



Meeting Examiner Requirements

Podcast Transcript

Welcome to The Strategy to IELTS Success! The bite-sized show that covers one topic, in-depth, each series. It is your complete IELTS preparation guide. The Strategy to IELTS Success brings the pieces together, so you don't have to!

Hello there. Welcome to a new episode of The Strategy to IELTS Success podcast. For those of you who don't know me, I am The IELTS Tutor from TheELTSTutor.com. I am a former IELTS examiner and qualified IELTS trainer and have been helping IELTS candidates around the world, face-to-face as well as online, get through all the challenges and issues related to the IELTS test. I am also the founder of theELTStutor.edublogs.org which is a blog that is all about tips and strategising for doing well in the IELTS test.

Today, we are going to talk about 5 of the Most Important Things that IELTS candidates should avoid doing in preparation for, as well as during the IELTS test itself.

Now, as many of you already know, the IELTS test is a high-stakes test so it's just common sense to anyone that they try to be as careful as they possibly can when it comes to preparing or performing well in the test. But sadly, what I'm about to tell you are considered reminders because I still see IELTS candidates committing these 5 mistakes so very often. Now, if you haven't been doing any of the points mentioned here, well done! However, if you are guilty of any, or all of these habits that I'm about to mention, then it's wise that you should make a change.

This is what today's episode is all about. I'm going to tell you the 5 important things that you need to be aware of and avoid when you are preparing yourself or sitting for the IELTS test.

Now, doing the IELTS test, or any test for that matter, requires not only careful strategising but also some form of discipline. And this is what you will need to have.

Number One: Avoid being late! Now, I think this is very very obvious. And yet, I still see candidates arriving fashionably late, thinking that they will get first priority when they arrive. Unfortunately, I have some sad news to tell you. You don't. You get treated the same as anybody else. Even if you are royalty or a million-dollar celebrity, you get to go to the back of the queue to respect the ones who actually take the trouble and make the effort to arrive early or on time. Now, let's be clear about this: sometimes things happen. You know, there will be unforeseen circumstances where you get stuck in a huge traffic jam or find that you have suddenly fallen ill and have to go get some medicine before coming to the test. These things happen. We understand. And I'm sure the test centre will excuse you for these and arrange for you to sit the test another day without you having to pay extra.

However, there is absolutely no excuse for test candidates to adopt a laid-back attitude when it comes to punctuality or have no valid reason for being late, apart from the obvious "uh... Sorry." I mean, would you be late as well for a job interview? Would you arrive well prepared or hot and flustered and too stressed to answer questions? You know, it's just the same with the IELTS test. Now, obviously candidates will not be assessed on punctuality but this can somehow create a domino effect. Now, what do I mean by a "domino effect"? It simply means that one little action that you do will have an impact on the rest of the things that you do. So, for example, if you arrive late, chances are that, not only will you perform very poorly because of the state of mind that you're in but you'll also have very little time left to do or finish the test properly.

This could mean a reduced band score for your Listening, Reading, or Writing section. Not so for the IELTS Speaking section. Now, if you do happen to arrive late for the interview, as I've mentioned earlier, you'll be put in the back of the queue to wait for your turn. In my experience of how this works in some centres is that if you're the 2nd candidate and you're not there when your name gets called out, your slot goes to the 3rd candidate, then comes the 4th candidate's turn, then the 5th, the 6th, and so on, until everyone else is done. So, you're basically in trouble if everyone else after you arrives on time and you don't get your turn until the 20th candidate has had his or her turn. So, congratulations!

Not to despair though, every centre works differently, but from what I've seen as an examiner who has had to accommodate latecomers, they usually get to the back of the queue. So, my advice is, be early, specifically one hour early at the test centre to allow for any unexpected emergencies. Because, it's just plain rude to keep anyone waiting. Perhaps not in your culture but no one's going to be impressed.

