



The Strategy to **IELTS** *Success*

Podcast Transcript

Welcome to The Strategy to IELTS Success podcast! 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 TheIELTSTutor.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, to get through all the challenges and issues related to the IELTS test. I am also the founder of theIELTStutor.edublogs.org, which is a blog that is all about tips and strategising for doing well in the IELTS test.

In today's discussion, we'll be looking at 20 important tips that can help you, the IELTS candidate, perform better in the test. Let's start off first with Listening. Usually, at the beginning of the test, an example will be provided for you to understand how to approach the task and answer appropriately. Use this opportunity to familiarise yourself with what you'll need to do for the task that you're given, as well as familiarising yourself with the sounds, the situation and the speakers who are having a conversation or the person giving a lecture or instructions. This is important because you need to first understand the context, which will help you to answer the question easily. So, use the example to get yourself situated.

Secondly, you'll need to keep listening until the recording stops. At the same time, look at the questions where the part is being played. If you need to write some notes down, do so on the question paper for easy reference later but not on the answer sheet because you will need to keep that neat so that your marker can easily read your answers without all those cancellations and rubber marks where you've erased your notes. Scribble your notes down on the question paper but remember, all your papers will be collected at the end of the

test, so you won't have a copy of your notes to take with you and share with your IELTS friends, OK?

With Listening, you will find that there are often pauses between each section of the test. Use this time to prepare for the next few questions ahead. One of the most common mistakes that I've seen candidates do is look back at the answers they have written and try to recall from memory whether or not they've given the right ones. They erase their answers and re-write them. Please don't do this. You have no time to remember and correct. The silent gaps that you're given between different sections are there to prepare you for the next set of questions to come ahead. So, always look ahead. Do not look back. I repeat, do not look back. OK? Use this time to predict the information that you're expected to hear and try to see if a blank, for example, requires you to write a noun, a verb, a number, an adjective, and so on. Always, always predict your answers.

When you do your Listening test, try to answer the questions in the order that they appear on the question paper. Always remember that the answers appear in the same order as what you'll hear in the recording. If you skip an answer box and have found the answer to the next item, this obviously means that you have lost the opportunity to find the information that you've missed. Now, depending on your luck, sometimes the clue to an earlier answer or the answer itself may be repeated even after the next one has been given, so it's worth paying careful attention to the recording and not lose hope even if you feel that you've lost marks for missing crucial information. This is what I sometimes notice when IELTS candidates do their practice tests. I've seen some people toss their hands in the air to show that they've given up on the test. Now, this is entirely up to you. If you allow yourself to be stressed over ONE simple mark at the expense of maybe 2, 3, 5, or 7 marks that you'll miss later, then be prepared to pay again to sit for another IELTS test. It's a little like a hurdle race in the Olympic Games, there is

still a chance that you'll come out getting Gold or be at 1st place even if you've knocked down one or two hurdles along the way. You don't see Olympians giving up the race after they've knocked down one hurdle, do you? So, why should you in the IELTS test? It's a very silly thing to do!

Now, once you have finished listening to all sections of the test, you will be given 10 minutes to transfer all your answers to the answer sheet that's separate from the question paper. So, this is the time for you to look back at your answers and copy them very carefully onto the answer sheet. Pay attention to your spelling, hyphens or dashes, apostrophes, one-word or three-word answers, and so on. Make sure that your handwriting is clear enough for your marker to understand the difference between an 'l' and a 't', an 'a' or an 'e', an 'a' or an 'o', and so on. If you find that your handwriting is an issue, then write your answers in capital letters, you won't lose marks over writing in capitals. Also, be careful that you place each answer onto the correct question number. I've seen accidents where candidates have accidentally missed one box and incorrectly placed the following 7 answers in the wrong boxes! The sad part was, all his 7 answers were correct! Don't let this terrible experience be yours.

