



Ben: Hello there IELTS students. In this tutorial, we're going to have a look at the speaking test and this is going to be incredibly useful because we're going to look at really in detail what the examiner wants from you, the exact types of questions. And to help us through this, we have Rob, an ex-IELTS examiner. How are you doing today, Rob?

Robert: I'm fine, Ben. I'm fine. And you, everything okay?

Ben: Excellent. Everything's all good here apart from the weather. If the weather is the biggest of my complaints then I think I should be grateful.

Robert: I think so. I think so. Yeah.

Ben: All right. So, Robert could you start us off with today's tutorial, please?



Robert: Of course, yeah. We've been talking a few times, haven't we, about the IELTS speaking test and of course it's a difficult one, isn't it? There's no one way. There's no magic wand that we can wave. There's no magic solution to how to prepare for the IELTS speaking test. A lot of people recommend those cue cards. You've got a lot of them on the website, haven't you, at the IELTS Podcast. They're very useful I think especially for Part 2 and also a lot of people talk about going through those model answers that you get in so many places these days. Yes, why not? Why not? Although it's somebody else's answer. It's not yours. It'll give you a few ideas I guess of course. On the other end, other people get into this idea and we'd all agree with that that you've got to find out as much as possible through reading, videos, or whatever pleases you about as many of those IELTS topics as you can. But let's face it. There's an awful lot of topics and what I've noticed recently-- well, in my last days there as an IELTS examiner was how varied they're getting and how personal they're getting. There was one I remember you look at it



you think what are they talking about? What is this topic? It's not recognizable. Describe the time when you saw a lot of people smiling.

Ben: Oh my word. Oh my word. That's harsh.

Robert: What's that all about? I think I'm going to come back to that today. I got a few ideas on that because what it is about is not necessarily about smiling, but about-- well, it is in a way about showing your feelings.

Ben: Right.

Robert: Wow! It's it kind of-- but it's a strange one. It's not easily identifiable. It's not education. It's not environment. It's not technology. It's not-- well, I don't know. It's not any of those things.

Ben: I'm just trying to rack my brains now. The last time I saw so many people smiling, the best I can do was like at a family event for somebody's birthday because everybody was all focused



on one person and of course, because they're giving gifts the people are smiling, but that took like a few seconds to pull together just to try-- it's not a natural thing, is it?

Robert: Not at all. Not at all. Not at all, but on the other hand, there's another way we could look at this. I think we were talking a while back about this. We were both saying that IELTS questions are following some kind of guidelines. Remember everybody people forget this IELTS is asking you or wanting to find out what you do with the language. And of course, the language is always going to be the same in a sense. The topics are different, but the structure of the questions and the structure if you like of your answers is going to be very, very similar. It's only the content-- that's easy to say; it's only... Don't worry. It's just the content that's different. It's like saying in a history exam, don't worry. It's all the same. They may ask you a question about the Middle Ages and it might be about the 20th Century. Don't worry. What!



Ben: It's only going to be something in the past. Don't worry.

Robert: Exactly. Exactly. Well, let's take a couple of examples, simple ones. Let's keep it pretty simple so we can get into the complications later on, whatever. Okay. Remember we were talking about in Part 3 you get three possible sets of questions and set one are kind of simple ways into discussing things. They're asking you maybe to classify, identify, compare. Let's think of a very simple example. I got three topics here. Each one is a describe thing for Part 2. These are Part 2 topics. Describe a singer whose music you particularly admire or it may be a similar one to that describe a song that you particularly like. So, that's a music topic. Another topic. Oh, I like this one actually. I don't remember seeing this for a long time. I remember a couple of years ago when I was still examining describe a rule that you didn't like when you were at school. That's a nice one, isn't it? Schools have rules. So, you can see which way that's going. We're talking about how important rules and regulations are at school and maybe I don't know in the



workplace or in society in general. I don't know. And another one. This is more of the personal stuff, how you deal with life. Describe a time when you made an important decision. Oh, my God.

Ben: That's a toughie.

Robert: Toughie, isn't it? So, what are we getting into there? All right. If we looked at part of set one questions, the questions are going to be very similar. It might be something like this. What kinds of... We're asking you to identify, describe, classify. It could be like this. What kinds of music do young people in your country listen to? What kinds of rules do most schools in your country have? What kinds of decisions do young people usually have to make? Wow! So, obviously in each case the topic is going to vary, but at the same time we've got that what kinds of. All I'm asking you is to get into describing something, classifying something. Also notice it is very classic IELTS, isn't it? Because that young people stuff because yeah IELTS-- let's face it,



IELTS is an exam not necessarily for, but to a large extent with a population in mind as the test takers they're going to be in their early, mid, perhaps late 20s, ambitious young people hoping to change, get on, do postgraduate courses or whatever.

