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Ben: Hello there, IELTS students. In this tutorial, we are looking at the IELTS Speaking part 2: why and where you can lose points and in this episode, we have Robert Buckinghamshire to join us. He's an ex-IELTS examiner. How are you doing today, Robert?

Robert: I'm pretty well, thank you. And you, Ben, how are things?

Ben: All good. All good here. It's getting cold in the northern hemisphere. I can hear you laughing because you're in the southern hemisphere.

Robert: Well, I'm still in the north, but just--

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Ben: Oh, sorry. Okay. My mistake

Robert: It's pretty hot, pretty hot, pretty hot.

Ben: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Do you miss the northern European winters?

Robert: Not at all. I guess-- the only thing you do miss is the changing of seasons when your memory-- you remember things according to how the weather was. Do you remember that time we went to... oh, yeah. It was a nice day, wasn't it? Or oh, it was freezing. When you live in that kind of more tropical zone everything's is the same all the year round. You've got things like Christmas and stuff like that to focus on, but that's about it because it's different way of--

Ben: Okay. It all kind of merges into one I guess.

Robert: It does. It does.

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Ben: Right. That's interesting how we use temperature and the weather as like markers to help us--

Robert: We do. We do actually--

Ben: Yeah and I guess it's one of those things you never really realized until it was gone.

Robert: Exactly. Exactly. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Ben: Okay. All right then. Let's jump into today's tutorial. So, in the previous one, Robert and I we spoke about Part 1. We dissected it and went through the criteria. So, if you missed that, I strongly suggest you go back. It was only a few episodes ago and there you'll get to hear Robert and myself just break down IELTS Speaking Part 1. And in this tutorial, we're going to do a fairly similar format. We're going to look at the areas where you can lose points and then we'll

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look at a model answer and just break it down for you. So, do you want to kick off, Robert and tell us what happens when we're in Part 2?

Robert: Yeah, of course. Last week-- what was it-- a few days ago when we were talking about Part 1. When we go on to Part 2, of course everything still applies. We still have those four criteria that the examiner is going to be very carefully listening in for: the fluency, the vocabulary and its range of vocabulary, the grammar aspect, and of course pronunciation and intonation, but Part 2 has some very different challenges I think to face for that person sitting down and taking the exam.

Let's remember a second how it goes. All right. You're sitting there. You're being examined and then suddenly, the examiner hands you a card they're going to call it with a topic on it and it's got a series of cues that you can follow. First, he's going to say that-- or he or she is going to say you've got one minute to prepare your answer. And you're given a little bit of paper and a pencil

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or a pen or something and you're told that you're being given about two minutes. In fact, it's exactly two minutes to talk about the topic.

And maybe afterwards, the examiner will ask you a very short follow-up question and then it goes on to Part 3. It sounds quite simple actually. What could go wrong with that? Well, quite a few things actually. Quite a few things. Again, and I think I mentioned it last week, let's look at this from the point of view of the examiner. What's the examiner worried about? What's the examiner going to be looking out for?

Maybe the examiner is going to reduce your score. I hate to say that, but yeah, reduce your score maybe from a good 7 or even an 8 to a 6, for example for any of the following reasons. Let's go first to fluency. The big deal of fluency; the flow of it, how you keep going. It's not just of course your ability to keep the flow going and joining up your thoughts. We talked about that before, didn't we, with your sos and because and all those, but being able to keep going on that topic for

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two minutes. You'd be amazed how many candidates run out of things to say with about 20 seconds or more left.

Ben: Has that happened quite a lot?

Robert: It does happen quite a bit I'm afraid and I'll tell you why in a minute, but it gets a bit uncomfortable. As an examiner, it's not what you want to happen. You get this thing when-- you get this uncomfortable kind of silence for three or four seconds and the candidate sort of stares at the information on the card wondering how to carry on and you get a... And remember if you don't speak for about five seconds, the examiner will jump in and has to say it in this way is there something more you can tell me about this?

Ben: Right.

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Robert: And you don't want that to happen. If you've got nothing else to say and that is a very rare event, the examiner will say okay, thank you very much. Let's move on to Part 3 or something like that. So, that's the one thing. How do you keep it going for the two minutes?

The other thing of course is when you're given the card, you're given these kind of guidelines; these three or four little points that they ask you to talk about, but some students just don't stick to the point. They go off topic. And of course very, very occasionally-- it's very, very occasionally a candidate might just simply not understand what they're supposed to be talking about and talk about something completely unrelated to what it says there.

