



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.

Today's focus is more on a question that keeps coming up again and again among IELTS students. "How can I do better?" Now, if you think about it, this is a general question and usually the lazy answer quite simply is "Practise! Practise! Practise!" But this answer rings true in all situations that require you to demonstrate your skills in anything: whether it's playing the piano, playing football, cooking, dancing, singing, and also language skills. So, if you're not practising, then don't even think that you're getting better at anything! So, practice is absolutely important when it comes to trying to do better at anything at all, including doing the IELTS test.

Now usually, I have a more suitable answer to students who ask me this when they're in a one-to-one lesson with me. For example, if we're focussing on pronunciation in an IELTS Speaking lesson, I'd usually be able to identify where the student needs help with, like 'th' sounds, or intonation skills and would be able to guide them with more practice or point them in the right direction with which resources to use to help them improve. However, this question is a little more difficult to answer when it comes to students whom I've never met before, ask me this "How do I get better?"

But of course, this can be addressed quite easily if you use the SMART method. I don't mean "smart" as in "clever" although, come to think of it, this method is actually quite clever. I'm referring to is the acronym SMART as in S-M-A-R-T. OK, "So, what does mean?" I hear you ask. Alright, let me break it down for you. However, before, we start to try the SMART method, I think the first thing you should be doing is identifying or pinpointing what your problem areas are. OK?

So before we try the SMART method, let's say, you are having problems with IELTS Listening, in particular, with getting your answers right the first time. OK, now think about how you could use the SMART method to improve your performance on this. Of course, you'll need to expose your ears to a lot of English, like listening to the news on TV, going through audiobooks, listening to English radio, and also tuning in to podcasts like this one! Whatever you do, you must make sure that you have a lot of exposure to the language. Just relying on test strategies alone will not help you get very far.

OK? So now, let's talk about what SMART actually stands for. S means being "specific" about what you are going to do to help yourself improve your listening skills. Narrow in on what specific listening text you are going to hear today. Is it listening to a documentary about birds? Will it be about the progress of agricultural technology? Or are you going to listen to an interview about the problems of raising children today? Or will you be listening to a university lecture on a website about advertising and the media? OK? So, be specific.

If you're going to be practising IELTS Reading, be specific about what material you're going to be reading. Again, will it be a text on space technology? Or is there an article you're going to read about how butterflies are important in preserving the flora and fauna? Will it be a blog post on the internet on what the writer thinks is wrong with the climate nowadays? Will you be

reading a magazine about developments of cosmetic surgery in Korea?

What if you're practising IELTS Writing? Will you be focussing on Task 1 or Task 2? Let's say you're having problems with complex sentences in essay writing. So, what specifically are you going to be writing about in your sentences? Is it about controlling the use of computers among children? Will it be about the government's role in encouraging re-cycling? Will it be about whether you think parents should immunise their children? What specifically will your topic be about?

Or if you're practising IELTS Speaking, what will you be focussing on when you're recording your voice: Part 1, Part 2, or Part 3? What are you specifically going to be talking about in your answers as you practise? Will it be about your last holiday in Part 2? Will it be about an interesting film you've seen? Or if you're focussing on Part 3, what are you going to be discussing? Will it be about the fact that you think governments are doing a poor job in educating children? Or are you going to be talking about why smoking should be banned everywhere? What, specifically?

OK, let's move on to M in the SMART method. This means measuring how much of your IELTS resources or how many you're going to be concentrating on. OK? Now, in Listening, are you going to be listening to one interview in one day? Or three interviews and one lecture in one day? With reading, are you going to be reading one text in one day or three texts in one day? What about writing? Are you going to be working on writing 10 complex sentences in one day or 15? Or 20? What about with speaking? Are you going to be talking about focussing on one topic or two? How much or how many? So, you should be able to measure or quantify how much or how many you can manage in one day. That's being measurable. OK?

Now, we'll move on to the A in SMART. A means making sure that your goals are attainable. What this means is, knowing that the target or goal that you have set for yourself is achievable or attainable. So, for this, you'll need to be realistic about how much you can manage. Look at your workload. If you're a busy professional and have a lot of overtime work or if you have to divide your time between work, children, and your IELTS studies, you certainly can't manage to tell yourself that you can write 5 essays in the space of one hour that you have between work and looking after your children.

So be realistic about what is easily attainable for you. If you only have 20 minutes to spare for your IELTS preparations in a day, what can you manage in those 20 minutes? Listening to one interview or ten? Reading seven website articles or one? Writing 30 sentences or 12? Speaking about ten topics or two? You have to decide what you can manage. Do not set yourself more work than you can actually achieve. So, this is what I mean by attainable. How much is attainable for you? I think you may have to go back to the M part in SMART to measure how much you can achieve. OK?

R is for Relevance. How relevant is the work that you're trying to do? So, let's say that you're working on listening to an interview about something for IELTS Listening. What are you going to listen to in English? Will it be an interview about a football player talking about his plans for the next World Cup match, or will it be something about how sports in general is helping foster good relationships and communication between countries? Which, do you think, is more relevant for your IELTS preparations? It's the same for IELTS Reading. What texts are relevant for your reading practice? Will it be an article about the next episode of Game of Thrones, or an article about how a reduction in tourism has affected the local employment rate in a particular city somewhere in the world? And for Writing? What are you going to write about? Are you going to practise writing in a diary about how your day went? Or are you going

to be writing about your thoughts regarding how your country could do a better job in providing assistance to people living in poverty? And in Speaking? Are you going to practise asking questions? Or are you going to practise talking about what you think of the healthcare in your country?

