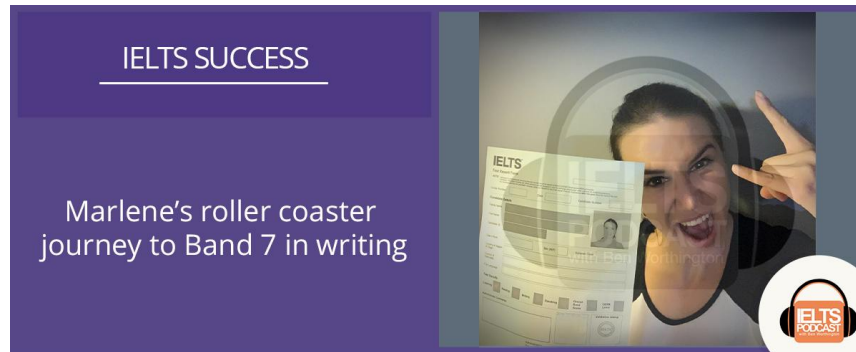


**Ben:** Hello there, IELTS students. In this tutorial, we are talking with Marlene and she's had quite a rollercoaster experience with IELTS, but she finally got there. So, welcome to the podcast, Marlene. How are we doing?

**Marlene:** Hi, Ben. I'm very good, thank you. Hello students out there.

**Ben:** Super. Okay then. So, could you tell us why you are taking the IELTS exam, please?

**Marlene:** Yes. I want to migrate to Australia. I was there in 2011 with my partner and we were on a work and travel visa and we fall in love with this beautiful country and we also met a lot of friends. We worked there as well and so then I thought now before I turn 40, it's time to do this and go there so and I thought it's easy, but it wasn't.



**Ben:** Oh no. What attracted you to Australia just out of curiosity because you're from Germany, right?

**Marlene:** I'm from German, yes. Sorry. What attract...

**Ben:** What attracted you to or what attracts you to Australia?

**Marlene:** Yes. I guess it's mainly the beautiful countryside, the ocean. I love the oceans and there are two of them; the Pacific and the Indian Ocean and yeah also, quite nice people, beautiful sunshine. I like the warmer weather as well. So, yes. That's why it come that we absolutely want to go there and live there.

**Ben:** Beautiful. Wow! Okay. And you said that initially you thought it would be quite easy, but in the end, it turned out quite difficult.



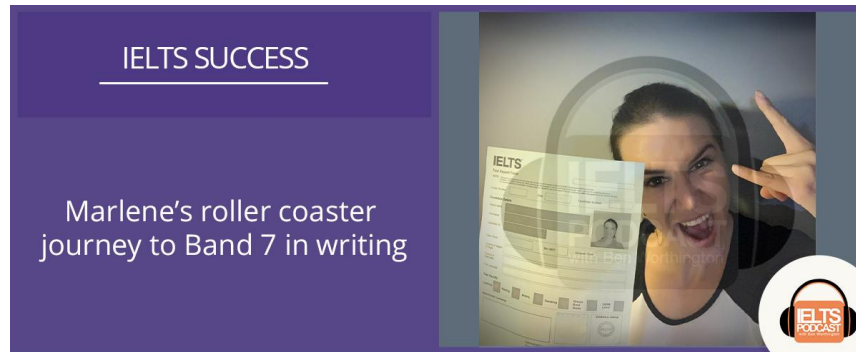
**Marlene:** Yes. It's the exam. So, the IELTS exam was quite difficult to pass and as well as the whole immigration process to Australia because they're very strict. Yes. You have to present all the documents and so, yes. It's quite a hard process.

**Ben:** Can you do this all online or do you have to do it through like an immigration agent?

**Marlene:** You can do both. We tried on our own, so yes. Now, we get ready. So, we did everything, but it just was the one thing so to have the IELTS exam with an overall band-- no, not with overall band-- with every section you have to present a 7 or more.

**Ben:** Right.

**Marlene:** And-- yes. I thought okay, I do that that's the last thing I have to do and then we can get ready, but yeah, it took me about one and a half year to get the 7 in writing. Yeah.