Ben: Yes. I've had that. And the look of surprise with my students maybe they got a cue card talking about a shopping center or a shopping mall and they talked about going shopping with their parents when they were younger and then I said okay, that was good. It was an okay presentation, but look at the cue card again and then they realized they were completely off topic.

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And they start like-- they get really angry with themselves because it's like wow! This is the simplest task. It's just to follow us on the cue card, but I still managed to bodge it up. I still managed to make a mistake.

And I think it's because of these lack of preparation, not reading it thoroughly, and just glancing at it and then assuming oh, they want me to talk about this and then off they go like a train down the wrong train track. And it's terrible especially if it was like a good presentation. And just going back just to rewind a little bit, Rob.

Robert: Yeah.

Ben: When he said you've got these students sometimes that will look at the card and then sort of like run out of material, run out of things to say after about 20 seconds or just 20 seconds left and I think there's two types of students: the ones who cannot carry on, who run out of time-- sorry--

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who don't have-- I'll start again. There's two types of students: those who look at the paper and struggle to fill the two minutes and the other type that just can't for lack of a better word shut up, just keep going on and on and on.

I think as a student it's your responsibility to find out which you are and then take steps to remedy that situation. And we've talked about these remedies in previous podcasts, but as an examiner, Rob, I wanted to ask you as an ex-IELTS examiner if a student will not stop talking, what do you do? Do you just jump in and say okay, thank you very much or how do you handle that?

Robert: You have to. You have to. You have to find ways of-- because you as the examiner are also being examined if you like. Examiners will occasionally be listened into by their kind of immediate supervisor like the examiner of examiners and they do exist these people.

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Ben: When you say they'll listen in, are they like standing-- are they--

Robert: No, no, no, no, no.

Ben: --sitting there next to you or they're just going to listen to the recording?

Robert: No, no, no. Every so often, all examiners are kind of monitored by their examiner chief in the region and so sometimes you're warned about it, sometimes you're not warned, sometimes you're told hey, by the way, next time your exams are going to be sent to so and so for monitoring. Okay. That's cool. So, you're on your guard as it were because you're a little bit more careful perhaps about time, but it's getting more and more strict apparently.

The last few ones I did before I stopped being an examiner you even got these additional little bits of paper saying to be in line with the criteria no more than five seconds more than two minutes will be allowed. So, the examiner is looking-- this is all in the name of standardization.

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It's got to be the same. It doesn't matter if you're in Tokyo or Timbuktu to give a test. It's got to be standardized.

So, I'm looking at that stopwatch and I'm thinking all right. I'm counting down those seconds. There's five seconds left. There's three, two, one, zero. The person is in the middle of a sentence let him finish it perhaps and then I would say very politely and with a gesture with my arm or hand just raising it a little bit, thank you.

Ben: Right. Okay. I see.

Robert: And jump in maybe with the follow-up question. It gets a little uncomfortable for the candidate particularly if they're as you mentioned before quite rightly the non-stop talker. You'd be amazed how many people go on and on about that and they're getting really to the point after about 1 minute 30 seconds. They go around the houses then they're getting onto it and they've

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got so much more to tell you. They're in the middle of an exciting story or something like that and you stop them. And they get very like annoyed sometimes is the word. Frustrated, annoyed, surprised. You stopped me and I was telling you this story and I was going to make you laugh and why did you stop me?

Ben: Yeah and this reminds me of like what I've always said is like this is a language exam and the student who's getting upset about being cut off, they've approached it like with full gusto. Good for them, but they've forgotten the cardinal rule. They've forgotten that this is a language exam and you're asking, for example, I think we're going to talk about mobile phones or describe the time you weren't allowed to use your mobile phone. You're asking that to find their language skill, not to find out their personal experiences without a mobile phone. You don't care. At the end of the day, if you wanted to find out how they handle not having a mobile phone, for

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example or whatever it is on the cue card, you go to Google or you'd ask them afterwards, but obviously, you don't care. You're there just to assess them.

And I think just to go off on a bit of a tangent here, if you are a student who doesn't stop talking or who's got lots of enthusiasm, I think in your case it's paramount you stick to the cue card or even just like you know you've got a big story coming up about the topic on the cue card, just cut it short in advance and get to the point because those students who get cut off and they haven't finished the story, I doubt they're going to get points for fulfilling the requirement of the cue card.

Robert: Exactly. Exactly. When you look at the fluency things, to get the highest grades an 8 or 9, it does actually say on the fluency scale the person develops the topic coherently and appropriately or develops the topic fully and appropriately. That's really, really high grade. In

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other words, they talked about the topic. They didn't go off topic. They covered the points. It sounds crazy, but there it is. It's the card. It's the card.

