



Ben: Hello there IELTS students. In this tutorial, Robert Buckinghamshire and myself Ben Worthington are going to tell you what to do to get a band 7 or higher for the IELTS speaking. In this tutorial, it's going to be mainly about vocabulary and then next week, we're going to look at one all about the grammar for a band 7 in the speaking.

But before we start, I want to just say a big thank you to our sponsor ELSA. ELSA is the pronunciation app that you can install on your iPhone or your android and with this app what you can do is you can get pronunciation feedback instantly.

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So, without further ado, let's get started with today's tutorial. So, Robert as your time as an examiner, what can you tell us about vocabulary for the IELTS speaking test?

Robert: Okay. So, hey. How are you, Ben? Good to talk to you.

Ben: All good, thank you. All good. Sorry, I was a bit hasty today. I know. I'm all right, thanks.



Robert: It's because Christmas is coming. We're all in a rush. We're all in a rush. That ELSA sounds really-- I thought you were talking about some actress or somebody called Elsa. Who is this Elsa? No, no, no, no. It sounds very interesting.

Ben: There is a cartoon actress called Elsa. I think she did *Frozen*.

Robert: Okay.

Ben: And I think if anybody's got a kid, they'll probably be more than knowledgeable about Elsa. I just googled Elsa and that cartoon came up and I said okay wrong search results. Keep searching.

Robert: It sounds great actually because it all ties into what we're talking about today I think about vocabulary because let's face it. When we study another language if it's English or if it's us



trying to get by in another language whatever that might be, we can always recognize an awful lot of words with a lot of exposure to that language.

And obviously, even in our own language, we always understand a lot more than we actually use. We recognize a lot of stuff; words we would never use in context, but when we're talking about this exam, it's an exam, isn't it? And we've got to find ways to get around it and get through it and get a good grade in it.

So, we've got to be practical. We've got to be pragmatic. What will get me a 7 or higher than a 7? And looking at it from the other point of view as I always try to, what is the examiner looking for? He's got his-- he or she has got his descriptors and if we look through the descriptors for the lexical resource band as it's called, two or three things really stand out.



The first thing is okay, the topic itself. Now, that is not necessarily random because we know more or less the breadth of all the possible topics that may come up in general terms, but we never know exactly what's going to come up when we're in that exam room. So, what it really means when we're talking about topic is are you really able to talk about both familiar topics and also what they're calling unfamiliar topics; things that you don't know very much about? Is your vocabulary wide enough to discuss any of that wide range of topics that may come up in the exam and talk about these things with a certain degree of confidence?

That means that you hardly make any errors when you're using your vocabulary. Well, let's discuss what that means in a second, but then if you can do those things, we're talking about at least a 7 or even an 8.

The other thing that the examiner is looking for and this is very odd when we think about it really is your ability to use what they call less common vocabulary and idiomatic expressions



and also of course to use what we call collocations correctly; those words that always go together. Your classic example is the make and do, isn't it? You make trouble, but you do your best. You do your work, but you make a cup of tea.

What's the difference? Well, because that's the way it is we say. Don't ask too many questions. Just learn it and get on with it. It's either make or do. So, you've got to know which words combine with other words. So--

Ben: Yeah and I'll just-- sorry to just interrupt. Personally, I'm a massive fan of collocations because they came up. If I remember correctly-- just to slip on in there an expression-- if I remember correctly, you speak Spanish as well, don't you? Is that right?

Robert: That's right. That's right. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes.



Ben: And like I guess when you were learning Spanish if you're anything like me, I learned a few just to kind of like make it look as though I'd learned certain tenses.

Robert: Yes.

Ben: And if I, for example [*Spanish term* 00:06:38.20] to use the subjunctive like that, I didn't really grasp it, but I knew if I could use that phrase I could pass as though I knew it and it ultimately I thought raised my like ability or at least it sounded as though I knew it even though I didn't know all the ins and outs, but I could get away with coming off as though I knew it.

And I think another good thing about the collocations is that because they come together and you use them together, you start speaking a little bit faster and you start sounding a little bit more like coherent and more fluent because they're all one after the other. And I think it's like a real quick and easy way to boost and-- yeah. Do you use them when you [*Spanish* 00:07:25.18]?



Robert: [*Spanish* 00:07:30.23]. I find it was all at first a question of picking up a lot of phrases, picking up the combinations of words and feeding them back and testing it out. And with things like the subjunctive, oh that's a headache, isn't it? I've never--

Ben: Oh, yes.