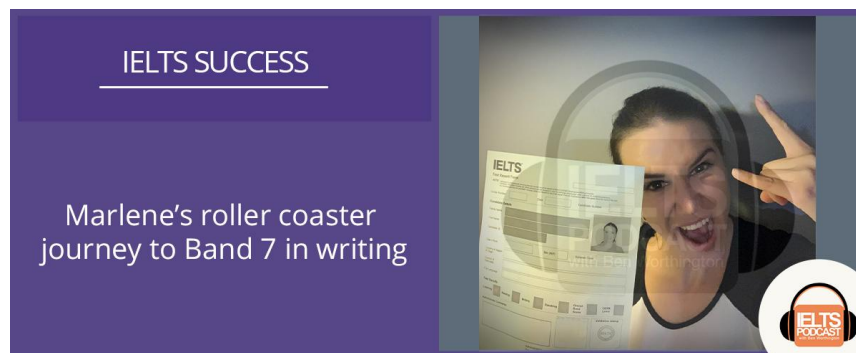
**Ben:** My word. But during that time we were with a pandemic. Is that right?

**Marlene:** Oh, yeah. That's right. Yeah, that's also true. So, they cancelled a lot of tests as well when the lockdown was going on in Germany. So, yeah. That was also a bit of a reason for the delay or of the course.

**Ben:** Right. So, it kind of slowed everything down I guess.

**Marlene:** Yes, yes, yes.

**Ben:** Got you. Okay. Okay. And then I guess things slowly got back to normal rolling out the vaccinations and Germany opening up again, but even then, there was a little bit of a challenge. What specific problem were you having with the IELTS?



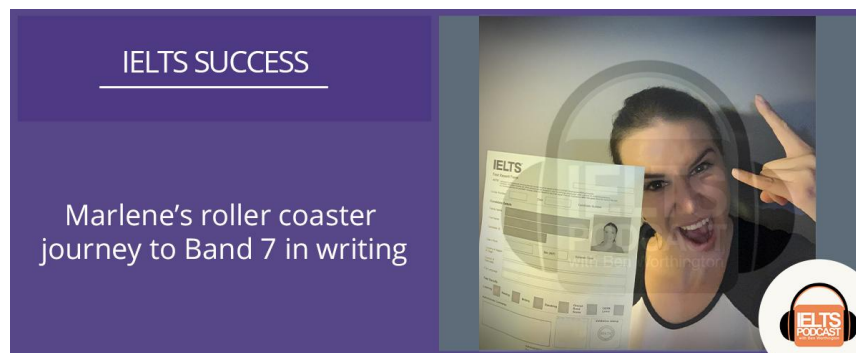
**Marlene:** It was the writing. So, I must admit the first time I tried it, I wasn't familiar with any of the whole test-- of the whole format. I didn't know anything. I didn't know in which order or I didn't know about the time limit. I just give it a go.

**Ben:** Right.

**Marlene:** Yes. So, if I remember correctly, I think I get a 5.5 for writing, 7 in speaking which was quite okay and I think a 6 in reading and listening a 6 as well I guess. Yeah.

**Ben:** Right. Okay.

**Marlene:** Then I thought okay, probably it's not that easy. You have to you know-- consider some facts to do it. Yeah.



**Ben:** So, you thought okay, I'll give it a shot and you did zero preparation before and you still came up with those scores. That's all right.

**Marlene:** Yes.

**Ben:** Yeah, but for the immigration you need higher, yeah.

**Marlene:** Yes. Then I had a period of I don't know six, probably three times in a row and then I stuck at 6.5 in writing, but all the other sections was quite good. It was then about 8, 8.5, 7.5, but the writing was the problem.

**Ben:** Right. So, as soon as you started to put your mind to it and focus on like preparation strategies and I guess mock exams-- did you do mock exams or were you just doing like reading through books and doing courses?



**Marlene:** No. Honestly, I started soon with you guys. So, I googled you up and I thought oh, that sounds quite good and then I wrote you an email and since then I'm you know in the work process with you especially with Daphne and it's fantastic. So, yeah.

**Ben:** Super.

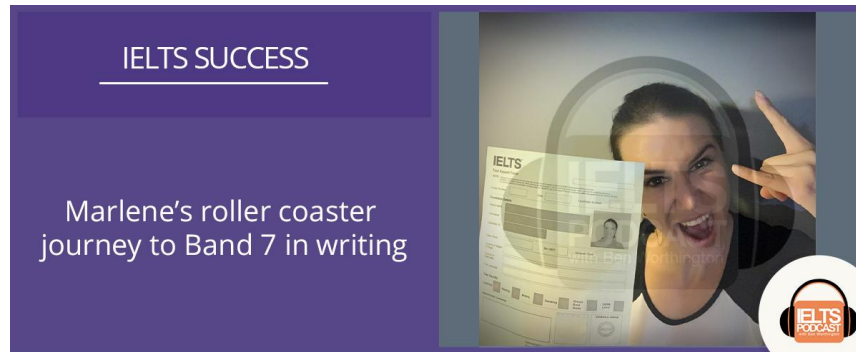
**Marlene:** And then I improved a lot.

