



Robert: Hello there, IELTS students. In this tutorial, we've got Robert Buckinghamshire, an ex-IELTS examiner and myself Ben Worthington and we're going to talk about Speaking Part 2 the cue cards. We're going to give you some advice on what to do and how to tackle this and a lot of this advice comes from Robert, the ex-IELTS examiner and I will be contributing also and we're going to be-- let's see-- my advice is similar to the stuff that we have in the online course, the Speaking Confidence Course.

So, if you are struggling with the IELTS exam, then please get in contact and we can help you and we can give you the skills you need in order to pass this exam.

So, how are you doing today, Robert? How's it all going?

Robert: Very well, very well, very well indeed. Very well, very well. And you? How's yourself?

Ben: Not too bad. Recovering from COVID, still got a bit of a chesty cough, but we're getting there slowly but surely. The family is recovering too so--



Robert: That's good.

Ben: Yeah, yeah, yeah, exactly. Okay. So, we're going to be-- is it a nightmare we're talking about today? Nightmares, no?

Robert: I don't know if any of you out there are big horror film fans, but yes, yes. I'm going to talk about nightmares. Nightmares. Okay. Don't get frightened. Don't get frightened. I'm here to help. I hope I'm here to help anyway, but look at the title of what I prepared today. It's this. How not to have a Speaking Part 2 nightmare. How to get out of that worst fear you may have.

Okay. Listen to this. Listen to this. You've just finished Part 1 of the speaking test. The first five minutes have gone pretty well. You talked about your job and then answered some questions about the first school you went to and then about barbecues. Hmm, a slightly strange topic as you don't eat meat that often, but you're feeling confident. All smiles so far. Yeah, it's been paying off. Good for you. Good for you.



On to Part 2. You're hoping the topic is going to be one that you like. The voice from the other side of the table is saying here's your topic. Please don't write anything on the booklet. Your eyes glance down at the words on the page in front of you. It says describe a puzzle that you solved (for example, jigsaw, crossword). You should say what the puzzle was, how long it took you to solve it, how easy or difficult it was, and explain how you felt about it.

You begin to feel a bit dizzy. Your head is spinning. The examiner is looking at his stopwatch. The seconds of your one minute preparation time I ticking away. 60, 59, 58, 57, 56... Wake up, wake up. It was just a dream, a bad dream. Your real exam is next week. But you can't get that puzzle out of your head. You keep wondering why you panicked when you read the topic.

Actually, you know the answer to that one. You never enjoyed doing puzzles and you probably never will. It's not as if you know nothing about some different kinds of puzzles. Hey, remember all those jigsaw puzzles they gave you when you were a little kid? A 500 piece of some obscure



castle somewhere in the middle of Europe and that 1,000 piece puzzle with all those strange exotic birds. Remember that one? And that one took about two weeks to finish.

In fact, you didn't even notice in the topic heading that it had after jigsaw in that parenthesis and etc. etc. It's a jigsaw, crosswords, etc. Hey, what am I trying to say here? What am I trying to get across to you all here? Well, a few things really.

The first is read every word of the question carefully. Look at that little etc. For example, it means exactly what it says. There are all sorts of puzzles from the famous-- what do they call it-- Rubik's cube to puzzles in mathematics or language that have puzzled people for ages. So, you didn't have to restrict yourself to jigsaws or crosswords. You could have chosen a computer game, to take the most obvious example. I know a lot of you out there probably are fans of computer games. Why not?



And there's something else, the second point. Just remember those four bullet points that accompany every Part 2 statement. They always follow a predictable pattern. Look at it again. Look at it again. Listen again to the one which goes from the puzzle one. It goes from what to how long and from there to how easy or difficult before ending up with the common last question which almost always is to ask you to explain how you felt about whatever; the situation, the event, whatever it was.

So, that sequence is often this: what or where, when, why, how you felt type. A simple example would be-- take this recent one. I found a bit weird, but they chose it because it is strange.