Robert: I admit it I'm lazy. I've never actually sat down and studied any of that stuff. I just got by listening in the street and picking it up like that and working it out and saying oh yeah, that's the way you do that. That's the way you get around things by saying that. That's the way that people use it here. Okay. That's fine. That's fine. So, that's going to get me through. That will get me through.

To some extent, it's a question of of course the width of your vocabulary; how wide your vocabulary is and also with these collocations and the idioms as you were saying, it makes you



sound more natural. It makes you sound a bit like a native speaker even if people know that you're not. And that tells us a little bit about the depths of your language.

The other thing I'd like to mention of course about the exam is that it's impossible to be able to talk about everything under the sun. There's going to be times when we don't know the words for it. I remember once so many years ago when I first came here and tried to speak in Spanish. I wanted to buy something for shaving; a razor, not an electric one. They don't work with me, but just a wet razor, rinse it with soap and stuff. And I learned the word to shave which was [*Spanish term* 00:09:30.18] and so I said to this guy that I met. I said [*Spanish* 00:09:35.20].

Ben: Oh, what sorry?

Robert: A razor. A machine to shave and he said that's the way we use it here. [*Spanish* 00:09:49.29]. Oh, wow! Okay. I guessed it and got it right.



Ben: Yeah. It's funny how like certain words-- when you're learning the language and you learn a certain word and sometimes if you're lucky, it comes with a whole story behind it like how you actually learnt it. I remember playing football-- sorry. We're going off on a tangent here, but don't worry. We're going to get back straight on to IELTS in a second.

I remember when I was playing football and the ball just-- we was five aside and the ball just flew past me and then went out and then I shouted across the whole pitch. I was like-- what was it now? [*Spanish* 00:10:37.13] I wanted to say--

Robert: It didn't touch me.

Ben: But I ended up shouting out to everybody around saying I don't touch myself. So, I totally knew like-- now I know I could say it better and I could say without having little innuendos, but



because of that incident, that embarrassment, I now know and it's stuck in my brain and I'm never going to make that mistake again.

Robert: But of course it's what-- I think the word they use so often and it's hard to say what it really means is paraphrasing, isn't it? How can you say something in other words? I can describe what I'm looking for, I describe what I want, but I don't know the exact word for it, but I want to explain it. And that's the other thing that the examiner is looking out for.

So, it's three things really. Can you talk about topics? Is your vocabulary wide enough to be able to discuss things? Do you know any particular vocabulary, any less common vocabulary, and particularly idiomatic things? I don't know.

I've got the feeling you can get away with a lot in another language even if your grammar is a bit shaky, if it's not perfect, but I think the two things that stand out for most native speakers when



they listen to other people speaking their languages the pronunciation and intonation as well as the combinations of words. People are going to say what did you say? That's not the way we say it. We say... Oh. The grammar as long as it's understandable, we can get away with it to a certain extent. To a certain extent.

Let's think back about the exam itself and all those topics that might come up. There is such a variety of possible topics, but being positive of course, we know what to expect. They're well known. Is it going to be in the field of education or is it going to be something to do with technology or to do with leadership or whatever it's going to be.

Even on a lot of places; on the IELTS Podcast website as you know there's a lot of information about that. Just check it out all of you and see the list of possible topics and also on the website there are useful expressions to use for each one. Knowing these topics can take us all over the place. Well, I think these days we can't really complain or can we because there's too much out



there, isn't there? You've got online sources, you've got newspapers, you've got magazines, you've got stuff which might be very serious and academic to stuff that might be not so serious, you've got videos, you've got YouTube videos. We're never more than just a click or two away from vocabulary and we can take it and learn from ourselves.

Apart from all those, sometimes when I look at more traditional sources like English language teaching courses with textbooks and stuff, they're fine. They're good. They're very professional. They're well done. But sometimes, you think it's not what I'm looking for. If my student really wants to be able to participate in meetings at work, I'm going to look for something else. Perhaps there's a website professional stuff giving tips on how to participate in a meeting and often you get it. It seems things even in the publishing world of English language books they look out of date after a few years because we often change the expressions. Things are changing so fast.



Ben: Yeah. This is such a good point, Rob. This is what I always did with my students as well. There's like okay, fair enough. We've got textbooks. It's better than nothing, but if you really want to take it to the next level, you look for the same material that the English speakers are going to be using.