You'd be amazed also the people who stare at the topic and they sometimes say oh nice, oh great and they just look at-- they don't even write anything on the paper and they start talking. And even though they-- perhaps because they're overconfident and they think oh, this is a topic I'm familiar with. This is an easy one, but no, no, no. Don't overdo it. Don't fill up both sides of that bit of paper with notes, but make a plan according to the cues they're giving you. Cover those three points.

Ben: Yeah, absolutely because you can glance at the cue card and think oh, excellent. I know the exact story and then you start talking and either you just carry on talking. You don't have time to

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develop each of the bullet points like we just mentioned or perhaps you develop all of your story and there's still a whole minute left to go.

And just one last thing is until you've actually done this, both for the people whose mind goes blank and for the students who just generate like a volcano of ideas and just want to keep talking, in both of those cases, they need to really just sit down with a stopwatch and time themselves because it's not until they've actually done it for two minutes will they get a real feel for how long two minutes actually lasts.

Robert: Exactly. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. You can build it up in English classism out of something I've done over many, many years. I think it's a radio program in the UK called Just a Minute. Can you talk about a subject for a minute and it's a nice game to play in a classroom. You say

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well, it's not a long time because it's only 60 seconds. Okay. All right, Ben. Talk about cheese for a minute. It can be fun, but this is a serious exam.

Shall we go on to that topic about the mobile phone? All right. You're sitting there, you're taking the test, and suddenly, you get this card which says describe a time you were not allowed to use your mobile phone, but then after that it says something like this, doesn't it? You should say... and you got these four points. And notice how those four points again, it's like in Part 1. It goes from the descriptive to the more abstract. It goes from something that appears to be easy like an anecdote, a story I can tell to something where I'm explaining myself, I'm giving opinions, I'm speculating maybe. I don't know.

For example, here you should say what the occasion was, when did it happen, when was it. All right. When and what and why; why you were not allowed to use it. Maybe there you could say

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something about well, I could understand why I wasn't allowed to use it because it was whatever the place was and finally, explain how you felt about it, how your feelings were.

To be honest with you, it's not one of the more shall I say difficult ones to talk about in the sense that it appears to be straightforward, but perhaps because of that, people do run out of ideas very quickly because it seems so obvious.

Ben: Yeah. Yeah. Can I give a model answer?

Robert: Of course.

Ben: I didn't make notes and I guess I've been given a minute to prepare about it, but okay. I'll start. I would like to tell you about the time when I couldn't use my mobile phone. It was relatively recently. It was probably about a week ago and we went to the hospital my girlfriend, me, and my girlfriend's mum or my mother-in-law and we went to get a 4D baby scan. So, it's

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not just a normal baby scan where you see the image. You can actually see the video and you can see the baby moving. And it was kind of like a present from my mother-in-law. So, we went to the other side of town and we had to queue for a little bit first, but then they let us in and once they started doing the scan, they put the gel on my lady's stomach then they started doing the ultrasound and we could see the video. And I immediately just pulled out my phone. It was almost like a reflex reaction. I was just pulled out my phone and then I took a video of my girlfriend on the table and then I wanted to film what we could see. And the technician there he said no. No phones. No phones allowed. And I was like that's not really fair. I was like we've paid for this. And what really annoyed me even more was that I wasn't given a reason and it was just like almost dictatorship style. You're not allowed and I was expecting because of the electromagnetic frequencies it's dangerous or something like that. I needed an explanation. And because I think I didn't get that explanation, it hurt even more. I felt jilted and I felt as though I'd lost out. I felt as though I wasn't getting my money and for a duration of the scan of the

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remaining time, I was thinking of ways of how I could sneak out my phone and film the actual event going on, but then afterwards, at the end of the day, we got a whole Google drive full of data videos and pictures, but I still don't understand why I wasn't allowed to use my phone. However, that's my small presentation about when I wasn't allowed to use my mobile phone. How did I do?

Robert: Great. I started my stopwatch, but after about half a minute when you were talking I think. So, I've measured here 1 minute 36 seconds, but you had already been talking for about 30 seconds. And you even went over the two minutes, Ben. I'm sorry. I'm sorry [unintelligible 00:21:26.05] but yeah, great. The style was great, wasn't it? You told us when it was. You told us where it was. It was a human interest story. It must have been an amazing for everybody. I mean wow! I'm old generation. Our son was born and I just arrived at the clinic and there he was. I

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even arrived late for his birth and so he's already been born. It's all very quick so. I know these days there's all the filming of the birth and oh my God, dude.

Ben: I know. Tell me about it.

Robert: Amazing stuff. Amazing stuff. Incredible. It's a great feeling. Great feeling. So, how is your girlfriend? Everything okay?

