



All you need for IELTS success

Episode 8: Understanding your strengths and weaknesses

Host: Liz

IELTS teacher: Pete Jones

Pete:

In my experience, if you focus only on your weaknesses, you're going to lose motivation or get frustrated with your lack of progress and in some cases, you know, I've seen people avoid their weaknesses completely and then this is obviously not going to result in any progress at all. So I think it's better to improve the skills you're already good at, you know, focus on your strengths, which will help you stay motivated, and then use these skills to help you make progress in your weakest areas.

Liz:

Hello, welcome to All you need for IELTS Success. I'm Liz, a member of the We Love IELTS team and today I'm once again joined by IELTS expert Pete Jones. We know that understanding your strengths and weaknesses is essential if you want to focus your IELTS preparation on the right areas, so today we'd like to help you with this so that you can maximise your study time. So for IELTS, what kind of strengths and weaknesses are we talking about?

Pete:

Well, the obvious ones are the four skills of Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking. You know, you may be better or worse at the receptive skills of listening and reading, than you are the productive skills of writing and speaking but then there are the less obvious sub skills, the skills you need to be able to listen, read, write or speak well. For example, in writing, knowing what content to include, or how to organise it, having enough vocabulary or grammar to express your ideas, being able to write quickly enough or, or type quickly enough if you're taking computer delivered IELTS. In my experience, people are much better at identifying their weaknesses than their strengths, and not very good at all at identifying the sub skills that they are strong or weak at. I hear from a lot of people preparing for IELTS saying that they find a particular skill very difficult, listening for example, but when I ask them what it is about the skills that they find difficult, many of them are not able to identify the sub skill or sub skills that are causing the problem.

Liz:

So given that many of us perhaps don't know or realise which skills we're better or worse at, how can we identify our strengths and weaknesses?

Pete:

Well, if you have a past IELTS result that's probably the best place to start because it's going to show you very clearly which skills you scored higher or lower in. Other ways include how you feel about certain skills, or the feedback you get when you use them. Speaking in English may make you feel very anxious for example, compared to how you feel if you have to write in English. And so this is a sign that speaking is a weakness when compared to your writing.

The feedback you get when you speak may help you see which sub skills you're better or worse at. You know, you may know that you can't speak fluently because you often don't know the right word to use and you hesitate while you think about the right vocabulary or it may be obvious that other people find it difficult to understand your pronunciation. Knowing what it is about your speaking that's a problem, which sub skill is difficult for you, is then going to help you improve your speaking. In terms of identifying your strengths, a really useful exercise to do is to make a list of things you've done successfully in English, or are proud of. You know, you may have successfully given a presentation at work or in your studies or you may feel good that you were able to understand a

movie that you watched in English or, or a book that you read. When you know what your strengths and weaknesses are, you can then decide which to focus on most in your IELTS preparation.

Liz:

So once we know our strengths and weaknesses, which should we focus more on in our IELTS preparation?

Pete:

This partly depends on why you're taking IELTS and the IELTS band score you need. You know if you're taking IELTS to immigrate to a country and it's only the overall band score that's important, you can focus much more on your strengths and almost ignore your weaknesses. But for most people, the individual band score for each skill is also going to be important and so it's not going to be an option to ignore your weaknesses. And in my experience, if you focus only on your weaknesses, you're going to lose motivation or get frustrated with your lack of progress and in some cases, you know, I've seen people avoid their weaknesses completely and then this is obviously not going to result in any progress at all.

So I think it's better to improve the skills you're already good at, you know, focus on your strengths, which will help you stay motivated and then use these skills to help you make progress in your weakest areas you know. In other words, use your strengths to support your weaknesses. If you're listening to this podcast, for example, because your listening skills are better than your reading skills, you know, you could now use this to your advantage and when you've finished listening to the podcast, you could read my blog post on this topic on the We Love IELTS website, and you'll probably find it much easier to understand after having listened to the podcast. You can also find someone to study with that has the opposite strengths and weaknesses to you. Helping that person in your areas of strength may give you more confidence or it may highlight what you can still do to improve in this area. And then getting support from that person in your areas of weakness is going to help you improve in those skills without the frustration that you might have if you're trying to do it alone.

Liz:

They all sound like great ideas. Thanks, Pete. Any final words of encouragement or advice for our listeners?

Pete:

I think it's really important to be honest with yourself. You know, we all have strengths, we all have things that we're good at. We all have things that we find more difficult. And when you're honest with yourself about what these are, you can then plan your IELTS preparation with these in mind and use your strengths to support your weaknesses. I also can't emphasise enough the benefit of teaching someone else what you know, or what you think you know, as it's a way to test your understanding and either reassure yourself that you do know what you think you know, that you are good at what you think you're good at, or find out that you've still got things that you need to learn or improve. It's better to find out what these are now before you take your IELTS test, rather than in the test itself.

Liz:

Thanks Pete we've put a link to Pete's blog post on understanding your strengths and weaknesses in the show notes for this episode. And if you want to follow Pete's advice and test your understanding of today's podcast, why not share what you've learned on our Facebook page?



All that's left to say, thank you very much for listening. Don't forget to check out our website, weloveielts.org, where you'll find more useful hints, tips and advice in preparing for IELTS and/or get in touch with us on social, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. Bye for now.