And like you just said, fair enough. We could possibly extract a little bit of vocabulary about how to conduct a meeting, but if we find a website or a YouTube video that's designed literally for native English speakers, we're going to be able to extract so much more and it's going to be incredibly more realistic and practical.

And also because of that and because it's probably from an industry source rather than going through a teacher, because it's direct from the industry source, we're going to get a wealth of



vocabulary terms. And even then, it's up to you as the student to extract like oh, okay. That's a useful phrasal verb. Oh, that's a beautiful collocation. I'm going to lift that directly.

And just one other thing while we're on the topic of topics, I would also suggest that a student find their own blind spots. So, I know that a lot of students might struggle with finance and marketing vocabulary. So, if I was that kind of student, I'd start going to financialtimes.com or Dow Jones and start just reading the Business Press.

Or likewise if I had a weakness about education vocabulary, you can easily find a wealth of information online and just go into that topic. Go deep as you mentioned. Go deep on that topic for a week or two and make some lists. Get that vocabulary in context I think as you were about to say and then start incorporating it into your own active vocabulary.



Robert: Well said. Yes. I couldn't agree with you more, Ben. Actually, that's very well said. Very well said. I like that. I like that because that's what we're aiming at. I tell you what would get me in the exam and I shouldn't because I have worked quite a bit with kind of scientifically inclined students over the years, but perhaps because I got an overdose of it, those topics related to the environment.

I know it's with us. I know I follow it to some extent. I followed what was going on in Glasgow. I'm a big fan of [unintelligible 00:17:00.00]. I think she's the best thing since Coca-Cola, but at the same time I turn myself off when it gets into all those scientific expressions to some extent. That would get me.

If I had to worry about a topic that I wasn't too sure of, that topic I think comes up in Part 2 and then leads on to Part 3. Something like describe an environmental problem your country or your city is facing or something like that. Okay. Fine. All right. Part 3 would obviously lead into



naturally some kind of discussion about the environment and issues related to it in general and I just said it's not something that really excites me. It's not something that I generally talk about from day to day. I listen and read about it, but I wouldn't actually be opening conversations about it.

So, I've got to get familiar first maybe with the basic stuff. If I'm trying to start almost from the beginning there, I might go to one of these excellent online dictionaries there are these days. I'm not going to drop any names, just I would advise anybody to look into Google online dictionaries the best ones and you'll get five or six. Some are British, some American. I'm not going to say you should go for one or the other. Try both.

They're wonderful things because they give you information about the word: what part of speech is it; is it an adjective, an adverb, or whatever, how it's used-- real use from real sources. They give you examples and you've got to work on those things noting their grammar, how they relate



to each other and then looking at the context, words that are similar or opposite to it, synonyms etc. And then the collocations. You're going to get that in the dictionary anyway and through your reading and listening. And also idiomatic expressions.

I did a bit of stuff on this the other day just to be honest to prepare for this chat with you, Ben actually and this is what I came up with. It didn't take me that long actually. Okay, I took a few shortcuts, but this is what I've got and I want to share it with everybody.

So, I started out with the online dictionary and of course it gave me the basic stuff. It gave me-- let me check it here. I've got it noted down somewhere here. Here we go. Okay. Environment which is a noun, environmental the adjective, environmentally the adverb, and the big word here very abstract word environmentalism-- which I had to say it twice before I could pronounce it myself-- environmentalism.



And then I checked out through the dictionary and through reading a couple of things common collocations that go with those three words; adjectives that go with them. Adjectives with nouns, for example. There are loads of them. I found about 25. Healthy environment, hostile environment, a challenging environment, diverse environment, urban environment.

I could go on forever. It didn't take me long. I found at least 25. It's not that difficult to find them. A lot of them of course are related to topics that may not be directly related to the environment as such rather the environment in a different sense almost psychological. The environment in the office or in the classroom, a good working environment, or whatever it might be. We could use the word environment in so many different contexts maybe.

Okay. That's my direct route; the dictionary route. It's quick, but also of course as we're saying, there's also that kind of steady build up from reading, listening, watching, taking notes. You've got to be all eyes. You've got to be as they say sometimes in this country you've got to be like a



fly. You've got to be mosca. You've got to have eyes in the back of your head and pick everything up that's around. You've got to absorb a lot of stuff. And you-- yeah. Sorry, Ben. Yeah.