OK – We'll move on to Tip number 6, which involves the IELTS Academic Reading test. You can begin this test by quickly glancing at the passage that is given to you to see the kind of texts you'll have to deal with. Skim for the topic, the style, the source that each one is likely to come from, the purpose of the writer, for example, are they writing to explain how something works or to argue a point about something? In other words, is the passage factual and descriptive or does it present opinions and argument? What kind of reader is the writer writing for? All this can be done in a space of less than 2 minutes. So, skim all three passages in 2-3 minutes to answer these questions before you do the tasks.

Now, next tip. As you read, try not to understand the exact meaning of every word that you come across. Or every phrase that is unfamiliar to you. You really don't have time for that. Yet, I still see some students using a dictionary whenever they do a practice test in my classroom. Now, you've got to be realistic about this. Will you be allowed to refer to a dictionary when you enter the exam hall? Most likely not. So, by all means, use a dictionary when you need to look up something as you read for leisure or when you come across something interesting on TV and so on. But avoid doing this during practice tests. You will have to adopt different techniques to try and work out the meaning without using the good ol' mr. dictionary.

Basically, there are three practical ways to try to guess the meaning of something: firstly, think about what part of speech the word is. How does it fit in the context of the sentence? Is it an adjective, a verb, a noun? Secondly, look at how the word is formed. Is it a combination of two words, or a compound noun, for example, the word *echolocation*. So, if you read a sentence that says "Whales and dolphins use sound in two ways: for communication and for echolocation." The word *echolocation* itself is a combination of the word *echo* and *location* and so from the word *echo*, which means sound that bounces off a surface and *location*, meaning, a place or position, we can deduce that from this context, whales and dolphins use sound to communicate as well as produce or create sounds that echo (or are heard again) to perhaps find or locate their way in the dark using these echoes. And the final strategy is to look at how the word is used in context. Look at the text that comes before and after the word. Sometimes, an explanation is given through the use of examples. For instance, in the sentence "Sound is an efficient way to transmit information. If humans shout to someone, it is unlikely that blah blah blah". So, if you didn't understand the word "transmit", the next sentence "If humans shout to someone" you could somehow guess that this is another word for sending out messages. Of course, it's not necessary to understand all the

words in a passage but you do need to recognise which words are important because they give you key information.

Moving on. Tip number 8. Sometimes, reading tasks have an example answer. If this is the case, study it and try to decide why the answer is correct.

Now, in some cases, reading tasks may require you to use words from the passage in the answer, while in others, you'll have to use your own words. You can find this quite commonly in short-answer questions. For example, "Answer these questions with words from the text, using no more than three words for each answer." From the text. It doesn't get any clearer than this. So, there is absolutely no excuse for you not to follow this instruction. And then you have the sentence-completion task types. Complete these sentences with words from the text, using no more than three words for each answer. And don't forget the summary-completion tasks: Complete the summary below. Choose no more than two words from the text for each answer. All of them, asking candidates to answer or complete "with words from the text." So, check the instructions carefully and use your own words **AT YOUR OWN RISK!**

(Psycho sound effect)

Tip number 10. Just like the instructions that tell you to use the words from the text, there will be instructions to let you know how many words you'll need to provide. Again, with short answer questions: "Answer these questions with words from the text, using no more than three words for each answer." They're not asking you to write four words or five. The instructions are clear: use no more than 3 words. Which means that you are allowed to use a maximum of up to 3 words for your answer. The same for sentence-completion tasks: using no more than three words for each answer. Or completing a summary: Choose no more than two words from the text for each answer.

So, if you've overlooked these important instructions during the test, that would be at least one or two marks, or depending on how many answers you've given, gone. Just gone. Even if your answers are correct. If that's the case, what a shame.

OK – Let's move on to Academic Writing. In writing for the Academic test, candidates must always keep to the topic set. What I mean is, if you're given a topic to talk about the number of students who take various types of transport to go to school, then stick to this topic. Avoid making too many general references like, there is an increasing trend in the graph or the trend reaches a plateau without referring to what these lines or trends mean. The same for Task 2. If you're asked to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of living in the city, then do so by linking it back to the task in the question paper. Do not try to prepare sections of the text before the exam itself.

