



Kev's English Podcast: Episode 12: IELTS Myths and Legends

Hello, in this episode I talk about IELTS myths, those strange stories you read on the internet, none of which are true...Have a listen and find out what they are.

My links..

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Hello and welcome to Kev's English Podcast, Real English, every week.

Hello, hello, welcome to Kev's English Podcast, episode number 12. OK, now what I want to talk about for today is myths and legends, in particular myths and legends of the IELTS test.

Now, as you may or may not know, I work on italki and I get many, many students from all around the world for TOEFL test, PTE, IELTS test, OET test. And the IELTS test is the one that seems to have the most myths and legends, or perhaps I should say misconceptions, misconceptions around it. So I'm going to talk about those for today.

I'm going to explain what they are and why they're simply not true. So let's talk about the speaking section first. Now, the first thing that people sometimes ask me, they say, Kev, do I need to sound like an Englishman or American to get a good score on the speaking test? You know, accent.

I say, well, no, you know, your accent is unimportant. Now, if you're talking about pronunciation, that's something else. Obviously, we all, you know, we all have an accent in whichever foreign language I attempt to speak.

Everybody is going to know immediately I'm an Englishman. Even if my pronunciation works and they can understand me, as in I'm intelligible, they will know Kev's an Englishman. That's how it is.

So accent is not important. Unless, of course, it's very, very heavy and very strong and it's difficult for the examiner to understand you. So you don't need to sound like the Queen of England to get a good score on the speaking test.

And actually, that received pronunciation, the number of people who actually speak that in the UK

these days is considerably small. Now, another one, you have to share the same opinion as the examiner. So when you're speaking, it's meant to be an informal discussion, a conversation with the examiner.

You don't have to agree. You don't have to think, right, what opinion do I need to say that will make them agree? That's not what you're being tested on. Fluency, coherence, pronunciation, vocab, and grammar.

And that's it. So it's not a truth test either because I keep having to explain this to people almost every day. People think it's a truth test.

They think, you know, if I don't know an answer to the question or I don't know anything about the topic, then I can't answer. So for part one, it could be about bicycles or fast food or chocolate or did you study science at school or blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. It could be any topic.

If you don't know anything directly about it, you can make some, you can make some shit up, not to mince words. This is especially true for part two. If you get some question like, describe a time when you had an accident, describe a time when you were late for an important appointment and it never happened, you might have to make something up.

Or if they ask you, talk about your favourite, your favourite film, but you don't have a favourite film, well just talk about any film and pretend it's your favourite. That's, it's how it works. Yeah.

So as I say, the truth, truth content is not what you're being assessed on. Even if the examiner thinks that you are a liar, it makes a difference. You don't need to share opinions, you don't need to tell them the truth or tell them what you think they want to hear.

Just simply answer the question as clearly and simply as possible. Now, that brings me on to something else. Somebody asked me about a strategy.

They said, right Kev, if I use short and simple sentences that I know are grammatically sound, there's no mistake there. Is that a good strategy to get a good score? And I said, well, you might think so, but the answer's no, because you're being tested on your range, grammatical range, not simply accuracy. So while you may think giving short answers, yeah, no, I live in China, to reduce the possibility of making an error, you're not showing them enough range of grammar or vocabulary.

I was talking about this with someone yesterday about how to, you know, generate more language for assessment. And I was saying, well, you know, you need to describe, go into the details. So we were talking about kind of food, right? You know, I said, do you, well, I asked him, I asked the question, do you like to cook? And he said, I like cooking meat.

Okay, I like cooking meat. Okay, we've got four words, no mistakes there. But is it beef? Is it chicken? Is it pork? Is it kangaroo? Is it grilled, fried, baked, roasted, boiled? What's the ingredients? What's the method? What's the preparation? So we're talking about these different verbs for cooking, different adjectives, different nouns for the spices and the herbs and all this stuff.

And I said, there's so much more that you could have included in your answer. So that's something to think about. Another misconception is that you can't ask the examiner a question.

Well, yeah, it's definitely acceptable, you know, if you're not sure, instead of trying to answer when you're not sure what the question was, you can simply say, I'm sorry, I didn't quite catch that. Could

you repeat the question, please? And they will be pleased to do so, you know. I mean, I wouldn't ask them to explain, you know, every single question.

But if you're not sure, sure, just ask them. I didn't quite catch that. Can you explain? And they will be pleased to do so.

Now, so that's speaking section in general. Oh, yeah, there's one more thing. Some people think that there's only one correct answer for the speaking section.

That's what some people think. Now, a lot of this comes from your educational system, where you were, you know, taught, raised, educated. In some countries, in the classroom, that's how they are taught, that there's one correct answer to a particular question.

In the IELTS, that's not the case at all. The actual content is relatively unimportant, as long as you talk about the topic and answer the question. You can agree with the examiner, you cannot agree.

You can tell them things you think they want to hear or things that you think they might not. It makes no difference. It's just a discussion.