Ben: Hang on, Robert. Sorry to interrupt. Just before we move on to the next one, I just wondering like I know you suggested perhaps a Rubik's cube you could talk about it. The etc., I was just wondering how far the etc. can be pushed in this case. So, it said like for example, a jigsaw, a crossword, etc.



Hypothetically speaking, if I started talking like well, I'm not a big fan of puzzles to be honest with you. However, my grandma's house was a massive puzzle to get into. She had these three locks on it and it was always such a challenge... And then I work through the bullet points and I'm like well, they had these three locks. The top one was a Yale lock. The bottom one was a bolt lock and it took me about 10 minutes every day to get into her house.

What's the deal there? What's the deal because personally I despise puzzles and my grandma's house was a puzzle?

Robert: Personally speaking, I would accept that one. I think when we extend it as far as we can go, your puzzles could be your grandma's house. It could be if you are a great student of mathematics some mathematical puzzle that has been talked about for two or three hundred years that nobody has solved or the puzzle of the meaning of the origin of the universe. You could extend it, right?



I think we draw a line when the candidate, the test taker asks if they can talk about something completely different. An example I remember when we did the training course many years ago, the trainer said look if for example you give them a topic which is describe a book you recently read or something like that and the person says well, I don't read books at all. Can I talk about a TV program? Then you are forced to say or to repeat.

This was the trainer's style which may not be my style. He said something like no. You just read it again. Describe a book that you have recently read. Oh, wow. Okay. So, you can do that.

Ben: Okay. Okay.

Robert: I think there's nothing wrong with extending it as far as you go because what is a puzzle? It could be a good detective story. A film could be working out a puzzle. Who done it? Who was the killer?



Ben: Right, right but I guess in those situations you really just have to emphasize. Like okay, I'm not a fan-- in this case, we go to detective show. Just say it is a puzzle because I was really struggling over it. You just got to like really emphasize it rather than just say I'm not going to talk about jigsaws because I don't like these kinds of puzzles, but I did see a great TV program once.

If you emphasize it and try and bring it back to the cue card, I guess that's the kind of leniency. It's testing it, but it's like on the edge I guess.

Robert: Exactly, exactly.

Ben: Right, right. Okay. Okay. All right. Thank you for that and just one more thing. I would only advise students to do this in dire consequences like if there is really-- in my case, I was just exaggerating. I don't have a problem with jigsaws or crosswords, but I know some students they



might actually like absolutely despise these kinds of jigsaws and crosswords and they're just in a desperate situation. They got to like extend it with a little bit of justification.

But otherwise if you can answer it, then yeah, just go ahead obviously. Just go straight forward. Okay. So, Robert, you were going to tell us about describing a crowded place. You were talking about strategy. Right.

Robert: It's something that came up recently actually. If I had that as a test, I wouldn't particularly like it very much particularly as I haven't really been in a crowded place for a long time. I don't think many of us have. Describe a crowded place that you have been to and the bullet points of where it was, when you went there, why you went there, and finally explain how you felt about being in this kind of place.

So, it's a classic where, when, why, and how you felt. It could be a football stadium, it could be a rock concert, it could be any kind of big massive event that all of us I hope have been to at least



once in our lives, but the sequence there is so simple, isn't it? It's inviting you to tell a story and like many of a good simple story tell it in a logical chronological order adding as you go along more personal details as your motives and impressions.

It starts from your simple narrative, verbs in the past tense or whatever. It gives you a base. In times of crisis you've got that base to depend on. I don't like the topic, but I'm going to follow the points. I can say something. Of course we can. Four bullet points taken one by one around 30 seconds each. We've got two minutes in total, right? Spend your one minute preparation time strictly following the four point sequence and making a few notes on each ones.

That guideline is really worth it. You'd be surprised at the number of test takers usually confident fluent speakers who've come up very well in Part 1 of the test and then read the topic, make very few or no notes in the one minute that you give them and they often ask before the time is up if they can start speaking, start their two-minute talk pretty well and then after about 90 seconds usually they got nothing more to say.