Ben: Absolutely, yeah. The demographic for my site is I think between 21 to 34. That's the common age group for IELTS test takers.

Robert: Exactly. Obviously, in these cases even though you might young people? What's that supposed to mean? Are you talking about teenagers, school-aged kids, young-- who knows? I got two or three possible answers there, but of course these are not model answers, just things I thought of, but look at the way of course I'm trying to get into describing things and introducing. Try to always introduce your topic. Don't go straight into the answer. What kind of music do



young people in your country listen to? They prefer pop music from the United States and local jazz bands that are very popular. Oh God.

Ben: Exactly. Like the examiner asks what kinds of music do young people in your country listen to and the student rap, hip-hop, heavy metal, and German bass. And just sits there. And it is an answer, but as you said it totally ignores the whole introduction, the classifying, the describing, the-- and what was the other one-- identifying, classifying, and comparing. You've missed all of that.

Robert: And make it a little bit different and give your examiner a chance to open their eyes and ears think oh, this candidate's a nice person. They talk in an interesting way. These are just examples. Music. Okay. Well, I'm not absolutely certain because I'm no longer a youngster, but I guess they listen to what's popular these days. Pop music especially from the U.S., the United States. I guess traditional local music is probably a minority taste at least in the big cities. I don't



know outside like in the countryside. I guess youngsters still follow the old traditions. So, I'm trying to also-- of course, it doesn't matter what topic it is. You get those little expressions: a minority taste, I'm no longer a youngster, you know those words to give the examiner the impression oh wow! That's very colloquial. That's good. And of course with the schools, what do you mean by schools? Listen to my answer. It gets a bit of a trouble because I think in many countries when we talk about public schools they mean schools run by the government and we know the British have that weird system they refer to. Public schools are in fact those horrible exclusive private schools. I think I'm taking public school--

Ben: You didn't go to a public school, obviously.

Robert: So, here's my answer to the schools about the rules. Well, it depends if we're talking about private or public schools. Private schools are usually run by religious organizations in this country, so their rules are very strict: dress code, discipline, and all kinds of regulations about



what you can bring with you to school like smartphones and tablets etc. and I guess no earrings, no piercings, no tattoos. On the other hand, public schools tend to be a bit different, a bit more liberal. Now, as a classic example, I'm trying to show there obviously the comparisons. Get into those on the other hand and tend to be kind of stuff. You're weighing things up and it all depends if we're talking about this or that private or public schools. And give examples. Occasionally you're going to list things; smartphones and tablets and also the-- what do they call it these days-- the body art: no piercings, no earrings, no whatever. And maybe for girls you have to tie your hair back or whatever those rules and regulations might be and the horrible uniforms, of course.

Ben: and I'll just say for the listeners, while you're listening to these model answers, you will see that a lot of them do-- maybe it's in a different order, but there is identification in there like whether it's the type of pop music or the type of school or the type of rule and there's some



classification in there like is it a strict rule, is it because of the discipline there, and then there's the comparison: on the other hand which you can also say whereas. There's lots of variations there available. There's those three and they're in the model answers. You just got to listen out for them and I think once you start identifying them-- well, first of all, hopefully you're aware of them now because you've heard them, but also in the next answers as well. They're not going to be strictly in every single answer, but there will be an effort to basically satisfy the examiner because that's what they're wanting with these describe questions especially where it's like what type of or what kind of.

Robert: I would say to everybody listening, all you test takers out there, think of that question. What kind of, what type of, identify, describe, compare. Think of a typical IELTS topic. What kind of questions could they ask about it on those lines? Make it up yourself. Start off with one if you like. Do it at home. Do it at home and get your answers in to us. What questions did you



even think of? Maybe you could start a competition, Ben. Answer question of the month that came in. This is a great question. Look at this one. It could be interesting.

Ben: Yeah. Absolutely, absolutely. We already get a ton of questions every single week from students who have taken the test and like oh, I got this question. I got this question. And we do do model answers every now and again, but think of your own answers as well and this will help you get into the mind of the examiner.