**Ben:** Right.

**Marlene:** Yes, but the writing still stuck a bit.

**Ben:** Yeah. And did you try any other options before you started with us?

**Marlene:** No.



**Ben:** No? Okay.

**Marlene:** I just-- no. I just ordered from Amazon a kind of a book like there are practice tests in it like real tests and I did them, but I didn't have any feedback you know. I don't have any feedback for that, so I don't know if I was good or not. You can like have a look on the internet for the reading and for the listening, but for the speaking and for the writing, yeah--

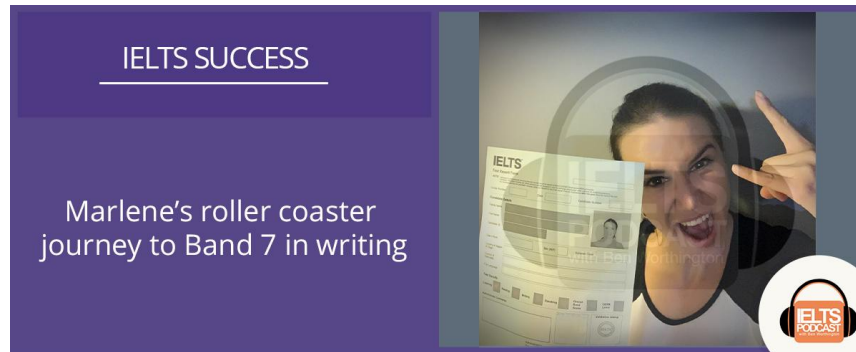
**Ben:** It's quite a challenge, isn't it?

**Marlene:** Yes.

**Ben:** But for the book you bought, did it have the answers at the back of the book?

**Marlene:** Yes. It had the answers, but yeah, for the writing and for the speaking it's yeah because they are like answers from strangers. It's not your style.

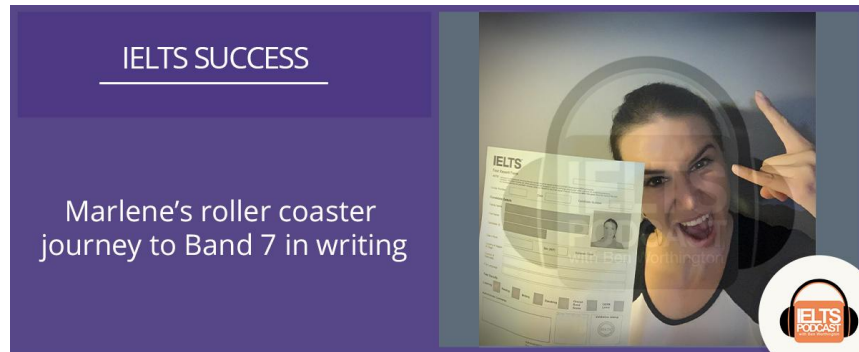




**Ben:** Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I totally understand. Yeah, yeah. I mean I was just thinking that if they sell a book without the answers then it really makes it ten times more difficult to prepare, but yeah. Whereas where it's open-ended answers for such as the speaking and the writing, it's a totally, totally different ball game. So, you watched--

**Marlene:** And then I was a bit overwhelmed with the writing answers. Like the examples they printed in the book, I thought okay, and I googled up every second word you know. It's high level. I guess a native speaker wrote that, so yeah. It was quite hard to cope with that.

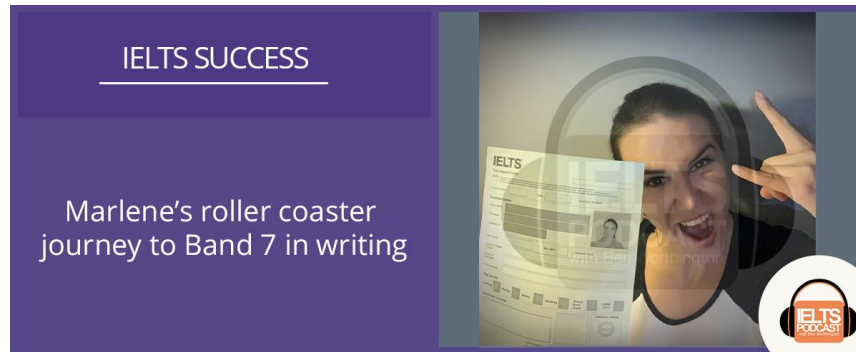
**Ben:** Well, this is it, Marlene. It's not only difficult for non-native English speakers. It's difficult for native English speakers because this is higher level English, you know. Like if a normal person just walked out of the pub, for example, and into an IELTS exam center, they're not going to be able to write unless they're you know in that field already, but for example, my brother he's a physiotherapist. He cannot walk out of his clinic and into the test center and start writing



academically. It's just not going to happen and it's a totally new level with new vocabulary and new styles. So, you definitely need specialist training for that and that's what you were working with Daphne with this, right?