Ben: I was just going to say I like that idea of going to the dictionary and then you've got it all there. It's in perfect English and sometimes they'll have the phonetic alphabet next to it so you can have a guess at how it's pronounced. You can always use an app as we mentioned at the beginning to get the pronunciation correct, but if you're going to a dictionary as Rob just mentioned, you can make your own list and then this is what sort of like-- it's one step better than just sitting there in front of YouTube and absorbing the information which is better than nothing, but if you're with the dictionary, you're writing it down. Hopefully, you're checking the pronunciation. You're making your list and then looking for opportunities exactly like Rob said of how you could use it.



And just going back to that first question of describe an environmental problem your city or country is facing, and environment is a very common topic, not just in the speaking but also for the writing questions probably and also for the reading ones.

Robert: Absolutely.

Ben: So, it's not a bad idea at all just to sort of like go deep on this and then as you start getting further away from the topic of climate change like okay, we've got the collocation hostile environment. When could I use that? Probably use that-- if I'm talking about my work which is again as we've discussed in previous podcasts that's also a common topic. So, you can start looking for like dual uses of different ways you can use the words you've used.

And then also just one last tip before I hand it back to Rob, when you do get these words, try and incorporate them into your active vocabulary as soon as possible because the sooner they're in



there, then the more likely it is that you're going to remember them. And as we were saying, I think you were going to mention like a load of verbs around the topic of environment.

Robert: Exactly. Exactly. Well you really hit the truth there. You know, Ben, it's an old story, but years and years ago when I began teaching people were saying with vocabulary you've got to see it, revisit it again and as teachers, we know we've got to come back to that vocabulary because what I taught today you're going to forget tomorrow. You've got to read over. You've got to work at it.

Yeah, the verbs. I made a list. It's amazing. Actually, verbs that collocate with environment: threaten-- let's be negative-- threaten the environment, damage, endanger, destroy. And let's be a bit positive now: save, conserve, protect, or even a little bit wider than that because let's build it up from there. Take steps to measure or take measures to protect or conserve. So, I'm thinking okay, can I think of an example there? Ah. The government should take direct measures to



protect the environment because... and then wow! Something a bit more. And as you say, wonderful because we're going to be reading it very often in the reading test, writing about it possibly in Task 2 of the writing part and speaking about it as well. Obviously, not all three at the same time. That would be magic, wouldn't it? How was the exam? Great. I got environment three times. Impossible. That would be out of the question, right? Or would it? I don't know. I don't know. It would be interesting.

Ben: Just to interrupt again, I just want to highlight what Robert did there when he was just giving the list. He thought of an example of how he could use that phrase and he came up with the government is taking steps to protect the environment. And that is straightforward, but doing that is just like another little activity you could do and then you want to get feedback as to if that sentence you said is right, but just applying it to your hometown, to your situation and then it just gets you closer to being able to talk about that specific topic if you did do it.



And likewise, you can do this not only with environment, but for example crime. You look up a load of verbs related to crime and then write out sentences or say them about crime in your city or in your country. And if you don't know, if your mind goes blank, that's perfect because now you've got a kick up the bum so to speak. Now you've got initiative to go and research about crime in your country.

And as we've been saying, it's just a few clicks away and you've got the answers and especially if you're finding authentic native English speaking material talking about your country. Then it's even better because you're further away from the textbooks.

And it's not just verbs. We could do this with nouns: the species, habitat, ecosystem--

Robert: Exactly.



Ben: --and adjectives and noun combinations as well. I like that. Could you give us a few examples?

Robert: Well, you've got things like-- oh, you mentioned species and habitat. Okay. Endangered species, natural habitat and maybe even we got a verb and then a noun-phrase after. We have to take steps to save critically endangered species. Build it up. Make it as complicated as you can because that is the way that English works and the way that we work when we're thinking of describing these things.

But it's just the start. We could go on to the old favorites: global warming, climate change and stuff like that and again those same verbs are going to come up, aren't they? And others too. How do we fight it? How do we tackle these serious issues? And as well as the things about our time. Do you recycle? What are you doing for the environment? Do you reduce, recycle, reuse, etc.? And we're talking about things like renewable energy, sustainable growth. These combinations of



words are so common these days that we're calling them-- that's what a collocation is. A very high probability that two or more words will go together. That's all it is.