I'll give you an example where candidates have made mistakes with this. This is taken from the Cambridge Practice Tests for IELTS series from volume 11, test number 2. OK – Listen to the question. "Some people claim that not enough of the waste from homes is recycled. They say that the only way to increase recycling is for governments to make it a legal requirement. To what extent do you think laws are needed to make people recycle more of their waste?" Now, I have seen opening expressions which have nothing to do with what you'll need to discuss in the task and instead memorized expressions which does not keep to topic have been written, like "In this essay, I will discuss the advantages and disadvantages of recycling and offer my opinion on this."

Now, the task does not say that you have to talk about the good points or bad points of recycling. It's simply asking your opinion on whether we need laws to make people recycle more of their waste. You will need to talk about why laws are necessary for this. You may throw in a sentence or two about why recycling is good and why not doing this is bad but this

should NOT be the main focus of the essay. So, my point is, keep to the topic and avoid memorised expressions, which don't match what you're supposed to be doing.

Tip number 12. Keep to the suggested timing: 20 minutes for Task 1 and 40 minutes for Task 2. Now, even though you may have been told, many times perhaps, that there are more marks in Task 2 than in Task 1, it does not mean that should spend longer than 40 minutes for Task 2, or the essay. Be reasonable with your time allocation. You will still be marked for Task 1 and if you get a really low band score for Writing Task 1, it's not going to help you with getting a high overall score. If you feel that timing is a problem for you, do lots of timed practice. Lots of them. Efficient time management for the test is something that everybody can achieve with lots of practice. Language skills? Not so easy. So, even if your English is not up to Band 9 standard, don't let problems with timing be an extra headache for you. You can absolutely control how much time you have but don't let time control you! I have, many times, told my student to break their time allocation further this way. In Task 1, you actually don't have 20 minutes to write. You only have 10. So, what you should do is, start with 5 minutes of analysing your graph or letter. This is the planning stage. Think about how you're going to point out the main features in your description. For letter writing, go through specific details in your head: the what, where, why, who when, how, how much, how long etc. etc. Then, write your report or letter for about 10 minutes. After 10 minutes, stop. Look at your writing. Go over it. Read it under your breath. See if anything needs changing. This should take no longer than 5 minutes.

OK, so now move on to Task 2. Do the same thing. Start off with looking at how you can approach the task for 5 minutes. Plan out your ideas on paper. Think of reasons, examples, and details. Once that's done in exactly 5 minutes, write your essay. Don't stop until the last 5 minutes. Use this remaining time to again, go over your essay for mistakes which could easily be

avoided, like spelling, tense consistency, links to main ideas, an established introduction with a foreground, a nice rounding off at the end and so on. You can do this with a clock timer in front of you. And once you get used to this timing, sitting for the real test would be an absolute breeze! For this to work in the test, by all means, bring a watch with you. And I don't mean a smart watch. I've heard that some centres do not allow smart watches in the exam room, which I think is a smart move to prevent possible cheating but there should be a big old clock in the test room for everyone to look at, so be sure to use that to your advantage.

Next tip, try to organise and link your ideas and sentences appropriately. This means using a wide range of language and the ability to discuss ideas and opinions in Task 2. I have seen many articles written about this by other teachers on the internet, particularly about using linkers and cohesive devices. However, be careful not to over do it. Avoid starting every sentence with a linker. Don't do what some IELTS candidates do in their writing. Use linkers for the sake of using linkers just to pass the test. If that linker doesn't make sense or if your examiner or reader doesn't understand the relationship of your ideas with that linker you've used, then you'll have failed in communicating your ideas. So, instead of gaining marks, you lose marks. Also, with language, be careful not to write too many complex sentences either. Try to pepper your writing with a few simple sentences here and there. Remember, the examiner is looking for a range of sentences. So, variety is key.