Robert: Yeah, because if you know what questions they're going to be asked more or less then we can work on the answers so much more easily. What about decisions; what kind of decisions do young people have to make? What kind of things could you say there? What's it going to be? Deciding what you're going to study.

Ben: Yeah, career.



Robert: Career, even personal things. Deciding-- oh I don't know.

Ben: Where you might live or when to go out.

Robert: Where you might live. Yeah, even things like learning how to drive or are you going to buy a motorcycle or whatnot. I don't know. I can't remember what it was like to be such a young person. Those horrible questions that you have to start thinking about

Ben: That's true. So, we've got like-- I agree. Making up your own Part 3 questions and just try and follow that structure with what type, what kind of and then as I said, I'll just say it again; identify, classify, and compare. And in our Speaking Confidence course, we go over answering exactly those types of questions like model answers and structures to help you improve. And there's another type of question, isn't there, which seem a little bit more demanding.



Robert: Exactly. Remember what we were saying, weren't we, that the questions do get more demanding as we go through that Part 3 of the speaking test. For example, in set two or maybe even it would come at the end in set three that more complex compare and contrast. What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of...? That's another classic question. You see that almost all the time in every IELTS topic. Okay. Let's take this. I've got one or two different topics here. For example-- how about this one? Describe your-- this is Part 2, of course. Part 2 question. Describe your favorite famous person. Oh my God. Your favorite famous person. Even this weird one. Describe a trip you would like to take. I've seen that one years ago with quite an interesting one. Describe a trip that you would like to take either by motorcycle or by car. Wow! Remember the one about the decision making. How about this one? Describe a time you helped someone. Again, you're thinking where are these things going? Wow!



Ben: These ones are quite tough. Describe a time when you helped someone. And I could imagine being in the exam and the only thing that comes into mind is just one incident maybe where I just handed somebody the glove that they dropped and how can you build that into a story? I saw somebody drop a glove and I went and picked-- I told them and I picked them up.

Robert: Because you're a gentleman. You're a gentleman, Ben then you've got the whole story about the age of chivalry is not dead.

Ben: Yeah, but with a little bit of imagination, I could probably embellish it and it's like oh, she turned around and she was so surprised and I probably made her day... but it takes a little bit of effort just to expand it.

Robert: Exactly, exactly. Although of course where these things are going in the end in Part 3 and you think of course that's what that question was all about. I tell you about that one. The



describe a time you help someone gets in the Part 3 discussions about team work that in our 21st Century world we're supposed to be all team players. Working in a team is so important. So, students work in groups. When you get a job and into your career path, you're supposed to be a good team player. Wow! It's an interesting thing because then people have always got an experience or a thing or two to tell us about when they had to work in a team. People who work very hard on a team or is a lazy person in the team or somebody dominates the team and it also leads on to things in the same context about do we need leaders? If we're going to have a team, does there have to be a team leader? What characteristics does a team leader have? That's where it goes. The same thing with the describing a trip. It seems so innocent, but of course it goes on to talk about tourism. And the being famous as well. I tell you what the disadvantages and advantage questions would look like. It would be something like what are some of the advantages and disadvantages of being famous?



And the same thing. What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of living in a popular tourist center? If you think about it, if you live there and you make your business out of tourism, congratulations. If you live there and you don't make your business out of tourism, you suffer.

Ben: This is so true. Absolutely. Ask the Catalans in Barcelona.

Robert: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Ben: But what I wanted to ask you, Robert, when a student is answering these, can they be as spontaneous as sort of like saying two pluses-- sort of like going through the two benefits and then a disadvantage comes into the mind and then they go back to the benefits and then another two benefits and then a disadvantage. It does not have to be like I'll tell you about all the benefits



then I'll tell you about all the disadvantages and then I'll finish with the conclusion. It can't be that structured. No.

