the Task 2, it can be quite hard as we all know to find something to say. That awful moment that so many students talk to us about about my mind went blank. I had no ideas. I didn't know what to say and my really, really top tip on this one is try to prepare as many essay title plans as you can. Have a look on our website at recent essay questions. It's a really good place to start and once you've got the recent essay questions, take half an hour every day, plan four essays, for



example. Give yourself 5-10 minutes a bit longer than you would have just to think and to write down some ideas.

So, what would the advantages of keeping public libraries open, for example, be? So, a library is somewhere obviously you can go and borrow a physical book. So, what would be the advantages of keeping a library open and what are the disadvantages? So, should that money be better spent elsewhere for example, on healthcare or on education? Think about these things in advance and then you'll be ready.

My other advice and I've just been talking to a lovely student Marlena about this because she said some essay titles appeal. She's happy, confident and others she finds it incredibly hard to think of ideas like we all do. We have favorite subjects and other subjects that we don't really like reading about.



First of all, how about talking to your work colleagues? Talk to your family. So, rather than sitting down on your own which can be pretty lonely, talk to someone at work. Say what do you think about for example, the price of internet services. Should all internet services be free because it's something that everybody needs particularly now or should people pay for it or should certain people pay and certain people have it for free? What do you think?

Get some ideas. These are big interesting topics and you may find that people have ideas that you haven't thought of. So, that's another idea. I would talk to your friends, talk to your colleagues or if you prefer if you're on your own and you quickly write down points in favor, points against. Make your plan and then stick to your plan.

Then when you've written your essay, revising or as I like to call it editing is really, really important. This is where you're going to pick up the silly mistakes. So, the noun verb that doesn't



match or the plurals or something like that, if you've made a mistake in your conditional or you've spelt something wrong.

These are silly points to waste. Don't waste these points. Just make sure you have time to check over your writing. It makes a huge difference. And a few minutes doing this will often mean the difference between a band 7 and a band 8. It can really make that much difference. So, an occasional error is okay for band 8, band 7. The examiner will spot if you're making quite a few mistakes. It makes a big difference.

And be aware of where you make mistakes. So, if you know that you have an issue with articles, for example or if you know that you have an issue with spelling, then take extra time. A really good example here was a student of mine called Cesar in Colombia and he wrote beautiful, beautiful essays, but he knew that he made quite a few mistakes in his writing and he had to



make time to go back and check and correct and it made a huge difference to the quality of his writing.

Just writing a little bit less because he was a bit short of time, but stopping his essay at about 330 words and then going back and checking rather than writing 380 and not checking and that made a huge difference. So, that gave him confidence that he could do it and of course, his writing was going to be more accurate. So, just to recap our exam skills, you need to know the exam, to plan, and then to revise and edit your writing.

The language skills, the language skills you may find that expert assistance is even more helpful. This is going to give you detailed information about what you need to do and then also how to do it. This is something that we do a lot on the course. We're looking at skills how to make your



essay the best it possibly can be, how to add the kind of little nuggets of grammar or vocab, of structure that the examiner will be looking for and teaching you how to do that.

So, language skills it's important obviously to know how to answer all parts of the question. This will enable you to score highly on task achievement or task response. You need to know how to structure your answer using paragraphing and connecting to link the ideas together. This is the coherence. You need to know how to use and show an appropriate range of general and specific vocabulary.

So, it's very often we see in essays just casual words sneaking in. A lot of students struggle with having a level of vocabulary which is a little bit informal, too many phrasal verbs, a bit too idiomatic. It's okay in the Speaking Part 1, maybe Part 2, but in the Writing Task 2 you need to



be showing quite formal language and this is relevant to many students. I just think they're just not confident enough or aware of the structure as well.

So, we worked with Naveed from Bangladesh. He-- goodness-- worked incredibly hard going from a 5.5 to a 7 during lockdown. Incredible work. Absolutely. Congratulations. He did really, really well, but what he needed to do was understand the structure of the essay, understand how each essay type for example, a disadvantage/advantages or problem-solution or opinion essay-- understanding how the different essay structures worked and then being able to adapt his skills and his knowledge to build up those paragraphs and build up that structure to make it absolutely perfect.

So, also using a full paragraph structure I think really helped him. On a disadvantages/advantages, he would do a good intro to lead the examiner into what he was going to write about. One paragraph on disadvantages, another paragraph on advantages and then the



conclusion at the end. So, that's really important to be able to show you can handle the task achievement. You know what to do. Show you can handle coherence, show you've got vocabulary and of course, the other thing is the grammar.

This is something that I am really hot on with my students is adding grammar into this essay. It is not enough to write an essay all in the present tense. You need to show a grasp of different tenses. You need to be accurate in those and there's very good sentences that we can add. For example, using a sentence with although like a concession is a great skill. It's difficult to use, but once you've mastered it, you can show the examiner this.