**Marlene:** Yes. Yes. So, that's what my Australian friends say. I showed them some questions and some answers and they said I couldn't do it and I'm a native speaker. So, I would prepare as well for that to you know achieve the 7 or higher. So, I thought okay, yeah.

**Ben:** Yeah, yeah, totally. It's a whole new set of skills and it's especially difficult if you've been away from the academic environment for a while. I remember I took a year out before starting university and after a whole year, actually I went to Australia and I was doing the working traveling holiday visa thing and then I came back to England started university and suddenly, I

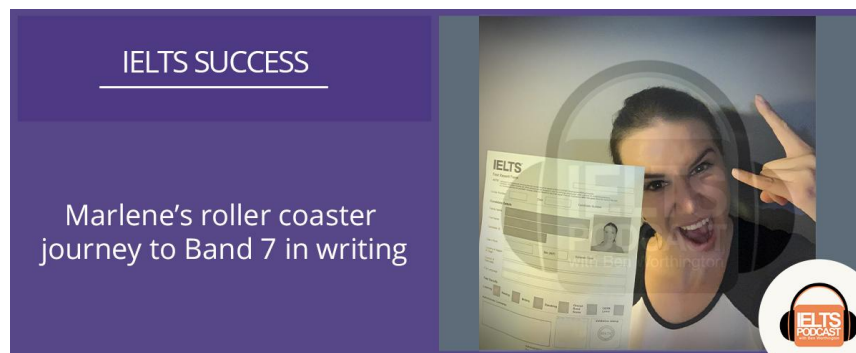


had to start writing all this formal essays again. And it takes a while to get back these skills. So, what was it like working with Daphne?

**Marlene:** Oh, beautiful. I like everything about her. She is caring. She is funny. She is professional. Yes and always you know in a good mood and yeah, it was fantastic. And she gave me the correction soon not even 24 hours after I send it to her and it really improved my understanding and you know, yeah, my whole level. It was beautiful.

**Ben:** And I guess you're working on your essays or you were working on your essays during the lockdown. Is that right?

**Marlene:** Oh. Well, I have a job, so I have to go to work then I work for eight hours then I come back and then I sit down and try to focus to study for that exam and write some essays and I just



counted the essays for Daphne and I said you know what? I wrote about 40-- no. 50 essay titles and 50 Task 1s, so 100.

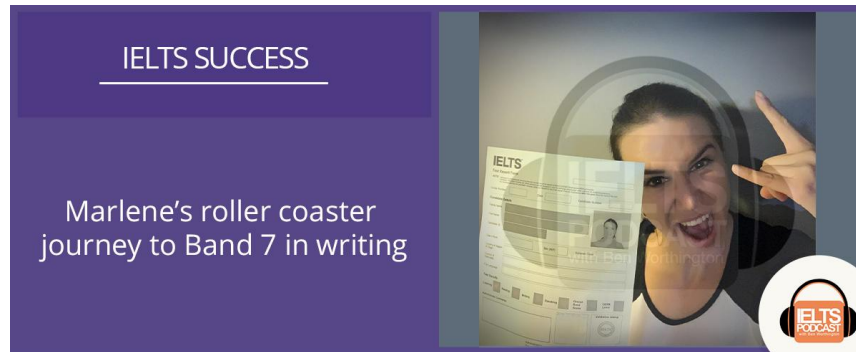
**Ben:** Oh my word! Wow! Wow! That is dedication and all the time after a day's worth of work.

**Marlene:** Yes and it's hard to switch between the languages you know. So, at work you are-- I'm a social worker, so people come to me for counseling and for advice. I do that in German and then you know to go home and to study for academic English essays. And I think the hard thing is for all the students out there the range of topics.