OK, so the 2nd thing here that IELTS candidates need to avoid is preparing for the test at the 11th hour, meaning at the very last minute. I keep seeing this happen more and more often, particularly with those who tend to be really confident at preparing for the tests themselves and then realising that they need help at the last minute. What can I tell you? I wish I could say, "OK, there's this 'smart pill' that you can buy online for a million dollars and when you take it, you'll be able to get a Band 9 for the IELTS test!" Of course there are some people who tend to work very well under pressure, myself included, but this in general, is not recommended. Like any musical audition, job interview, or any type of test where you will be assessed, it is often better to be organised and prepared in advance before the important day itself.

This means allowing yourself some time for proper training before the actual test. Last minute desperation will often lead to failure. And you certainly don't want that! IELTS candidates need to work for that result that they so desperately want. I mean, think about it. The test itself is quite expensive, to the point that some people say it's a scam or a rip-off but we'll get to those claims in another episode. Candidates pay about £150 for a test. Now if you fail to get the result you want, you'll have to pay another £150 for a 2nd attempt, and then another, and then another. I've even heard some candidates make a career out of this and have spent over £1000 doing the test more than 9 or 10 times!

Now, if you have that kind of money and time and energy to waste playing lottery games with the test, wouldn't it be a good idea to invest all this time, energy and effort in good proper training with the right teachers and spend money on it just one more time and then get on with your life? The longer you dwell on this, the more discouraged and bitter you will become as a candidate and test taker and you'll end up blaming the whole world but yourself for what went wrong! I'm sorry but the truth is, IELTS candidates need time to get themselves organised. Leaving things till the very end is never ever a good idea.

The 3rd mistake is leaving answer boxes blank in the IELTS Listening and Reading test. Definitely not a good idea. It's like telling the examiner, "OK, I give up. Just give me a zero". What a wasted opportunity! Instead of getting a guaranteed zero for that question, the least you could do is to try and make a guess. That way, you still have a probability of getting something right. OK. Let's try a little game here. For this, you'll need a pen and paper or whatever you could use to write something on. What I'd like you to do, is put a list of numbers 1 to 10 from the top to the bottom. So, you'd have

number one at the top, number 2 below it, then number 3, and 4 and so on. You'll have a list of 1 to 10. OK? Got it?

Step 2. I want you to write a letter ranging from A to D next to each number. You can repeat the letter if you want, for each number. So, let's say, you write C next to number one, or A next to number 2 or a D next to number 3 and an A again next to number four. OK? Got it? OK, I'll give you a few seconds to pick any letter you want, from A to D, and put one letter, next to each number. Pause this podcast if you need a bit more time.

OK? Done! All right. Now next, I'm going to read out a list of my letters and I want you to listen and compare my letter with yours. If your letter is the same as mine, give yourself one mark for this. Ready? Here goes: Number 1) B, Number 2) C, Number 3) C, Number 4) A, Number 5) D, Number 6) B, Number 7) C, Number 8) A, Number 9) D and Number 10) D. Would you like me to say that again? OK. One more time: Number 1) B, Number 2) C, Number 3) C, Number 4) A, Number 5) D, Number 6) B, Number 7) C, Number 8) A, Number 9) D and Number 10) D.

So, how many of your letters are the same as mine? If you have at least one correct answer, that would be much better than a zero, wouldn't it? If you've had nothing correct, then bad luck! The point of this mini exercise is to show you that a bit of guessing can go a long way if you make the effort of trying to guess your answer, rather than just giving up and leaving your answer box blank. So, try not to do this with your IELTS Listening and Reading test, OK?

The fourth thing that IELTS candidates need to avoid is focussing too much on vocabulary and grammar in writing and speaking. Now, quite often, when I do a short survey among my students, many say that they do get help with their IELTS preparations with these two

tests. And yet, when they sit for the test, nothing has improved with their band score, despite the good feedback they get from their teachers. Now, the question that IELTS candidates must ask themselves is: does the person checking my paper and speaking skills truly understand how I'm being assessed in the test? Unfortunately, the feedback that many of these students tend to get is focussed too much on the grammar and vocabulary criteria only. That's like wasting time on improving yourself for 50% of the criteria! What about Fluency? What about Pronunciation? These two criteria are commonly overlooked in favour of grammar and vocabulary because too many people get hung up on them or rely too much on them, thinking that if they do well here, they can get by in the test. No, absolutely not!