Ben: It's all good.

Robert: That's great.

Ben: It's all good. You know what really rubbed the salt in my wound afterwards was that he turned around from the table and he said no phones. He didn't give me a reason, but then he went

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back to his computer and I just saw him chatting on messenger and then he was watching a boxing match on YouTube. And I was like-- that's what irritated me even more.

Robert: Even more so. Even more so.

Ben: But everything else is going okay. We got the Google drive, so I wasn't as miffed. I wasn't as angry afterwards.

Robert: Great. It just shows you-- coming back to the Part 2-- it's the card. It's the cue card. I know on the website you've got a lot of cue cards and also that you can get hold of these things and in books and in classes and all kinds of ways. Practice, practice, practice those cue cards. Get into it. Record yourself for those two minutes. Get into timing yourself and sharing it with others. Did I cover the topics? What do you think? Did I miss anything out? Could I have said that in a different way?

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Because going back to the obvious things, Part 2 and Part 1 and Part 3 even more so perhaps are just you showing off as much as possible your English, your language particularly the more complex things that you can get into particularly in Part 2 and Part 3 and even in Part 1 of course as well what we've talked about before. That's going to push your score up. That's going to impress people.

And of course, all of those cues and all the topics will have similar kind of guidelines. You're going to have a what and a where and a why and a how and explain why or whether it's going to be. Of course, it's not arithmetic. It's good to have it in your mind. We've got two minutes. You've got four sections or four parts to answer. That's 30 seconds each. Okay something, no that's crazy. Nothing is so simple and as clear-cut as that, but as a rule, yes yes. Please find something to say about each of the four parts. That's why that preparation time is so important;

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covering those four points, organizing your ideas, thinking of a good example, thinking of how you're going to finish it off or even introduce it.

Ben: I was just going to when you said organize your ideas, this is a key point and I just want to emphasize. You're going to organize your ideas and also if there is like a phrase like as far as I can recall or to be honest or something like that, write down like an acronym of that. TBH like we do when we're texting. TBH, I felt jilted. You can use your acronyms. So, we're organizing our ideas. We're going to put in acronyms there and little sort of like fragments of language that we definitely want to include just to remind ourselves that we're going to include them. So, I just wanted to-- that was a great point there, Rob. I just wanted to--

Robert: We all have our own ways. You see people using arrows and some kind of connections between their parts of little talk and you also give those people and sometimes it works well. Sometimes you feel oh, wait a minute. This person is using this purely as a way of filling up the

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time. You can overdo it. Those people who begin well, you've asked me to talk about a time when I couldn't use my mobile phone and that's a very interesting question I think because I've never really thought about that before. Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. One was enough.

Ben: Yeah. I was going to say you could just tell they were just stuffing it with fillers.

Robert: Yes. That's more interesting maybe when we're going to Part 3 where we're called out by a question that really we have never thought about before from that point of view. So, we think yeah, give me a chance. Give me a chance. Give me a couple of seconds. We need those fillers, but we'll talk about that at a later date. The careful planner always comes up best, not forgetting you may occasionally meet and they're one in a hundred those people who don't even have to think very much. They just go straight through it all and they're very, very fluent. You more often than not you any of those people who after let's say 90 seconds one and a half minutes the worst kind of thing. They look at the last point and they say explain how you felt

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about it as if they're reading it for the first time. That is oh dear me. It's something that happens to the very confident person who's pretty fluent, but they haven't really spent the time on the card.

Ben: Yeah, just like over confident and they just had a glance like I can do this and then just checking the card and they realize okay, spoke about that, spoke about that and then as you said oh, how did I feel about that? Well, let me tell you... yeah, yeah. It's pure preparation, isn't it? That's what it comes to.

Robert: Basically-- absolutely, absolutely, absolutely.

Ben: Okay. Just to go back about the fillers, about using them with caution. I remember teaching a student the typical fillers like oh, that's an interesting question. I haven't thought about that before. And just as a joke, I would be like okay, use these with caution. For example, if the

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teacher asks you what your name is, you don't say oh, that's an interesting question. I haven't heard about that before. To be honest, as far as I can recall, I think... It's going to come across as slightly weird to say that.

Robert: Exactly. Exactly.

Ben: Okay. All right. So, we've got-- is there anything else that you would like to mention about this before we wrap it up?