Robert: No. Not at all and of course obviously on many occasions, a person will come up with either a disadvantage or a disadvantage the first thing that comes in their heads. What are the advantages and disadvantages of being famous? First thing that comes into my head well, I guess the downside would be you don't have a private life and give the example. Take the example of-- I think I remember reading about Apollo John Lennon. He was happy when he lived in New York although I know he got killed there, but he was happy in New York because he could walk down the street and nobody cared. He could have a private life there, but whereas in London or in Liverpool, his life was not his own. So, I think that's one of the main disadvantages. And maybe then I dry up and the examiner should look at me and say something quietly like and the advantages? Oh, yeah well, I guess being famous is-- yeah, it does bring its advantages. You can



live out your dream. You can travel anywhere you like first class and the doors open for you. Oh, I don't know. Personally, I see more disadvantages than advantages. Here for example, I've got at its best, this is your golden opportunity to show how you can use connectors, discourse markers to show contrast. For example, I'm thinking of the one about advantages and disadvantages of working in a team. Look at this answer. It's a bit it-- I worked on it a little bit so it sounds a bit too model for a model answer, not so spontaneous maybe, but listen. Well, they say that two heads are better than one, don't they and so teamwork can be very productive because we can help each other and even better learn from each other. Maybe you can divide up the tasks between each group member or if one person knows a lot about something, he or she can share that knowledge with the rest. On the other hand, one drawback is when one or more team members don't want to work and everything is left to the others. I had an experience like that. Now maybe when I say I had an experience like that, I remember when I was working two years ago in a company and we were working on a project. Then the examiner is thinking uh-oh,



uh-oh, he's talking about himself. I've got to get him out of that and you get interrupted. Please don't worry. Remember that in Part 3 avoid if you can going on. A little mention. I remember when that and that happened to me. No real problem, but if it's more than five seconds talking about yourself, seriously, the examiner has to interrupt you.

Ben: How will they interrupt you?

Robert: As nicely as possible I think. Usually, they try to find a key to get it more general. Let's say all right. I remember a time when I was working in the company and we were given this project and they put me in charge of the project and I found that all my other team members were so lazy at that time that they gave me... It might be a simple way. Does that happen to a lot of people do you think?

Ben: Right and then bring it back into the general away from the personal.



Robert: Away from the personal.

Ben: Yeah. Okay.

Robert: So, it's not easy, but again, looking back at that model I gave, I've got on the other hand and also those magic words. Don't always say advantage, disadvantage. What are the pluses? One of the negative things, one of the drawbacks, one of the main benefits; look at your synonyms. Use different vocabulary. That's all going to be plus points for your benefit in your final score.

Ben: Absolutely and you've got the good use of the contrast there as well; on the other hand.

Robert: Exactly.



Ben: Excellent. And I think we've just got one last point before we finish, right? About the other topics.

Robert: Yes. I think that-- get into them again. Look at the other topics I've mentioned, things like the being famous: advantages and disadvantage of being famous, living in a popular tourist center. Other things too. It could be technology: advantages and disadvantages of using mobile phones, using technology in the classroom or things like that. Look at everything from two points of view.

Ben: Yeah this is great advice and it's quite an easy mental exercise to do. Like okay, if I was a teacher, how would I feel about the technology? If I was a student, how would I feel about it? If I was famous, how would I feel about it? If I weren't famous, how would I feel about it? Absolutely.



Robert: It goes with any-- give me a topic and I can think of it. Film industry: what are the advantages and disadvantages of a country having its own film industry? On the plus side, of course, a country can portray itself and project itself, its image. It will be good for other things too like tourism. On the downside, well there may be countries that the only films they bank are about violent things, so it gives the impression to other countries that oh, my God. I'm not going to go to visit that place. It must be a terrible place.

Ben: It's true. It's true actually. The city of God I think comes to mind.

Robert: Wonderful film, a wonderful film. Absolutely.

Ben: Okay. So, just before we finish, I just want to mention that this skill of looking at things different points of view is not only going to help you with your speaking especially for the advantages and disadvantages questions, but it's also going to help you for the writing because



this is quite a common question structure as well the advantages and disadvantages. So, just before we finish, two things I want to mention. One is just a quick summary. So, in this tutorial, we looked at the types of questions you're going to get in Part 3 and they're often about identifying or they often ask you to identify, classify, or compare and we're looking at different types. And if you go back to the beginning of this recording, you can hear the model answers and you'll be able to hear Robert give his answers where they do naturally include these structures of identifying, classifying, and definitely comparing. And the last thing I want to mention before we finish is that if you are struggling with the IELTS exam, then please get in contact. It doesn't matter if it's the reading, if it's the speaking, or if it's the listening or if it's the writing. For the writing, we've got the Jump to Band 7 or It's Free online course and we are getting some great results from there. Pablo is doing-- if you're listening Pablo, well done with your essays. Those are absolutely fantastic and it's great to see the improvement and see you use that structure we've been talking about. And also for the speaking, if you're struggling with the speaking, the



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