It's a bit of hesitation, a bit of repetition, a bit of well, as I told you before and it was... well, what else can I tell you? Do you want me to say anything else? It's a great pity because just by following that four bullet points and having the guideline in front of them anyway it can really help anyone. It can help us to overcome that not so pleasant topic that the examiner is giving you.

Ben: This is-- sorry just to do it together. This is just a great point and I've seen students do this and it's just like the curse of confidence. They like see it and they're like I could easily talk about it, but once you get started after-- exactly like you said after like 60, 90 seconds you start stumbling.

And I've done this personally before when I tried answering the cue card. I'm like ah, this would be a piece of cake. I'm a native English speaker and then I started digging into it and I was like actually, I am struggling here. I'm struggling. I've got to grasp, but if I had just spent that time



preparing, it would have been so much easier and it would have been so much more logical as well.

It's like I always remember a story a friend told me. It's just like yeah, I could tell you what it's like in my speedboat and you'd get a rough idea, but it would not compare at all to being actually in the speedboat going full pelt. And it's exactly the same. Like we could imagine what we're going to say, but until we get there, until we actually start, it's going to be an entirely different experience.

So, I think that's some solid advice there. Really take that time and really like brainstorm those bullet points. And this is exactly what we cover in the courses. Like we could give you a framework and we suggest you brainstorm ideas for these bullet points and then you can drop them into the framework for your speaking presentation. And it just makes it incredibly smoother and such an easier experience.



Robert: Exactly, exactly, exactly. And that's it. No panic. No panic. Forget that nightmare. That's my last point here, the point no. 3 obviously connected to the first two points I've been making. Never panic even if you really don't like the topic or know very little about it. I want to give you an example. Let me give you this example.

You probably might have guessed of course that the examiner decides what topics to give you in Parts 1 and 2 before you enter the room. You've got to plan it out. I remember as an examiner sometimes I'd do all of them before. I'd have 20 minutes before the exam started. I just select all the topics beforehand and sometimes if I was a bit pressed for time, I'd just do it one by one. I'd spend a good minute before calling the next person in deciding which topic to give them.

I've never met this person before and I probably would never meet the person again ever in my life. I had no idea who they were apart from their name and maybe their age by this. If the candidate is using a national ID number or ID card to verify their identification, I would know a high number meant it was a young person. A lower number meant it was a slightly older person.



That might influence me. I remember I was only ever influenced when I knew the person was under 18 because I was always told the next person is underage. Okay. It's a kid maybe in their last year of high school wanting to go to university in the UK or something. I would on purpose never choose a topic in Part 2 that had anything to do with work because they had no experience of work. It wouldn't be fair.

Ben: Yeah. Right, right.

Robert: What do you think about working in an international company? I don't know. I'm still in school. It was unfair. That was the only time I did take into consideration the age of the person. Okay. I'm going to give you an example from my own experience as an ex-examiner. When I was an examiner, I'd chosen for the candidate coming in a topic about sport. I think it read something like-- this was a few years ago-- something like this.



Describe the sport that you have watched on television that you would like to try. To be honest, I don't recall if it was exactly like that, but it was something like that anyway. I don't know if you would like to try or that you liked or...

Anyway, the guy came in. He was a male in his 30s I guess. In Part 1, honestly he was really, really good. I remember mentally noting down that he was definitely a strong candidate, a 7.5 for sure. Probably and possibly an 8 or even an 8.5. He was excellent if in parts 2 and 3 he continued to show off his strengths, his language skills. That's what I had in my mind in Part 1.

I gave him the topic. He looked at the topic. He muttered something about not liking sports and after a few seconds or so started making some notes. The minute was over and I asked him to speak and it was then for the next two minutes that he continued to show that he was an 8 by starting off commenting on the topic.



His lack of interest in sports in general and his avoidance of TV sports programs in particular. Obviously, I was thinking wow! What a strange guy. He doesn't like sports and after about 15 or 20 seconds of that came something like this. He said something like this. But recently by chance, I was watching a program on cable TV about drone racing which I quite enjoyed. Drone racing. What the hell? Drone racing.