**Ben:** Really? This is one of your like pain points; the range of topics?

**Marlene:** Yes.

**Ben:** Interesting.



**Marlene:** Yeah, because you can have everything and you don't know-- you can have-- I hated the advertising titles like the company titles, but I love the outer space, aliens, technology was quite okay, environment and family and health was quite good, but I had bad luck in the real situations. I always had the advertising and company and yeah--

**Ben:** Oh no.

**Marlene:** --kind of stuff, yeah.

**Ben:** And I guess you like the social questions or the child questions because this is your field, isn't it?

**Marlene:** Yeah. That's right. Yeah. Yeah.

**Ben:** Interesting.



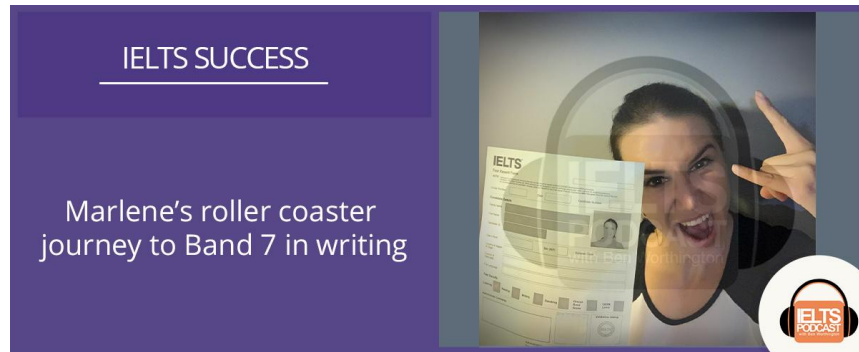
**Marlene:** And what got me to 7 was a question if we should contact intelligent life in space or not because it could be dangerous and I gone crazy on this title and I was holding on my breath, smiled and then I wrote yeah and...

**Ben:** I guess you hit the lottery. You hit the lottery when you got that question, no?

**Marlene:** Yes. Yes. I thought oh God, finally! A normal title which is... yeah.

**Ben:** But that's interesting because it shows a lot about the IELTS like if you are really into certain topics like you are, but you really dislike other topics, it can be quite a challenge for those students if you've got a narrow range. I mean eventually, you manage to like broaden your knowledge and the vocabulary related to those topics. Is that right?

**Marlene:** Yeah. I made little cue cards with--



**Ben:** Oh, interesting.

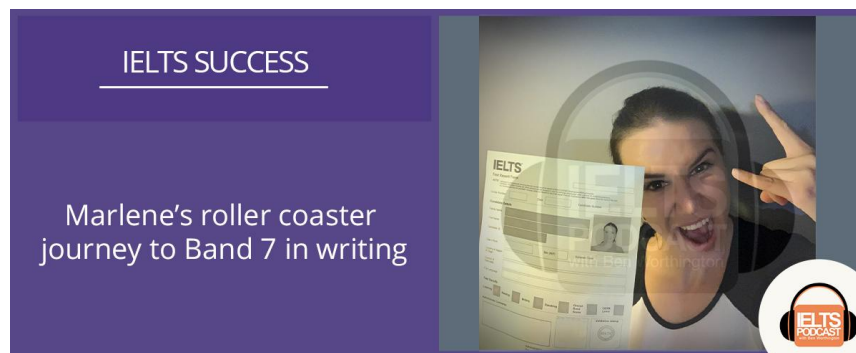
**Marlene:** --topics like environment and with the vocabulary, but I think the hard part is to get any examples. So, sometimes I don't even get an idea in my own language so in German what example could I use for I don't know for some kind of work stuff a manager CEO question. I don't know. Who knows? I made things up. So, yes. I think you have to be prepared because it could be any kind of question.

**Ben:** Yeah, yeah. This is interesting because it goes beyond language now, doesn't it?

**Marlene:** Yes.

**Ben:** It goes beyond language because they're asking you about CEO pay, for example.

**Marlene:** Yes.



**Ben:** You know and if you cannot think of an answer in your own language because this is not a topic that you are interested in, not only do you have to invent an idea or invent some material around it, then you've got to form an opinion and then on top of that, you've got to translate it and then find the vocabulary. It's an incredible challenge.

**Marlene:** Yes.

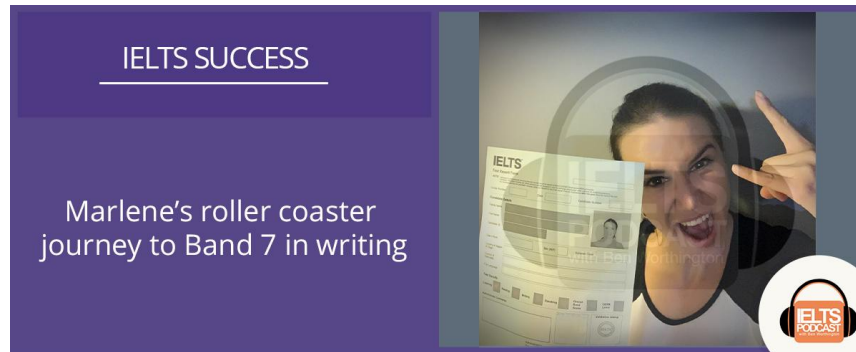
**Ben:** So, you said one of your techniques for overcoming this which I thought was really interesting was the flash cards or topic cards. Is that right? With some vocabulary on.