The IELTS candidate will do well if they score almost uniformly on each criterion. You need to reflect on how you come across to your examiner in terms of speed; on how often you correct yourself, on the frequency of your hesitations. Were there any long pauses in your interview? What about your pronunciation? Were you trying to imitate an accent so much that you end up sounding garbled, awkward and confusing your listener or examiner? And your writing? Did you use any paragraphs to divide your ideas or information? Are your supporting points related to your main ideas or were you just filling up space on paper? What about your answer as a whole? Did you actually address the task or did you misinterpret the question and start talking about something that seems to be related but which, in fact, has nothing whatsoever to do with the task?

All of these are important considerations! It won't make much of a difference if you happen to be a professional journalist who writes for an international newspaper or if you are used to doing a lot of presentations in your job. Despite your perfect grammar and extensive vocabulary, if you don't have paragraphs in your essay, you

will not get Band 5 for Organisation or better known as Coherence and Cohesion. If people are struggling to understand what you're saying or if you speak so slowly that your listener wants to shoot themselves, then you're not really doing a good job either in Pronunciation or Fluency. All of these form the other 50% of your overall writing and speaking scores. What I'm saying is, there's nothing wrong with getting feedback from anyone about your writing and speaking practice, but do make sure that all four criteria are being assessed properly because when you get that test report, they will not break down your scores for you. You'll have to get a professional to dissect that information equally on all the four skills.

And now we've come to the one last thing that IELTS candidates should be careful to avoid. And that is, memorising your answers. Do not, I repeat, do not commit answers to memory. For two reasons, firstly, rote learning is a waste of time. Why? Because reciting answers in the interview will only make your IELTS examiner believe that this is something that you have memorised for the sake of getting a high band score in the test. Let me give you an example. Why do you think examiners almost always do not give you much time to talk about your job or studies? A lot of candidates have attached themselves to this belief that they can get a higher score if they speak very well about what they do. Not true. OK? If your examiner suspects that you have prepared an answer, they will simply move on. I've quite often been asked this question by some of my students who were worried about why they were always cut off in the middle of their answers by the examiner, and then asked another question.

Again, two reasons: time keeping and memorising. It will be quite likely that your examiner has to quickly move on to another topic because of strict timekeeping, or simply because you were speaking too slowly, in which case, will lead to the earlier point about the examiner moving you on because they have to keep to time. Second

reason: they might suspect that you have prepared your answer and simply don't want to listen to that and move on to another question where your answer will appear honest. I usually tell my students that it's almost always the first case where examiners have to keep to time.

Now, the second reason why memorising answers is a waste of time is simply because of opportunity cost. You may have wasted valuable time concentrating on one particular topic or answer and then find that your questions will be about a completely unrelated topic! You start to panic, stutter, and don't know what to say next. There goes your Band 7 ... right down the toilet. In the speaking test, your examiner can either prepare the questions before you walk through that door and stick to those questions. Or ... when you walk in, they can take one look at you and change their minds and decide to switch one topic for another, depending on their mood. So you come in, all confident that you're going to be asked a question about holidays and tourism in Part 2 and 3 and then discover that your interviewer feels like asking you something about habits and addiction instead.

The same applies to the writing test. You've crammed your answers the night before because someone who'd done the test last week or a few days ago that they've been tested on parental roles in society, so you read up all you can about the topic and find that when you have your pencil ready, you are given a question on the importance of having a clean and attractive environment for studying at university. Wow. All that time and effort gone to waste. Remember, you're not playing the lottery to see whether you've struck that lucky number. The key is not only to work hard, but also work intelligently. And memorising answers is neither working hard or working intelligently.

So there you have it: The 5 Things that IELTS Candidates Should Avoid. I hope you have found the information in today's podcast helpful in knowing how to approach your IELTS preparations. Head on over to the TheIELTSTutor.com for a summary of the information of what was mentioned in today's episode. You can also download a transcript of today's episode to read. In the next one, we'll be looking at 20 Tips for IELTS Success so you won't want to miss that! If you have found today's podcast very helpful and would like to hear more, don't forget to subscribe to The Strategy to IELTS Success on iTunes and tell a friend about it. Thanks for listening!