It's an informal discussion, a conversation between two people. There's no truth in it, there's no correct answers, so think of it in that way for your speaking test. OK, now, coming back to IELTS in general, this is something which I hear quite often.

Some testing centres or institutes like the British Council or IDP are better, as in you'll get a high score if you go to IDP. So I hear people say, OK, you know, I'm going with IDP because you get a better score than with the British Council. Or they say, I'm going to take it in Turkey because you get a better score than if you take it in Iran or etc.

You know, and this is what people say. But it's not true. Every testing centre operates under the same criteria with the same standards.

You know, examiners have a lot of training and the whole point of IELTS is that it's a standardised exam. Wherever you take it, anywhere in the world, the experience, the quality, the criteria, the standards should be identical. Now, it's possible there may be some rare exceptions.

But in general, that's how it is. There's no easier places. IDP does not score higher than British Council.

Actually, one of my Iranian students once said something, he says, IDP don't want Iranians in Canada or Australia, so they give them a low score. I thought, OK, if, you know, that's what you think. But anyway, it's not actually true.

Some people think that some examiners give you more scores if you're polite to them, if they're smiling and so and so. But again, that's not really true. If you think about it, I mean, also the examiner might not be making eye contact, they might not be smiling because they've got four different jobs, you've only got one.

Your job, answer the question, they have two. Listen to your answer, make notes on what you say, watch the time and stick to a script. That's what they have.

They've got four different jobs, whereas you only have one. So maybe they're not being particularly friendly. But that doesn't mean that they're not doing their job, what they are supposed to do.

Another one is that there's some tips and tricks to beat the system. If you look on YouTube and if I see any video or article, you know, tips or tricks to beat the IELTS, it's just, nah, that's a waste of time. You know, some schools try to guarantee this.

They say, oh, there's some special tricks if we teach them, you'll get a high score. But no, that's a fraud. That's not the case at all.

I would only choose a school or a teacher who has a proven track record of success with their students. If you check out my reviews on italki, my success rate is pretty good for all examinations. And that's what you should consider.

Nothing more. No tips or tricks. Now, one of the biggest mistakes that many students make is they only study IELTS.

Right? They only do IELTS listening, IELTS reading. They don't want to talk unless it's about IELTS questions or topics. And I say to them, this is a waste of time.

It's a test of your English ability. So you need to use English in the wider sense. You need to be watching films, watching TV shows, reading books, reading articles, talking to people about all kinds of topics.

If you just focus on IELTS and what lots of people do is they keep doing mock practise exams. They buy Cambridge 18, 17, 16, 15 and they keep doing test after test after test. But what I tell them is, constant testing, it doesn't work because a test can only test what you know at the point of testing.

If you see, that's why it's a test. You're not learning anything new by constant testing. So what you need is to be using English as widely as possible, not constantly test, test, test, test, test.

I wouldn't do more than maybe one practise test a week or maybe every two weeks. In the meantime, you need to be learning, learning new vocab, new phrases, new structure and practising not constantly test, test, test because that doesn't do anything. You're not learning anything new.

The only thing that you're learning is how to be more efficient in the exam. But are you developing your English skills? I don't think so. One final thing.

I mean, there are more myths but I'll keep it short for today. For the writing section and also for the speaking section, though more for the writing. People think that, especially when they are paraphrasing, that they need to use lots of fancy words, so-called band nine vocabulary and blah, blah, blah.

And there's no such thing. I have a group on Telegram for IELTS and I post current questions and topics. I invite students to write an essay.

You may have seen some of these on my channel on YouTube. And a very common mistake is they try and use language that's too complex, it's too complicated, that doesn't fit, it's not appropriate. The synonyms that they use do not work.

Now, I'm not going to go into this in detail because I've made several videos about this but it's not a good way to impress the examiner by learning lots of big words, lots of big complicated words and

inserting them into your writing, especially in the essay test. The best way to impress the examiner is by answering the question clearly and simply. That's the best way.

If they've got to decode or decipher your essay because you've filled it with such complicated language and structure that they can't understand what you're trying to say, you won't get a very good score. That's a fact. So, there you go.

That's all. I hope it helps. So, just keep this in mind.

There's no shortcuts, there's no tips, there's no tricks. Lots of the advice that you see on the internet is crap. Not to mince words.

What you need is to find yourself a school or a teacher with a proven track record of exam success and stick to that one school or person. You don't want to be jumping around, this teacher, that teacher, this teacher. Find one school or teacher who has a proven method who can show you, look, my students, they get this score, they'll pass, etc.

Stick with that person and forget all these other myths and legends. The IELTS really is not as complicated as people try to make it seem. OK.

So, don't forget. Try and use English as widely as possible. Don't just simply focus IELTS, IELTS, IELTS.

Find someone who can prove that they know what they're talking about by showing you their track record. And if you do that and you give yourself enough time to study and practise, you'll get the score that you need. OK.

Hope that helps. I'll see you next time on Kev's English Podcast. See you later.