**Marlene:** Yeah. That's right. That's right.

**Ben:** Okay. Could you just like explain that a little?

**Marlene:** Yeah. I tried to surround myself with any kind of topics. So, I watched series in English, I read English books, and I even tried to write down some titles in some hated sections





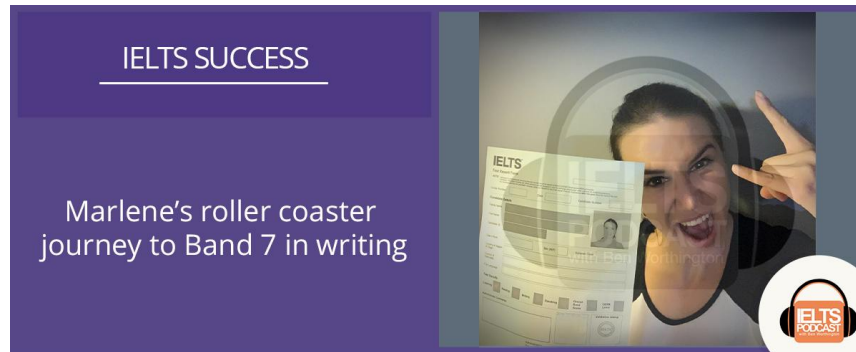
you know like political essays or something like that because Daphne said just try it then you are not like shocked in the exam because you don't know what you get. So, try to get prepared, try to collect some ideas, try to write them down to have a slight idea if it comes to such a topic you dislike, you know.

**Ben:** Exactly.

**Marlene:** And yes. Also the same with the speaking I guess. Yes.

**Ben:** Yeah. It's the same principle of like filling up your head with ideas and going through like past questions, previous questions and just generating ideas kind of like what we do at the beginning of the writing course you know.

**Marlene:** Yes, that's right. Yeah.



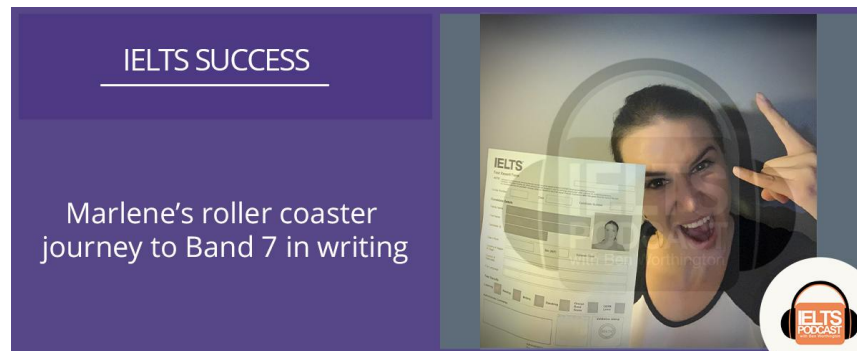
**Ben:** Yeah, yeah and I guess if you are-- go on, sorry.

**Marlene:** I think if that your-- in my case, it was like this. If I had a terrible topic, my mind went blank also. I could not think about any examples and I panicked a bit and then I didn't had time to finish properly you know, to include some good examples. So, my structure was not well and I think that's why us are stuck on the 6.5 for five times probably.

**Ben:** Oh, I'm so sorry. That's-- yeah.

**Marlene:** No. It's not your fault, Ben. I think your team did everything, you know.

**Ben:** Thank you. Thank you. Yeah and it's kind of like it's a spiral, isn't it, when your mind goes blank and then the clock is still ticking away and you still got to generate these ideas. And part of you solving this problem was the flashcards, was generating ideas on multiple questions. And like what happened if you still got a question and you still went blank? Was there a specific



process? Did you sort of like slow it down? Did you break it down into smaller pieces and tackle it? What would happen? How would you like overcome this mind goes blank?

**Marlene:** I tried to focus. I did what you showed in the course like the table with the body paragraph one and two. So, I tried to implement a simple structure. I break the question down to two parts and then include any thoughts like words plus an idea on each side and then I try to go back and you know, yes, try to keep calm and go on. Yeah.