Robert: I don't know. Obviously, we could spend a month talking here about all the little details of the grammatical side, the vocabulary side. Maybe that would be worth looking at in more detail and going over that when we talk about Part 3 at a later date. I don't know. Perhaps the grammatical structures, the vocabulary items; how do we acquire them, what's the best way to get hold of the right expressions that we feel most comfortable with. There are all kinds of ways

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of doing it. I think within the idea that I thought of today you're just running through the general stuff, the amazing importance of those cue cards. And they're available everywhere. On the site there are lots of them. You keep posting updates of different cards. They're so important. They really are.

Ben: Yeah. Well, just two things I'd like to mention is that one, you said the grammatical structures for these I think that could be an episode in itself and the vocabulary for these cue cards as well. That could definitely be another episode. So, listeners keep your ears open. We'll probably be publishing something like that shortly.

And there's just one last thing that I'd like to mention which I think you wrote down, Rob which was you've got four sections in this cue card and a rough guide is 30 seconds each which I think is an excellent observation there.

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Robert: It is rough. It does come to a numbers game because certainly an examiner like it or not-- and sometimes they don't like it. They can't handle it very well without a lot of practice-- it is a numbers game. You've got that short space of time to say something. We're dominated by time here and it's the only way otherwise scenes could go on and on forever or because it wouldn't be fair on different candidates. So, it's got to be standardized, but that's it.

You've got the two minutes. It seems like an eternity, but as soon as the examiner will saybecause the examiner in fact has-- as soon as Part 1 finishes, the examiner should jot down on a little piece of paper in front of him or her the time. Let's say that Part 1 finished after five minutes and two seconds, what I used to do was to write down immediately nine minutes two seconds. That means I've got exactly four minutes to do Part 2. That includes me talking as well, me introducing it because I'm going to say and take maybe 20 seconds, 25 seconds max to give

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you the topic and the card and it begins when I say now, in this part of the test I'm going to give you a topic and I would like you to talk about it for one to two minutes.

Oh. By the way, I'd like to mention that when the examiner says for one to two minutes, it's notit is two minutes. There was talk years ago by the examiners in their groups and I was part of that once and we said why can't we change that to just say and I'm going to ask you to talk about it for two minutes. And the supervisor said we've tried that, but in the University of Cambridge whatever the Soros he said no, keep it like that.

Ben: Wow! Interesting.

Robert: Madness, madness.

Ben: Literally, yes, it's leading.

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Robert: It is ridiculous, but it is two minutes. It's never one minute. If people tell you it's less than two minutes, they're not telling you the truth. It is two minutes. So, then you've got one minute to prepare. So, let's say you after one and a half minutes-- sorry-- after 30 seconds you get your card and your topic, you've got a minute to prepare. So, we're now into 1 minute and 30 seconds of our four minutes. You've got two minutes to talk. At the end of the two minutes, the examiner will say thank you. Can I have the booklet back, please and the pencil and the piece of paper. They take that back. That's another three or four seconds and then the examiner will have maybe 20 seconds left and there's a follow-up question. There are always two follow-up questions on the booklet. It might be a simple thing. It might be something completely trivial. You've been talking, pouring your heart out to me about your girlfriend having a baby and going there and you wanted to film the echo, all very romantic and all, very nice lovely story then I say to you something really stupid like and do you always carry your mobile phone with you?

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Ben: Got you. Okay, okay, but you're going from a script.

Robert: I can't go off script. I don't have any control. I don't have any control.

Ben: It could just seem a little bit out of context for the student.

Robert: It does, but I fill up that time and I only want a short answer for you and some people think hey, this is my chance to finish off my story that I was talking about and they go back to that story. Yeah because remember I was telling you about the time when... and in the end after the four minutes is up, you just say thank you.

Ben: Right. A very English way of saying stop talking. We've finished. We're moving on to the next one and it's amazing like we don't say thank you. We're moving on. We just say thank you. That's it.

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Robert: Thank you. Thank you. It's the falling intonation. Thank you often with a hand gesture; open palm face off. Thank you.

Ben: Wow! It's madness. And to all the students listening, of course that means we've finished and we're moving on to the next section and you cannot talk anymore because thank you is what you say when you've received something. So, it makes complete sense.

Robert: It does. It can be funny.

Ben: Yeah, absolutely. Okay. We're going to have to finish there. Thank you very much, Rob. It's another fantastic tutorial and remember IELTS students, if you're struggling with the IELTS exam then please get in contact. You can join our email newsletter at ieltspodcast.com. And remember we've also got the essay correction service also at ieltspodcast.com and the online

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[Music]

Ben: Don't go away just yet. I want to say another thank you to our lovely sponsor ELSA Speak. ELSA Speak is a pronunciation app that helps you improve not only your pronunciation, your intonation, your sentence stress, your accuracy and you can get a special discount if you go to ieltspodcast.com/elsa.

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