He went on simply to explain what drone racing was, why he enjoyed watching it, and finally made the comment that although he would never like to take part in any kind of sport that involved physical activity or meant kicking a ball or whatever, he wouldn't mind taking part in drone racing as it involved not just the competitive element, but also the technical skill you would need to use the remote control to remove the drone through the air and so on.

I think I've seen it myself actually after that. There was some drone racing on TV. I watched it for a few minutes. It's quite exciting. There are like young guys in this dark room and they chase



each other with these remote controlled drones through spaces and through all kinds of-- like a puzzle again really. It's quite good. Why not? Sounds like fun.

But the lesson is he didn't panic. He simply found a suitable angle to the question like your grandmother's locks, prepared his answer, followed the bullet points and importantly-- very importantly perhaps added a short introduction to his two-minute talk. Although--

Ben: I was just going to say that's exactly what was on my mind. He kind of like prefaced what he was going to say and it was like so-- it was in context. They kind of like all linked together. If he had just said I dislike sports and I never play them... but he linked it. He bridged it over and he was like I'm not a massive fan, but I did enjoy this sport. With that bridge, I think it makes so much more sense.



Robert: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I like the way that people introduce it. It was short and to the point. This is not a topic I particularly like because blah blah blah, but here is something I can talk about and talk with confidence.

From my point of view, I'm always a little bit unsure or-- well, no. That's not the right word. Let's put it another way. Some test takers seem to give you some kind of memorized phrases at the beginning of their two minutes. You know the type. And there's nothing wrong with that to just paraphrase the question. Something like oh, you've asked me to describe a time when I solved the puzzle. Well, that's okay I guess and then get into it, please.

I often get oh God when people say things like this is a topic that has always interested me and I would like to thank you for choosing... Please don't thank me.

Ben: Yeah, I think that's a bit on the extreme, but I think maybe one or two phrase-- if you're a student who's very very nervous, I think these small memorized phrases could be useful. You



don't want to rely on them, but just a little phrase here and there or even just to get you started. Not as long as we just heard, but just a shorter one then it could help you boost your confidence.

But if you're using long ones and you're relying on them and you're building your talk around it, it can be-- yeah, I totally agree with you there, Robert. It could get a bit tiresome very much from the examiner's point of view.

Robert: Yeah, yeah. I used to switch off actually mentally when I heard this. Nothing wrong of course. Yes, quite right. A few introductory words to start off, but get to the point and tell your story. Make it interesting. Yes, occasionally we will have a topic which is tough. I know this is not really my type of thing, but well, let's give it a go.

And of course exams bring that out of us, don't we? It's like having a job interview. They're going to ask you some tricky questions, but somehow like a magician you pull that rabbit out of



the bag, out of a hat and you find something to say. It's there. We've got all the knowledge inside us, all those bits and pieces of things we can find to say in any emergency.

Ben: Exactly and I think it comes from like if you've thoroughly prepared and you know what you're expecting and as an examiner once said to me once she says like if you're aiming for a 7, make sure you're at a band 7.5 before you present for the exam and then you're coming down on it and it's just going to be so much more natural. It's so much easier for you.

Robert: Exactly. Aim higher than you need always. It doesn't matter if it's an exam for IELTS or any type of exam. You can have a bad day, a tricky question or something. Things do go wrong.

Ben: Exactly, yeah. Okay then. Well, I think that's it for today's tutorial. Thank you very much, Robert and if you're struggling with the speaking or with the writing, then please get in contact. We're getting a humongous amount of success for our students at the moment. They're all



progressing or getting those band 7s and settling in Australia, finding work in Canada or working in the UK and it's just great.

And I think soon, we'll be having some more success stories, some more interviews with some successful students. So, if you want to join us, if you want to be on the podcast, then join the course and when you get your band 7, we'd love to interview you. So, have a fantastic day and remember you can find out more at ieltspodcast.com. Thank you for listening.

[Music]

Female Speaker: Thanks for listening to ieltspodcast.com