**Ben:** Yeah. It's so much easier when you're following a plan. Would you agree?

**Marlene:** Yes, yes, yes. I agree.

**Ben:** When we were doing the course it was like okay, if we can break it down because I saw this day in day out lots of students, Marlene, would struggle with my mind goes blank and I've struggled with this when I'm speaking Spanish and it's so frustrating because I know the



vocabulary, I know exactly what I want to say, but I open my mouth and I'm just like... And then my brain finally catches up and I finally got the conversation ready or the phrase I want to say and the conversation has moved on. And this was so frustrating. Well, the way I tackled this problem was the same way I kind of approached the essay writing process like breaking it down into small components, following a process you know of just like in my speaking-- when I was speaking with friends, for example, they would just be like okay, just find out that the key vocabulary, agree or just reflect it, start speaking and eventually, they'll come. And in this case with the exam questions it's like as you just mentioned the process; breaking it down, setting up the table, generating ideas, and then working from there. And this frees up so much time once you get moving. It's like once you get momentum with that process, it just makes the whole writing process a lot more easier I think. So, Marlene, I guess after writing so many essays this process became automatic for you. Is that right?



**Marlene:** Yeah, that's right. My second problem was that I tend to wander off topic in the first place. Sometimes, not every time. So, then I go back to the to the question and I thought oh, no. That is not answering the question. Yes. So, that was my second problem. So, time, panic, and grammar as well a bit, but Daphne gave me some good advice to include in your essay, some higher language grammar like the inversion or the conditional sentence. So, at least one or the although or the despite, in spite questions. So, I was like automatically process and I thought-- before I wrote another essay I thought okay, so yeah. The conclusion, the body paragraph; do you have any high level grammar sentence in it? Okay. Here check, you know? It goes automatically. And then I guess it goes better and better and I improved quite good.

**Ben:** Yeah yeah. Now, that was beautiful hearing that because it seems like the more essays you wrote, the more sort of like ingrained and it almost becomes muscle memory the process so much so that it frees up mental energy to start focusing on other things that we've taught such as



the inversion, the conditional. And once you get to that level I find like okay, I've got my body paragraphs. Let's check for high level grammar. If there is, perfect or maybe I didn't include the conditionals. Maybe I can squeeze it into the conclusion. I think it's confidence boosting, isn't it, once you get to that level?

**Marlene:** Yes.

**Ben:** That's what I found working with students.

**Marlene:** Yes, definitely. Absolutely.

**Ben:** So, Daphne was helping you and then on the exam day as well you got a question about aliens. Is that right?

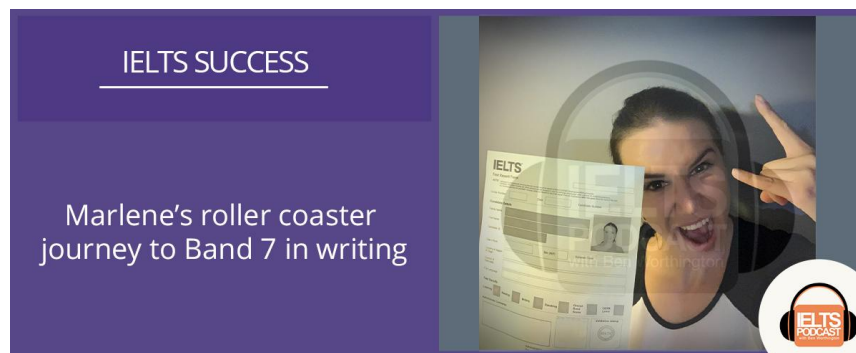
**Marlene:** Yes, that's right. It was a really cool question.



**Ben:** Why was that question easier for you to answer? You think because it was like more creative based perhaps?

**Marlene:** I don't know. I wrote one essay for the correction with Daphne about a similar question title and Daphne found it amazing and she even asked if she can have it for a model essay. So, it boosted my confidence quite well and I don't know, but I never go back to such a title and then I don't know. It was just like good luck I guess. So, sometimes it's also related to that you have good luck and you have an easy question or easy for you, you know.

**Ben:** Well, not just that Marlene. Like the definition of luck is where preparation meets opportunity you know or hard work meets opportunity. And in your case, you did the preparation, you'd done the work before. And if you hadn't done that work then the essay that you found on your test about the alien and contacting and whatnot, it would not have been lucky



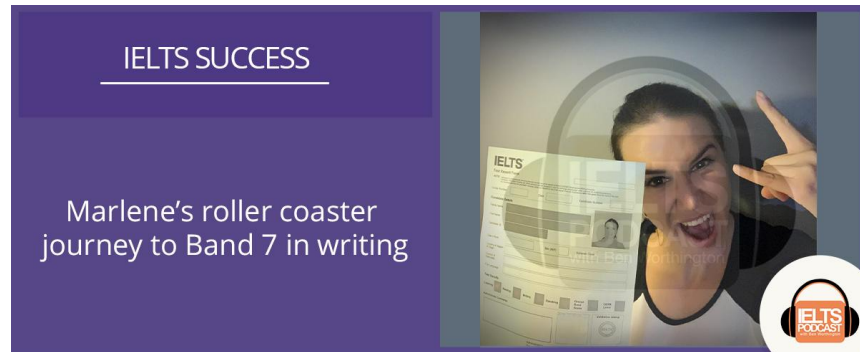
if you had not written the essay before. So, I wouldn't put it totally down to luck. I wouldn't put it down to luck. I would put it down to your dedication and hard work you know.

