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Ben: Hello there IELTS Podcast listeners. In this tutorial, we're going to be talking with Anabel who is originally from Cuba. She's got a very interesting story and she scored very well in the IELTS exam. So Anabel, welcome to the podcast. Could you just tell us a bit about yourself and why you're taking the IELTS or why you took the IELTS exam?

Anabel: Sure. Hello. How are you? I'm Anabel [unintelligible 00:00:43.22]. I'm originally from Cuba as you said before. I lived in Mexico for 20 years then the U.S. and I'm currently living in London. I took the IELTS because it was a part of the things I had to do in order to start my LLM which is a master's degree for lawyers. And I'm going to study at LSE which is the London School of Economics and Political Science here in London and I'm starting in September this



year. And I was struggling because I needed-- so LSE was asking for a 7 in writing and it was not that I didn't have the knowledge because I mean I speak English, but the thing is that this course specifically helped me to find the structure they wanted like the framework. So, I followed the recommendations. I didn't even finished the course because I had my exam like-- I booked the exam for two weeks, so I was not able to finish the course.

Ben: Okay.

Anabel: Yeah.

Ben: But you did get some feedback, yeah?

Anabel: Yeah, yeah.

Ben: Okay good.



Anabel: So, I sent two essays. You know what helped me I realized I was not answering the questions.

Ben: Oh.

Anabel: Yeah. So, actually--

Ben: What were you doing? What were you doing before?

Anabel: Sometimes well in the feedback I realized that sometimes I don't know I was answering some other stuff and not you know the question. Also and I don't know it was easier than I thought.

Ben: I see. I see. So before this you were practicing, but you may be writing out some essays, but you did not get any feedback and then when you got feedback you realized oh, this is why



I'm not getting the grades I want because I'm not answering this question being asked in the paper.

Anabel: Yeah. And also the examples; I use the method like I don't know mentioning research from certain universities have proven that blah blah, no? So, that helped me a lot.

Ben: What did you use for your examples before that?

Anabel: I was using examples from my life--

Ben: Okay. I see.

Anabel: --so not that academic. So, I think that also help. Also-- what else-- the introduction, conclusion, like having a framework. Firstly, secondly, like outweighing the two sides of the question like the positive, the negative, like drawbacks--

Anabel: Like analyzing-- sorry.



Anabel: Exactly.

Ben: Yeah. Got you. So, just to rewind, it sounds like you weren't analyzing the question and you weren't sort of like dropping it into the framework and it seems as well that you kind of just like worked through the course and then sent off some essays, but as you were going through the course, it seems like you had quite a few aha moments. Would that be fair?

Anabel: Yes.

Ben: Right. Right. Interesting. Okay. And just to change topic before we move on, you're going to be starting at the LSE in September and if COVID comes back, will you have to study from home? Do they have-- I don't know-- have they prepared for that?

Anabel: Yes. They are. They are prepared for that, but I hope fingers crossed that we don't have another lockdown here in London because I'm fed up I think.



Ben: I know. Yeah. I can relate especially with your three kids as well that must have been very intense.

Anabel: Yes, it was. It was. And actually, it started from the U.S. because when this COVID happened we were in the U.S. So, classes were online when we were in the U.S. Then we came here. We arrived during the summer and then in September, I was like oh, they're going to go back to school and again lock down.

Ben: Oh. Oh, oh my word. Okay. Okay. Yeah. I can see. I can see. It's time to change stuff again. I can relate. So, before you jumped into our online course, did you try any other online options? Did you try any like I don't know a tutor, face-to-face tutor?

Anabel: I didn't try the tutor. I took a course back in Mexico in the British Council, but it was not that good. I mean I think you gave me more like practical pragmatic recommendations because I mean like you said during the podcast, I don't want to prove my intelligence. I get the



grade the freaking 7. And you know what? And also I think it was useful because I was struggling to get ideas. I like to take my time when I'm writing and I think the course helped me to do the brainstorm to get some ideas because when I took the exam before, I was struggling to get ideas and it was actually easier than I thought and you don't have to come up with brilliant ideas. Just you want to communicate something easy and smooth.