The same with linkers. Don't use the same one over and over again and don't force yourself to use a linker with every sentence. But it helps to have a variety when you do use them. When demonstrating your ability to discuss opinions, always refer back to your plan so you don't stray off the topic. Support your main ideas with lots of explanations and examples. Another key thing to remember here is: quality over quantity. The examiner is not looking for 20 reasons why living in the city is

better than living in the countryside, for example. They are looking for depth and development in your arguments. So, instead of explaining with many many reasons why city life is good, try using 1 or 2 reasons why this is so and expand them further with more explanations and examples to emphasise your opinions and reinforce your points. OK? 2 things to remember: variety is key and quality over quantity. Oh, and one more thing: don't try to show off by using language that you're unfamiliar with. This doesn't impress your examiner especially since, very often, these big expressions are used incorrectly in context. So, only use language that you're confident in.

Tip 14. I'm sure this has been said many times before but if your writing is shorter than 150 words in Task 1 and less than 250 words in Task 2, then you're guaranteed to lose marks. This should not be what you're aiming for anyway. You should set a target of between 170 to 180 words in Task 1 and between 270 to 280 words in Task 2. Any longer than that, you'll only be wasting time. You will not, I repeat, will NOT get extra marks for writing more. So, instead of using that precious valuable time to check your work for mistakes, you'll have lost time writing more and possibly making more mistakes while overlooking the ones that you could have corrected in other parts of your text.

Now, when you have finished your writing, it is always, always a good idea to go over your work. At the end. Just as it is important for you to plan your writing at the beginning. What you should aim for is 5 minutes to analyse your task and think of ideas to address the task. Make sure you know how many parts there are to the task. When you plan, make notes, not complete sentences. You don't have time for this. At the same time, don't continue writing your essay right until the end when the time comes for you to submit. You have to give yourself enough time to check your essay. I can't tell you how many times band scores have had to be reduced because of

mistakes which could have easily, so easily been avoided. So, allow yourself plenty of time at the end to check your work.

Let's move on to the Speaking test now. What you'll have to remember is, to avoid giving a prepared speech. This quite commonly happens at the beginning of the interview where candidates begin their test very confidently, talking about their job or their studies because they've prepared a long speech about their work or school. Let me let you in on a little secret. This part of the test is usually to break the ice and make you feel comfortable about the questions that come afterwards. The examiner doesn't usually pay careful attention to this part because they know that candidates have prepared themselves to answer this question quite smoothly.

The other dangerous thing to do is to talk about something that's completely unrelated to the topic. Let me give you an example of this. Suppose, just suppose, that you're asked to describe a favourite bookshop in IELTS Speaking Part 2. But when it's time for you to talk, you decide to say something about your favourite book instead. The examiner notices this and gently prompts you to go back to topic by pointing at the task booklet to steer you back in the right direction. You see this and 1) either ignore the examiner and continue talking about what you want to say without any reference to the topic, or 2) panic because you feel that you've given the wrong answer and start hesitating because you're confused or worse, stop talking altogether.

Either way, you won't be in a win-win situation. Now, do you really want that to happen to you? Do you really want to waste time preparing a speech that a) will probably not come up in the test or b) will look like it's the question for the answer that you've prepared for but actually isn't, or c) is actually something that you've prepared for but whose answer will probably be ignored because the quality of your answer does not match up to the rest of the questions that you've been

asked throughout the interview. Doesn't really matter anyway because all roads will lead to a reduced band score. Congratulations! So be wise. Just don't prepare your answers.

Now, the next tip, tip number 17. It may be controversial and lead to some people who would disagree with me, and that's fine anyway because everyone is entitled to their own opinion. The consensus here is that IELTS candidates should speak directly to the examiner, and not to the recording equipment. Now to this, I say, ignore this tip. Of course, it's always good manners to speak directly to the person you're talking to, and doing this may also lead to increasing your self-confidence. However, please do not let this determine the quality of your performance in the speaking test. If you are a naturally shy person and feel much better talking to the clock, then by all means, talk to the clock.