**Marlene:** Yes. Yeah, yeah, that's right. And I checked the time and I thought oh well, now you got 15 minutes left. I wrote about nearly 400 words and I thought okay, now you have to do Task 1 in 15 minutes, not in 20, but this process was very automatically. So, the Task 1 I don't know it was just like I could do it in my sleep. I even dreamed about that. So, I think you could give me at the moment any kind of table or bar chart or pie chart you know. I'll get you an answer for that in my sleep. Yeah.

**Ben:** Super. Yeah, yeah and I guess you were-- sorry?

**Marlene:** It traumatized me.





**Ben:** I guess when you were writing your Task 2 it was kind of-- and you'd done a similar essay before, it was almost like a déjà vu, right?

**Marlene:** Yeah.

**Ben:** And I guess this would have boosted your confidence immensely. It's like oh, it's one of these. I've done this just two weeks ago, no?

**Marlene:** Yeah, yeah, that's right. Yeah, yeah, and then you have a good feeling. You stay calm and then you can give it a go and it worked out good. So, I'm really happy about that. Finally, yeah.

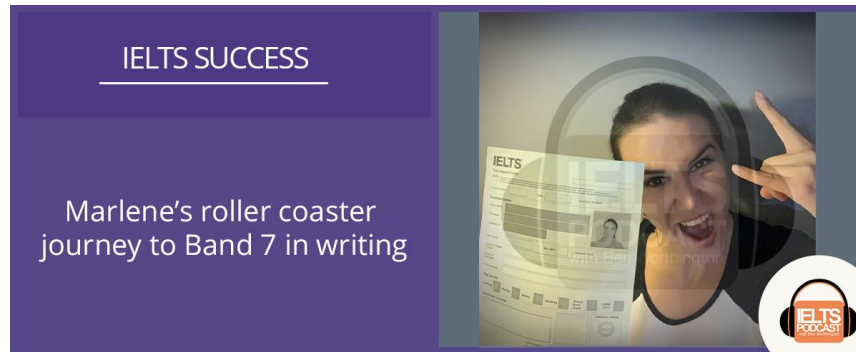
**Ben:** Sorry?

**Marlene:** I'm really happy about that finally, yeah.



**Ben:** Oh, yeah. Definitely. Yeah, yeah and you see the question and you've answered a similar one before because you've put in the work and it boosts your confidence and then you get momentum and it just makes everything so much easier. I totally agree there. So, is there anything else about working with Daphne that we haven't covered that you'd like to share or working with us at [ieltspodcast.com](http://ieltspodcast.com)?

**Marlene:** Yeah. I listened to your podcast. I thought they are fantastic. So, on my way to work and back and on my way to the exam which were in Berlin sometimes, so quite a long distance from my hometown, I always listen to your podcast and especially to the grammar writing podcasts, but also sometimes if I need a little you know encouragement, I listened to the other students who passed the exam before me. So, it was a bit you know encouraging for me and I think you all do a fantastic job. You put so much effort in your students and yes. Always with a



positive and funny attitude and I can just recommend your format to every student who is struggling with the IELTS exam.

**Ben:** Oh, thank you very much, Marlene. It's very, very sweet. And yeah you've completed the cycle now because now you'll be inspiring other students as well and they'll be listening to you, Marlene and they'll be like, yes. I can do it. I can get to Australia. I can get to Canada. I can get that band 7. So, thank you. Thank you very much and I wish you all the best with your--

**Marlene:** Thank you.

**Ben:** --trip to-- not trip-- with your immigration to Australia.

**Marlene:** Thank you, Ben. All the best to you and good luck for all the students out there.

**Ben:** Okay. Super. All right. Well, if you are still struggling with your exam, then remember you can go to [ieltspodcast.com](http://ieltspodcast.com) and sign up for some free IELTS materials or join us on the online



course with the guarantee of jump to band 7 or it's free and we will be more than happy to help you get your band score up, get that band 7 or 8 or 9 whichever you need and get you to Canada or Australia, or the UK. So, good luck and thank you for listening.

[Music]

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