So, you have to be distinguish what's relevant for you and what's a complete waste of time. For instance, reading novels or comic books in English is great for improving your language in the long term but it's not going to help you much when preparing yourself for the test. So, studying hard is one thing but studying intelligently is another. So, the best thing to do is to work hard and work smart because there's absolutely no point in continuing to work hard but working hard at the wrong thing. So, don't waste your time doing this.

And now, we've come to the final letter T. Now T means giving yourself a time period in which you are going to finish this task. OK? Give yourself a deadline or a time limit. So, again, back to the example we had about IELTS Listening. When you have chosen which specific interview or lecture you're going to listen to, how many interviews or lectures you've chosen that you can easily manage in one day, how relevant they are to what you are learning or preparing for, then it's time to set yourself a deadline. For instance, by when? By the end of today? This week? This month? So, maybe you tell yourself, I'm going to listen to three BBC Hard Talk interviews about the rise of unemployment in Germany, the ageing population in Japan, and about education in Venezuela by the end of Thursday.

So, this is an example of the SMART method: I'm going to listen to THREE interviews (this number is measurable and attainable). Notice that I didn't say 10 or 20 interviews because this is just impossible to achieve, especially if you have a job and family commitments. So, I'm going to listen to three BBC Hard Talk interviews – now, this description is specific. I did not say lectures, I said interviews. But I did not just say interviews either, I

said BBC Hard Talk interviews. So, this is being specific. OK? Alright – so, I'm going to listen to three BBC Hard Talk interviews about – the rise of unemployment in Germany, the ageing population in Japan, and about education in Venezuela.

Again, I'm not just being specific here about what I'm going to listen to but I've made it relevant. I'm not going to listen to an interview about the latest movie release in Hollywood. I'm not going to listen to an interview about a puppy with three ears. I'm going to listen to something, which is going to help me with dealing with topics that may come up in the IELTS test: jobs, growing old, education and so on. So, I don't waste time listening to something that's not going to help me with ideas or vocabulary in the test. It's OK if you're interested in Hollywood or cute puppies but do that as your long-term language improvement goals, OK? Not your short-term IELTS study goals.

Let me give you an example of an IELTS Reading strategy using the SMART method. For example, I'm going to read TWO articles on the Guardian news website about pollution by the end of today. How is this SMART? Now listen again, I'm going to read TWO articles – now that's being measurable and attainable. I'm going to read two articles on the Guardian news website about pollution – that's being specific. I'm going to read TWO articles on the Guardian news website about pollution by the end of today – that's being time-bound.

Here's one about IELTS Writing. Now, if you're doing some writing practice, a SMART method would be something like – I'm going to write 20 complex sentences about the negative effects of tourism in some countries by the end of the week. OK, so how is this SMART? I'm going to write 20 sentences – that's measurable and attainable. 20 complex sentences – that's specific. 20 complex sentences about the negative effects of tourism in some countries – that's also specific. What sentences? Sentences about the negative effects of tourism in some countries – that's narrowed it down to being specific.

OK? I'm going to write 20 complex sentences about the negative effects of tourism in some countries by the end of the week. By the end of the week – that's being time bound.

And what about IELTS Speaking? For example, you can say I'm going to talk about two topics: my favourite book as well as the state of literacy in my country, by the end of today. How is this SMART? I'm going to talk about two topics – that's measurable and attainable. About what? My favourite book and the state of literacy in my country – that's specific and relevant. By the end of today – that's time-bound.

So, do you see how these are SMART? Remember what it stands for – S for Specific, M for Measurable, A for Attainable, R for Relevant and T for Time-bound. So, use this formula when you are thinking of how you can practise to get better. You'll now have no excuse. This is one of the answers to the question of "How can I do better?" Use the SMART method. Be resourceful. Don't expect anyone else but yourself to do your work for you. You'll have to get yourself motivated. You'll have to get yourself disciplined. You'll have to be SMART. OK? Now that you have the strategy, you have no excuse to not know what to do to answer the question "How can I do better?"

Now to help you along, I have provided the study log worksheet template, which you can use for your own SMART method. As you can see, on the first page of the worksheet, you can find an example of how a student has identified their language problems in the table on the right. They have also made this SMART. For example, in trying to improve their listening skills when learning Mandarin Chinese, they have decided to watch at least one Mandarin Chinese drama on TV by the end of the week. So, how is this SMART? Specific as in Mandarin Chinese drama – Measurable and attainable, as in at least one drama – Relevant as in the drama obviously must be in Mandarin Chinese, not Cantonese Chinese not Hokkien Chinese but Mandarin Chinese – Time bound as in every week.

See how this works? What's wonderful about this is that the student has listed the materials that they need to use as well as putting in their reflections and thoughts about what they have found easy or difficult to do to, in order to determine their action plan for the future. This is an example of SMART learning. This type of studying is very focussed and should help with giving you a clear direction of what you'll need to do to do better.

You can download the worksheet from my blog at theieltsutor.edublogs.org together with the transcript of today's episode.

So there you have it: The answer to the most important question you'll ever ask "How can I do better?" 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. 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!