



**Ben:** Hello there, IELTS students. In this tutorial, Robert and myself-- that's Robert Buckinghamshire, a former IELTS examiner. How are you doing, Robert?

**Robert:** I'm fine. I'm fine. How are you, Ben?

**Ben:** Super. I'm doing great, thank you. And me, Ben Worthington, I'm an IELTS tutor. I've been teaching IELTS for a very long time. I started off with just Standard English, but I wanted to specialize. I like getting results, so I started this podcast and this is how I managed to train myself for preparing students.

I interview experts about the IELTS exam and then I use this advice with my students and eventually, I was throwing out what wasn't working, keeping what was working and this is how we got the great course Jump to Band 7 or It's Free and that's to help you with your writing and



that comes with essay correction. So, it's a very practical, very pragmatic way to improve your grade quickly.

And just before we jump into this week's tutorial, I want to say a quick word from our sponsor that's [elsaspeak.com](https://elsaspeak.com). With ELSA, you can get some immediate feedback on your pronunciation. You can watch tutorials on how to pronounce it. And it's not just the sound. The tutorials show you where you should put your tongue in your mouth. It is incredibly detailed and it's just a great way to improve your pronunciation, your fluency, and learn correctly the first time when you're learning new vocabulary.

And if you go to [ieltspodcast.com/elsa](https://ieltspodcast.com/elsa) that's e-l-s-a, you can get 40% discount on the pro pack. So, it ends up at \$27 and that includes the dictionary, the lessons, and the live feedback feature as



well. Or you can get the pro pack for \$75 which represents a massive 85% discount and that's for the lifetime access.

So, let's jump into today's tutorial. What is today's tutorial about, Robert?

**Robert:** Grammar I think. We're looking at particularly Part 3 the speaking test and how important grammar is.

**Ben:** Super, super. All right. So, how would we start if we want to improve our grammar?

**Robert:** Well again, what do we need to get a high band score, a 7 or above in the grammar? When you think about it, it looks a bit simpler than anything else, doesn't it? Because grammar appears to be from the outside something that's pretty well established. You get it right or you don't get it right. It's something hit and miss as it were, but at the same time, the examiner is listening out I think for two things.



From the point of view of complexity, how complex are your grammatical structures and we have to think what that really means and also how you manage to mix in a natural way simple sentences or simple constructions with more complex ones and how well you do it, how accurately you do it. We're thinking of accuracy here. Is it right or is it wrong?

Now, although as we know the exam is not a punishment. People don't take points away from you for making mistakes, but do they? Perhaps in terms of the grammar part here, there isn't an argument we could say well, it depends how many errors or how many mistakes you make. Nobody is expecting perfection, of course not. You may occasionally get someone who is so good probably better than the examiner anyway and they get a 9 because they're really bilingual in the true sense of the word.

Of course a few errors, a few little mistakes perhaps those associated with your first language and they've become kind of fossilized in your own speech, but errors that don't make



understanding you at all difficult. You still get your points across very easily. You make sense. You're going to get a 7 or even in the best case an 8, but if you make fairly frequent mistakes particularly with more complex structures, then probably we're looking at a 6.

If occasionally the examiner is thinking as an experienced teacher I understand what this person is saying, but thinking of an ordinary native speaker who is not a professional language teacher, would they have any difficulties understanding this person? And that is a criterion. When it goes down to a 5, you're thinking yeah, this person makes so many mistakes really that understanding is kind of-- it breaks down occasionally. If I were an ordinary native speaker I'd have to say sorry, can you say that again? I didn't quite catch what you really meant. Are you saying...?

So, what does all this mean? We're talking about how accurate you are, how good you are at getting it right and also the complexity, the range of it. Let's look at the accuracy first.



**Ben:** Yeah. Actually Rob, just before we jump in, I want to just rewind to a point that you mentioned at the beginning where you said a mix of simple sentences with a more complex one. That really stuck out for me because this is exactly what we teach with the writing course because we get essays and the students have just absolutely rammed it with long complex sentences that are incredibly difficult to wade through.

And they're surprised when I tutor them and I say look, the occasional complex sentence is excellent, but we want to break it up with a mix, exactly like you said for the speaking. We want a couple of short sentences and then a few medium length sentences and then the occasional complex one when it's necessary.

It's just refreshing to hear it because this is exactly what I teach with the writing. So, it's just another example of one of those skills that you gain in one area and you can carry over into the



other area and probably without even noticing it. Once you get a good grip of it, it's just going to flow over naturally. So, I thought that's an excellent point there.

**Robert:** But it's the same in our native language. All right. You ask me a question and I need a little time to think about it and I might begin by saying to you well, it depends what you mean. It depends what you mean it's a pretty simple sentence. And then I might go into a much more complex one afterwards.

It depends what you mean, Ben. If we were looking, for example, a case where a student was talking about I'm rambling on a bit and I'm getting into the middle of a pretty complex thought, but of course thoughts and language are not necessarily the same thing. Sentences do not go on and on. I think English also has tended in the last few generations thankfully to simplify itself in



in terms of making yourself understood, getting the message across, not going around the houses talking about everything in one sentence. That's out of the question.