Ben: Absolutely. Absolutely. Yeah. Like I've said before this and you said it again, it's not a test of intelligence. It's a language test. Language is communication. Your ideas just have to be reasonable, believable. You do not have to solve global warming with your IELTS Task 2 essay. You just have to forward some semi-believable, some believable reasonable solutions and I think yeah I think like you just said once students realize this I think it takes a lot of pressure off them and so that they can focus on the actual writing, focus on the language which is the whole point



of the test. So, you were doing a British Council course in Mexico. May I ask what that consists of?

Anabel: It was like a fast track IELTS. It was I think four weeks and it was like-- it included everything like listening, reading, they gave you tips writing of course, but most of the students were struggling with writing and actually, a lot of the students in my LLM group in the master's degree were struggling as well with the IELTS because they needed the 7 in writing and everyone was getting 6.5. And actually, I have a friend that she told me she took the IELTS five times.

Ben: Wow! A lot of money.

Anabel: A lot of money. She spent almost £1,000.



Ben: Wow! Yeah. It's so frustrating. It's so frustrating. And did you get a 6.5 before? Were you also stuck at 6.5?

Anabel: Yeah. I was stuck with the 6.5.

Ben: And how were you going with the other parts of the test?

Anabel: Great and that was the most frustrating thing that I was getting 8 in reading, listening. Speaking I was getting 7 all the time. That didn't change. Well, actually the first time I took the IELTS I got a 6 in speaking.

Ben: Oh! Why?

Anabel: I think I was very nervous and the guy in the interview he was not very friendly.

Ben: Oh, okay.



Anabel: I think he was sick that day and he wasn't feeling that great.

Ben: Oh, no. That's not good.

Anabel: But I was getting 7 like the following-- so one, two, three-- so in total in my life, I have taken the exam four times.

Ben: Four times. Right. And the first time were you usually getting about an 8 for reading and listening and the speaking was started off at a 6, but eventually got up to a 7.

Anabel: Yeah.

Ben: What do you think changed in your speaking exams to get from a 6 to a 7?

Anabel: So, I moved to the States, so I think I was able to practice more.

Ben: Okay. Yeah, yeah.



Anabel: Also, I took some classes at Harvard which were very dynamic. You have to participate a lot. So, I think that gave me like the push to you know to speak and practice more, but I was still struggling with the writing.

Ben: I see. So, all this time even though your speaking was improving, you are still stuck at the 6.5.

Anabel: Yes.

Ben: And how did that make you feel?

Anabel: Awful. I'm like I must be stupid like what's wrong with me? I don't get it. And also you know so actually my husband found about you and the course and he told me like oh, I found this thing on the internet and it says the course is I don't know this amount, but if you don't get the 7, you can ask for a reimbursement.



Ben: Yes. Yes.

Anabel: So, I was like hmm. They must have like you know the tip--

Ben: Secret sauce.

Anabel: Yeah. Exactly.

Ben: Oh wow! That's fantastic. Yeah. So was that the kind of like tipping point? Was that-- the guarantee; was that what made you say okay, I've got nothing to lose? And I don't want to blow my own trumpet here, but you didn't even complete the course. You didn't even do all the essay corrections. You just did a couple of them. Wow!

Anabel: Yes.

Ben: Wow! Wow! And I think what happened in this case then, Anabel, is that your language skills were-- obviously with your 8s in your reading and your listening and your 7 in your



speaking were quite high and in your case I guess you were missing kind of like just the final 20 meters of the 100 meter sprint. You just needed this exam knowledge-- the exam skills which I think you got via the feedback.

Anabel: Yes. Exactly.

Ben: Beautiful. Beautiful. And who gave you the feedback? Was it Daphne or Ellen?

Anabel: I think it was Ellen.

Ben: Ellen. Right. I see. And was there anything else? You said before that she helped you with focusing on the actual question being asked. The course gave you advice about the structure of the essay and the examples to give and how to give examples. Is there anything else that helped you you think could get to that 7?



Anabel: The p1 p2 like structuring your essay. That was also very helpful. I just needed a structure.