Let me give you an example. Although there is no doubt that studying for IELTS is exhausting and time consuming, the importance of fully preparing for this exam cannot be understated. So, I'm acknowledging that yes, it's tiring. Yes, you have to work hard, but once you've prepared, it's



really worth it. So, this is a concession clause; something we look at in the course and something that will really help you if you want to score band 7 and above.

So, to work on the grammatical structures, you need to understand what your essay is lacking. This is where we can help you with the feedback. This is where we can say okay, you've got this grammar right, but try adding that grammar that might help you and then we can practice and each time you practice, you're building your confidence and you're improving. This is what we're looking for.

Big question: how can I get a band 8 in IELTS Writing? Okay. So, the truth is that the average band score in IELTS is only around 6.2 in Academic. It's really interesting this. Ben and I were talking about this the other day when we were doing a podcast together. 6.2 is really interesting.



That's the average score, okay? So, to get a 7 even to aim for an 8 is excellent. You are high achievers. This is really, really motivating and an amazing thing to go for.

So, candidates that follow exam tips and practice their essay writing can usually get a 6 or a 7 especially if they have a good range of vocabulary and familiar with possible essay types, but to get a band 7 definitely or 7.5 or even 8 you need to get that feedback. You need to understand your strengths and understand where you could be improving.

So, I think in a way someone saying to you answer all aspects of the question or use main and supporting points or write 250 words is okay, but it's not exactly specific enough and you need specific help on specific areas that you find difficult in and difficult in order to improve. So, with expert help, which is what we do at IELTS Podcast, we want to help you be confident in planning each part.



Planning your intro and writing a strong intro. Planning your body paragraphs and writing your body paragraphs convincingly. Writing a persuasive argument, following that up with a great example, including your example, and writing a conclusion that just doesn't say I think the advantages are better than the disadvantages, but recaps on the points you've made in your essay.

Every single sentence in your essay has to be relevant, has to be relevant for that essay, not general generic sentences for every essay. That is something I particularly hate and the examiner will also hate. So, it's better to understand, to write from the start what your position is rather than rephrase the question.

So, this is something very useful for the band 8 style. If the essay asks you to agree or disagree as in for example, some people say eBooks and modern technology will totally replace traditional



newspaper and magazines. To what extent do you agree or disagree? You can take one opinion all the way through and you can begin strongly.

Although-- using that concession again-- although technological advances now enable us to have easy and often free access to printed materials online, I believe there's still an important role to be played by more conventional forms. So, immediately the examiner understands where you are. You have got an opinion and you're going to argue that opinion very fluently, eloquently during your essay.

Also important to extend and enrich your vocab. Lovely example here is a student of ours Vinod who worked so hard for his band 8; really motivated, really determined and we knew or he knew that he needed to expand his vocab and really show great lexical range in order to score highly. So, he worked on vocabulary looking at word of families, building up synonyms, building up



antonyms, building up collocations. An amazing list of collocations; which words work together which sits naturally in English.

So important to do this and to have this skill and to have these at your fingertips when you come to doing the exam. So, which collocations are used formally, which are used more informally, and that hard work really, really paid off. So, that was something that we could help him with, but then he did the extra hard work. I'm not going to take all the credit for that. He did absolutely brilliantly.

And making sure you add grammar and grammar structures. Now, I know Kate and Ben were podcasting on this earlier this year on essential grammar for band 7, for band 8, for band 9. Have a listen to those if you feel grammar is something you could be working harder on. I would particularly recommend including conditional sentences. A second conditional is pretty straightforward and you can add that in as an example or even a third conditional to just give you



a little sample of that one here. If the student had practiced more for the exam, they would have scored a higher grade. So, if the student had practiced more for their exam they would have scored a higher grade. So, to be able to put in a third conditional will give you extra great points for grammatical range and accuracy.

So, all the above; all the understanding the exam, understanding language skills, and building your language skills takes really hard work. A lot of writing, a lot of feedback, a lot of rewriting, and a lot more feedback, but I really want you to know that we are here to help you. This is what we do at IELTS Podcast. The course Ben does is just being revised at the moment.

So, the course is extra up to date. It's going to include a sample on how to check your paragraphs, how to make sure your paragraph is absolutely on point, to answer the title correctly,



score highly on task achievement. So, we're here correcting your essays, giving you feedback, and really helping you to improve every time.

As I say, pick up a sample correction if you haven't done one already. We'd be delighted to go through that with you and then get involved in the course if you feel that you want some more expert help, that you've had enough of a group lesson or you just want help for you; personalized. So, there's lots of stuff online at ieltspodcast.com. Check that out. Listen to the podcasts. I'm sure you do. Subscribe for the free emails and there's an awful lot of help there on the emails; essay practice and some good tips.

And please tell your friends. If you've got friends who are struggling with IELTS and they want some help as well, tell them about us and we'd be happy to help you. Thank you so much for listening. I am Daphne and it's been great to share some IELTS writing tips with you today.



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