**Ben:** Yeah. This is so true and it's surprising like a few other languages don't appear to have undergone this kind of like modernization where the communication is the objective, not the actual style. And I think Spanish and Hungarian because I know these languages, I think they are prime candidates for being modernized, says the non-native speaker of those languages.

**Robert:** But you're quite right.

**Ben:** Yeah, but just to cut to the chase, just to get to the point in other languages, the flowery expressions are expected whereas in English not so much. The objective in English is the communication. And don't get me wrong. We're not going to do our essay in bullet points which



would probably be the most efficient way to communicate, but we're still going to include some stylistic elements, but it's a balance between being understood and showing your skill.

**Robert:** That's true. Yeah, yeah. Bullet points will get you an automatic 5 without reading it and that's in the writing part. Oh, he used bullet points. Sorry. I can't give this person more than 5, but in the speaking particularly in Part 3 of course, the discussion goes every which way. You may have to describe something or to compare the past and the present, make a list or compare advantages and disadvantages and to speculate, hypothesize about different things, make predictions and so on.

So, as I go through that simple list of things we do with language, each one became more complex from the language point of view. We need more complicated language to hypothesize



than we would do simply to describe something I guess in terms of the structures, not necessarily the vocabulary.

First and foremost, get the basics right. There's nothing better than getting the-- the first thing an examiner will say oh my God! Pretty uncertain use or not very good distinction between let's say those old favorites; the present perfect and the simple past. Those old labels that we teachers love. You used go in the wrong sense or I have seen him three weeks ago. Oh, wait a minute. No, no. That's wrong. Oh my God! Oh my God! Oh God! Simple things.

Once you get those sorted out; the verb tenses, the simple present and the simple past, the simple past and on the present perfect, the continuous tenses-- what are you doing these days and what do you do these days-- those kind of apparently simple things that we have to get sorted out.



And also all that nonsense about the future. There are good arguments for saying that the future in English doesn't exist grammatically. We've got will is more used to make predictions rather than talk about the future, but we use-- what are you doing tomorrow? Oh, going to the beach. Oh, yes, yes, but next week I'm going to stay here because I have to work at the weekend. Okay. So, going to or just using a simple continuous tense to talk about the near future and something.

All students, please get that basic stuff sorted out. You're not expected to be perfect. The occasional little error would be noticed, but not taken against you as it were. It might make a difference let's say between a 7 and an 8, but it's not going to get you further down than that, but a lot more frequent mistakes on the basics is going to get you down to a 6 or 5 and that's what we're not looking for.

**Ben:** Right. Right. So, just to summarize, I know from tutoring quite a few students that a lot of students are not interested in the basics because they've read the band descriptors and they're like



ah, okay. I need to learn how to describe. I need to compare the past and the present. I need to compare advantages and speculate and hypothesize and make predictions.

It's all well and good, but unless the foundations are solid, you're building on shaky ground and it's probably going to make it more difficult to be understood if you're making predictions and your tenses are not under control. So, excellent advice there. Excellent advice.

**Robert:** So, what about the more complex stuff? You've got to get these in. Use all opportunities going back to what we talked the other day about vocabulary. Find those opportunities within a topic to say something a little bit more complex. Get it done beforehand. Rehearse it. Practice it. Try the cue cards. Work on it. Play it. Record it. Share it around with professionals and also with other students taking the test. Get confident in it.



Let's take the conditional stuff. That's an easy one because we love teaching it and we try to make it simple. There are three types of conditional sentences. Oh, God. How many times you do that, but this is the hypothetical stuff. I got an extreme example. It's the third conditional. We cannot change the past. How I'm very sorry, but we say things like-- well, I'm getting back to the same topic.

The other day we talked about environment and climate change. It seems good just carry on that topic, that theme. If the impact of climate change had been recognized years ago, then perhaps we wouldn't be where we are today. We wouldn't have had all these terrible issues that we have seen in the last 10 or 15, 20 years and I think if older generations had taken more care of the planet when they were younger, then the situation today would be very different, in my opinion.

**Ben:** Wonderful.



**Robert:** I'm going on a bit there, but you see how it goes. I tried to mix up there that idea of what we call the if with the past perfect and then is it reflected today. So, it would be or wouldn't be today or I'm referring entirely to the past-- it wouldn't have been, it could have been different, but it isn't. We didn't do it.

**Ben:** Yeah, yeah. That's a beautiful sentence because you're not only like hypothesizing, but you've got the different changes in the tenses and the speculation there. So students, if I were you, I would write down that sentence because I think it's one of those sentences that you could probably adapt to other topics.

So, let's just go. If the impact of climate change had been recognized years ago... So, if the impact of criminal re-education had been recognized years ago, then perhaps we wouldn't be where we are today.



**Robert:** We were in prison.

**Ben:** Perhaps we wouldn't be in prison today. I just want to mention the tip there that once you've learned a phrase like that, then you can interchange the vocabulary where it's appropriate and you can use that phrase then for different topics, not only in the speaking like we said but in the writing as well.