Your examiner will NOT take offence. Neither will they reduce your band score for you not looking at them in the eye. It's OK. If your eyes naturally wander around the room as you speak, let them travel around the room. There is nowhere in the IELTS Speaking assessment that tells examiners to penalise candidates for not looking at them. OK? This is a myth. In my experience examining hundreds of candidates, I've seen different types of speakers with different styles of speaking and not once have I had to punish anybody for not looking at me while they speak. This is not a test requirement. So, don't worry. You might want to refer back to my earlier podcast episode or blog about Eye Contact in IELTS Speaking. That should put your mind at rest. So don't let anyone, anyone, tell you otherwise.

OK. Tip number 18. Whenever you reply "yes" or "no" to the examiner's questions, try to add more details to each of your answers. In each case, always aim to explain at least one point. For example, in Part 1, if you're asked this question "Do you like going to the cinema?" Don't just say "Yes" and then stop right there. Explain why you like going there. Use the 'wh' questions –

who do you like to go with? What kinds of movies do you like watching? When do you normally go there? Why is it better than watching films at home? Which cinema do you normally go to in your home town? etc. etc. The same thing for Part 3. If your examiner asks you "Do you think it's a good idea to control how much time children spend on the computer?" Don't just say "Yes". Explain why. Use the OREO method. Now, if you don't know what I mean by the OREO method, you may want to have a look at my blog post and search for "How to Develop Your Answers in IELTS Speaking Part 3" in the search box on the side bar and it will lead you to the article that explains what this means.

So, for the benefit of those who aren't clear about what I'm talking about. It simply means this: O means opinion, so give your opinion. R means reason. Follow this opinion with a reason. E means Example. So, after your reason, give an example. And the final O means opposite situation. This means imagining the opposite situation through a conditional sentence. For instance, if children were given too much time on the computer, they'd end up not doing their homework and be in danger of losing their eyesight when they get older, and so on. Develop your answers clearly. In Part 1, aim to give 3-4 complex sentences, no longer than that. In Part 3, there's no maximum limit to the number of sentences that you should give. You can give 10 sentences, you can give 100 sentences, and that's fine. But certainly don't give 1 or 2 sentences in your answers. Aim for at least 5 complex sentences in Part 3. I think one thing to remember is imagining your examiner asking you "why" after you've finished each answer, like "What's your favourite colour?" "Yellow" "Why?" "Because it makes me feel happy." "Why?" "Bright colours put me in a good mood." "Why?" "I feel that dark colours bring me down and I feel quite depressed when I'm in a dark room with lots of dark colours around me" "Why?" "I'm not really sure. Maybe it's all psychological, so bright colours have a positive effect on me." You get the idea.

Tip number 19. This is a tricky one. A lot of candidates seem to think that the IELTS speaking test is a test of your general knowledge. This is simply not true. It does not test your general knowledge or how much you know about the world, although having this knowledge would help you with your answers in the sense that you'd be able to develop your responses and provide more depth to your answers. In the interview, you'd only be tested on your ability to communicate effectively. This means your fluency, grammar, vocab and pronunciation. You will not be marked on content. OK?

OK - so now we've come to the final tip. Tip number 20. When you respond to the examiner's questions, make sure that you organise and link your ideas and sentences appropriately. At the same time, use a wide range of structures as well as vocabulary to show your skill at communicating. And very importantly, try to talk at normal speed. Not too fast, not too slow. I've seen situations where candidates spoke really really slowly because they were concentrating too much on getting their grammar right and other situations where people were speaking so fast that I wasn't able to follow what they were saying. So, maintain a normal talking speed and to do this, you'll need to practise recording your voice as you answer questions during your speaking practice and not just listen to them yourself, but get other people to listen to your answers and say whether you were speaking too slowly or too quickly.

So that's it: The 20 Tips for IELTS Success. I hope you have found the information in today's podcast helpful in knowing how to approach your IELTS preparations. Head on over to 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 the most important question you'll ever ask "How can I do better in my IELTS test?" so you won't want to miss that! If you have found today's podcast vey helpful and would like

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