Ben: Yeah. Yeah. Like a system to follow.

Anabel: Yeah. Exactly.

Ben: Yeah. I remember when I stumbled across this just one basic idea the p1 the p2 and for me after that point, personally, I could start writing a couple of Task 2 essays an hour; just knocking them out. It became so much easier and other students have said the same. Now, is there anything else that you would like to mention about working with Ellen that we haven't mentioned? No?

Anabel: I don't know. I'm thinking, but yeah no I mean she helped me with the p1 p2. I sent like 16-- you gave me like 16 questions and I had to send ideas and that was really helpful. And then I sent a couple of essays and I got the feedback actually one day before the exam.



Ben: Wow! That's really good. I think the benefit of getting this feedback so quickly getting it back into your hands is that in this case it actually was probably fresh in your mind going into the exam. It wasn't like an essay that you handed in a week ago. You wrote it recently. You got the feedback recently and then even more importantly, you had it recently fresh in your mind reviewing it and then within a couple of hours-- within the next day, you're in the exam and you're writing your answer. Do you remember what essay question you had?

Anabel: Oh my God! I think it was about like keep kids going-- wait. Let me think about it. I think it was kids that they do not manual jobs, but that they are successful, but they don't go to school.

Ben: Okay. Okay. Okay.

Anabel: I really don't remember very good.



Ben: But did you find-- how were you in the exam room? Were you quite comfortable, quite relaxed?

Anabel: No! I thought I was like no. I saw the question and I didn't have a lot of ideas. So, I just put the first one I came up with and actually I was like Christ, this was not really good and then I got the score and I was surprised because I thought it went wrong and yeah. I was actually surprised. I was not expecting my 7. Yeah.

Ben: That's fantastic. That's fantastic.

Anabel: And I was really happy.

Ben: No more IELTS. You're not going to finish the course and write some more essays and send them in.



Anabel: I don't know. You know what? Yeah. I don't know maybe I will because I already paid for the course. Probably I'm going to finish it when my kids go back to school because right now they're on vacations. They're going back next week.

Ben: Right.

Anabel: So, I'm going to have more time to work, study.

Ben: You know what you could do, Anabel? You could finish the course and take the IELTS test again and then we do another call.

Anabel: No!

Ben: We do another call. Fair enough. I understand. Fair enough, but yeah. I imagine as well doing it at a leisurely pace and doing it with no pressure and just to get the feedback and just to improve your writing I imagine would be quite a rich experience and also it definitely won't



harm you for your own preparation for LSE when you start there I guess. Okay. All right. So final question: what would you say to anybody who's probably thinking about joining the online IELTS course we have at ieltspodcast.com?

Anabel: Oh my God! Like do it right now. Don't spend your time or money taking IELTS forever. I wish I knew about this course from the beginning. It would have saved me a lot of money.

Ben: And time.

Anabel: Yeah, but actually, there were-- when I took the exam, I remember that there were doctors there who needed the IELTS to work here in London and one of them he was from Austria I think and his English was really good, but he had the same problem. Last exam he got 6.5 in writing and in the rest he got 8, 8, 8, and then 6.5 in writing. Yeah and I was like oh, I took this course. Let's see how it works.



Ben: Okay. I got to keep an eye out for this Austrian doctor and if you're listening and if you did have a chat with Anabel before your exam, then you know that this course works. So, come and join us, please Mr. Austrian doctor.

Anabel: Yes. It will save you a lot of money and time.

Ben: Absolutely. Yeah. Okay. Well, I think that's everything. Do you have anything more to say before we finish, Anabel?

Anabel: Yes. I'm very happy I don't have to take the IELTS anymore.

Ben: Well done to you. Well done and congratulations and I'm very excited and yeah. I'm very happy that you could just close this chapter. No more IELTS tests. You're on your way to LSE. You're on your way to getting the masters as a lawyer. Is that right?

Anabel: Yeah. Yeah.



Ben: Beautiful. Beautiful. Master of Law. That's it. That's it. That's super. Thank you very much, Anabel.

Anabel: You're welcome.

[Music]

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