Ben: Exactly.

Robert: And an example-- oh, yeah. We've got quite a few examples we could think of it. I wrote a sentence here. In my country, there are some NGOs that are trying to tackle the negative impact of global warming on the ecosystem. For example, one group of people are planting trees or whatever it might be. Don't forget the idiomatic stuff. Examiners love that. I don't know why. Things like hey, how green are you? Go green. How are you trying to reduce your carbon footprint? Do we really talk like that and some people do I guess.

Ben: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, but this reminds me it's like fair enough. It's not everyday speech where we talk like this, but if you think about it as a job interview, you're in that position to impress. So,



we've got to pull out the best words that we can and that we know confidently how to use. And don't be afraid of using these. Like Robert said, this is what the examiner just loves. You can give them these, but accurately. You don't want to be talking about-- if you get a question about crime and you're talking about the carbon footprint of criminals, that's probably not the best way. So, remember do use them in the context.

Robert: That's right. That's right.

Ben: Okay. So, anything else before we finish there, Rob?

Robert: No. I think that's it. I'd like to just go over again what you said. I think it's so important. What's good for speaking will also be good for all parts of the test; the reading and the writing. In particular writing perhaps. You have to be a bit more formal in the writing when you're trying to write these beautifully constructed sentences, but it's time very well spent working on



vocabulary. It really is the key to everything in my opinion, much more than even the grammatical side in my particular opinion.

Ben: Yeah, yeah. Absolutely. And I think as well I may have mentioned this in the past, but it's like one of those quick win you can get by boosting your vocabulary because as we said, it spills over into the other areas and so you get the same amount of improvement by working on your grammar or your pronunciation is probably going to take a little bit longer than if you work on your vocabulary.

And I think in the future, we'll probably look at different methods for acquiring this vocabulary. We've touched on a few, but just to give you a few from the top of my head which I'm actually using now to learn Hungarian. I'm just using a ton of flashcards and I've got the most random vocabulary ever in Hungarian and it's not so practical at the moment. However, it's kind of like just the building blocks because I know from being a language professional that this is where I'm



going to get the quick wins and the best use of my time especially when I'm starting out and then next time when I hear a sentence, I can maybe pick out a few terms and I get the idea whereas if I did a couple of hours studying the grammar, it's going to take you forever to understand if I obviously don't know the words.

Robert: Hungarian's very difficult to learn I say. It's very difficult complex--

Ben: Oh my word. And you know what as well, Rob? When I told my friends that I was learning Hungarian they all just cracked up. That wasn't a joke. I'm seriously learning Hungary and then they're like ah, okay. Sorry. All right. Good luck. We'll see. We'll see. I'll keep you updated.

Robert: [unintelligible 00:31:48.03] I don't know.



Ben: Yeah. Yeah. Just one last thing. I made goulash the other week and my girlfriend she's Hungarian. She's like oh, what did you make? I was like goulash and she's like really? Really? This is goulash? And I was like okay.

Robert: You opened a tin.

Ben: Okay. So, is there anything else you want to--

Robert: No.

Ben: --before we finish?

Robert: That's fine. I think that's great. That's great.

Ben: Super. All right then. As you know, we're coming to an end. Thank you very much for listening and I just want to say another word for our sponsor where with this app as we



mentioned throughout the podcast, when you're learning new vocabulary, it's also good to get some feedback on the pronunciation and especially if it's new vocabulary because you don't want to guess how it's pronounced and then spend the rest of your life pronouncing it incorrectly. So, it's worth just to take a few seconds, a few minutes, maybe just get that pronunciation. Get it right first time and then avoid those fossilized errors.

And ELSA app is elsaspeak.com where you can download the app. That's a great app to help with your pronunciation. And as I said, if you go to ieltspodcast.com/elsa, you can get the pro pack for a year for \$27 or you can get the pro pack for a lifetime for \$75 dollars and the \$75 one is an 85% discount.

And just one last thing. If you are struggling with the IELTS exam, please get in contact. We can help you. Every week we are helping students pass the exam. We've got success stories of students who've been using our course who've been getting feedback, improving their essays and



we've got courses for your writing score to jump to a band 7 or it's free. That's the course Alexis is on at the moment and his essays are improving every single day. It's a lovely site. And we've also got the Speaking Confidence course. So, if you go to ieltspodcast.com, you can view them all there. So, thank you very much for listening and good luck.

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