And it's little steps like these, little activities that just stack the deck in your favor so that you're going to work out with the band 7.

**Robert:** Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. I just saw the one for technology. If the internet had not been adapted for public use-- because I believe it was originally for military use-- then our world today would be completely different. Can you imagine a world without internet?

**Ben:** Beautiful.



**Robert:** Again, that's another common topic, isn't it? The other thing and I think it's fascinating. It's one of my-- particularly for me particularly interesting area what we call modality. Modal verbs, that fixed set of you can, can't, should, shall, will, would, may, might; that kind of stuff. And we teach them, we try to learn them.

English is a bit subtle, isn't it, in some ways. I'm comparing it a little bit to Spanish. When you compare let's say can and may in the two languages because in Spanish they translate this as one verb usually, but of course, can is just something which is true. It's potentially true whereas may is a well, maybe true, maybe not. It's a possibility.

Don't forget the polite English person if you invite them to a party. If you say hey, you're coming to the party tomorrow? Oh, I may do. That means no. Beware of the Englishman. They're not going to tell you the truth, are they? They're going to say well, maybe. They usually mean no.



**Ben:** This is so true. This is so true. Like I've gotten myself into such situations where I thought it was a clear no and the person was still waiting for an answer and in my mind it was a clear no. But then when I sort of like reviewed it afterwards and I looked at the words I used, if you take it literally, then there's still a possibility that I might go ahead. What I ended up saying was like yeah, I'll get in contact if we go forward with this. That in my mind was a clear no.

**Robert:** Exactly.

**Ben:** But then I met the guy in the elevator and he's looking at me and I'm like hi and he's like well? Well?

**Robert:** I've got my contract here. Are you going to sign it?

**Ben:** That's a good point. Don't take an Englishman on his word literally. Only literally. Yeah, that's a better way of saying it.



**Robert:** And I think with all that stuff as well, once we get around all those verbs, it's those things that are kind of sometimes described as semi-modal expressions. All right. I did something which was difficult in the past. It took me a long time to do it. How do I say that? And a lot of students would say oh, I did the homework. Yeah, I could do it. And what do you mean you could do it? Well, it was difficult, but I could do it. I think no. What you want to say is I managed to do it.

What's the difference? Well, we use that if we're saying something was pretty tough, but we did it in the end in spite of all the hang-ups. And those are well worth looking at. I've got an example here talking about climate change and stuff and it's quite a long sentence, but it begins like this.



Well, believe it or not, in fact it's the United States of all countries that has managed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions the most over the last decade, but then again, of course some states in the United States haven't been able to do as well as other ones; the oil states I suppose.

So, I've got two things there. In a positive sense, I'm using managed to, has managed to. I did it although it was difficult. If I'm using it in a negative sense, I'm probably going to say I haven't been able to which again has all kinds of interpretations what it really means. Did you do it? No, I couldn't do it. I wasn't able to do it. Sorry. It could mean I didn't have time or I was out drinking beers or whatever. It could be an excuse.

Those kind of things I think are often missed by teaching books and also in English courses, but I think it's a pretty important area of English that way in which we talk about whether something is true or not or whether we are capable of doing something or not. Some of it is straightforward. I



could swim when I was four or I could speak French when I was three or something like that, but that's-- both of those were lies, by the way.

I would advise anybody to just get into some grammar books or look it up online again at those modal expressions. There's some good stuff around to check around.

**Ben:** Yeah. Definitely. And it's just one of those things like another feather in your bow so we say. It's like another little thing that's going to increase the chances of you passing. And also while you're reviewing these, I would recommend go deep on it. Master it. Because mastering a whole area like modal verbs is incredibly more powerful than half learning the tenses, half learning the modals, half learning hypothesizing. Just go deep on it. Master it and then move on to the next one.



And it goes back to what we were saying. It's like solid foundation especially with the basics which include the modal verbs. Go deep on those and then build up from there.

And I think that's about it for this week. Next week, we're going to have a quick look at passive voice structures, we're going to look at relative clauses, and the what why or how phrases, but that's it for today.

And remember if you are struggling with the speaking, you can have a look at our IELTS Speaking Confidence course. We're getting some great results with the students who are currently on that course and that comes with some feedback as well where you're sending your recording.

And also if you are still struggling with your speaking, then you might want to look at our sponsor's site and if you follow the link I'm going to give you [ieltspodcast.com/elsa](https://ieltspodcast.com/elsa), there you



can get 40% discount off the pro pack. So, instead of \$45, you'll end up paying \$27 and that'll give you access to the pro pack with over 3,000 lessons, the instant feedback, the whole level assessment so you know where you're going, you know if you're improving or not and likewise. Or you could buy the pro pack for usually \$495, but with the 85% discount available with the link I just mentioned it comes out at \$74.

So, a big thank you for listening and remember if you're struggling, just go visit [ieltspodcast.com](http://ieltspodcast.com). There's a whole team there waiting to help you and this is what we love doing. So, get in contact and we can help you pass the IELTS exam. Take care.

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