



## Kev's English Podcast: Episode 22: Interview with Adriana from Columbia and her OET success!

In this episode, I talk to one of my italki students, Adriana from Columbia, who recently took OET and got a grade B pass with some very good scores!

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Hello and welcome to Kev's English Podcast, real English every week, with your host Kev Dean.

Okay, so Adriana, thanks for coming on. Before we get into OET and English in general, perhaps you could just give us a very brief introduction.

Yeah, so I'm Adriana, I'm from Colombia, I'm a doctor from Colombia, and I took the OET test last week, and I think that's what we're going to talk about, right? I graduated recently. So, tell you what, can you tell us first, why did you take OET? There's all these different examinations these days, why did you take OET in particular? Yeah, actually like OET, like in my country, it's not that popular, it's starting to be popular. We usually hear about other type of tests, you know, but I think, like I felt it was like a little bit more straightforward in terms of if you want to like open some doors, in my case for residency programmes in other countries, like it's the logical way to do it is to do a test that will involve like medical knowledge, you know, that actually will help us if we finally migrate to another country, just to be, you know, like get used to that type of language.

It's not only like about speaking in English, it's about speaking in English in this area. So that's why I took it. You say that OET is not particularly well known in Colombia.

So what is the most popular English examinations? Is it TOEFL, is it? Mostly, mainly, like that's what we always like here, like we have like even like courses, you know, like institutions that they sell you also like classes, like courses to take those tests. But no, OET, it's actually like, for example, like we have only like two venues here in like at least in the capital of Colombia, we have only like two venues. But I'm glad I took it, to be honest, when I started just learning about these

tests and just like watching videos and I completely felt like that was that's the right move, you know, to make.

Well, it certainly was because you sent me a picture of your scores. Yeah. So what did you get? You got 390 for writing and 400 for speaking? Yeah, yeah.

It was, I think it was a writing 400, speaking was 390. But even so, that is pretty good when you consider you only had that much preparation time, was it like a week? Yeah, exactly. I was trying to like to get ready like on my own, just to practise on some letters, but it's hard when you don't have maybe like someone to guide you.

For example, you have a lot of information in the website, the OET website, and that's very helpful. Like it's actually like a reading it and you follow the instructions and it's just pretty straightforward. But for example, especially for writing and speaking, you need someone to do, you know, to guide you.

And I'm very grateful I found you. I think I found you a little bit late in my time. Well, I did say when you told me like it's in a week, I thought, OK, but obviously it worked out well.

But I think your level of English was pretty good anyway. Thank you. Well, no, it was.

It was just a matter of, you know, like you said, understanding the criteria for like writing and speaking because OET.com have all these free kind of guides. You've got that ultimate writing guide, you've got two speaking guides and they go through quite a lot of information. But still, they don't specifically, you know, without having specific examples as illustrations to like say, well, purpose, you need to do this when you speak in, don't use a phrase, you know, they don't need or whatever, all those things that we spoke about.

So, yeah, I think it's certainly important. I mean, some people were telling me about how they use chat, GPT and all this artificial intelligence stuff. I've had this for like a few people and that for the writing section, as you saw, only works up to a point.

It'll tell you the grammar, but it won't. It doesn't know the specific criteria of how the writing section works. But back to what you were saying about, can you tell me more about English in Colombia? I mean, so you said that IELTS and TOEFL are popular because, you know, I mean, Western Europe, if you go to Holland or Belgium or Germany or any of the Scandinavian countries, you can get by in English because there are English is well-established languages in general, like taught at school, in high school.

So, you know, when people go to Holland or Belgium and some of these Western European countries, even if they don't speak Dutch or French or whatever, they can get by because the education system, you know, it's quite good. So what's it like in Colombia? Now, because I've got no idea because I've I've had some students from Brazil, one from Argentina, one from Paraguay, one from Uruguay and that's about it. And they were telling me different things about how it's not so common or it's not so well developed in their school system.

So maybe you can tell us a little bit about English in Colombia. Yeah, it's kind of the same, I was I went on a trip like recently to Eastern Europe and as you said, I noticed that that you actually you can navigate that pretty well with English because people in Eastern Europe, they tell you, for example, oh, yeah, I speak a little bit of English, but they don't speak a little bit of English. English is great.

You know, I was surprised because it's their second language and I grew up in Colombia and we actually we're supposed to like we take English classes, you know, in high school and everything. But it's pretty poor what we learn. It's not that I learned English because I lived like for about six years in the US.

That's how I got my English. But unfortunately, in Colombia, our level of English is a little bit poor, like very and I noticed that just like because I got to compare it with Eastern Europe and they speak English. You said Eastern Europe, where exactly? Oh wow, I took a, it was a three month trip and I went to, OK, I went to Turkey and then I was in Budapest, Bucharest and then from Bucharest I went to Serbia.

Yeah, but to Belgrade. Then I went to Finland too. The Baltics, the Balkans.

No, to Budapest, yeah. I mean, like, you know, most of the capital cities, like I'm in Bratislava. So Bratislava, Budapest and Prague.

Yeah, Prague. If you're going into the restaurants, hotels, bars, just your daily kind of stuff, most people can speak English. I mean, people over a certain age, maybe over 40s or 50s, you do better in Russian because don't forget, these are post-communist states.

Yeah, it's like, well, it's 55 years now. But so people over a certain age, so English wasn't taught, it was only Russian, German. Yeah, you know, yeah, especially in Moldova.

I went to Moldova, they gave me a word. So, so it's like people under a certain age, you should be able to gain English. But some of the older people are not, you know, because they they weren't actually taught it.

So you can try it in Russian and probably they'll still be able to understand you because that's what, you know, that that's what they were taught as kids under communism, Russian and German in this part. Because Austria is just a couple of kilometres away, Vienna is like an hour and lots of people live here because it's cheaper and then they work in Austria. So, you know, quite a few people can speak in German as well.

So you've got English, German, Slovak, and some of the older people can speak in Russian because of communism. But most of the capital cities, though, you will find them. It's like I used to live in Prague before, I couldn't speak a word of Czech, but I was fine.

I used to live in Budapest, I couldn't speak a word of German either. And I was perfectly fine, but to my shame, I can't speak any Slovak, but still I get by. I was at a bar last night down in town.

The girls there speak perfect English, the old town, you know, it's like that's it. But if we say we were to come over to your part of the world, what's your capital city called? I forget. Oh, my capital is Bogota.

So if tourists come over there to Bogota, can they get by in English or would they definitely need some kind of Spanish? I think it's, for example, Cartagena, it's a little bit more popular in terms of tourism, you know, English speakers are tourists. They can maybe like navigate a little bit better there. I heard Medellin is a little bit easier.

Bogota is not that you can find people who actually can help you with English. But if you want to be a little bit safer, you might need like some level of Spanish to navigate or just to find a person beforehand to help you go through. Because if you walk, it's definitely not like in Europe, you don't

find like if you go to a store, they will tell you like what? In Spanish, of course, it's not easy to find people who are speaking.

It's a very, very. But don't you get American tourists though? I mean, you're kind of neighbour in the north, don't you get Americans there? Because I would have thought it would be easier for Americans to come as tourists as opposed to us in Europe. Yeah, tourism here in Colombia, it wasn't like that popular before because, you know, unfortunately, we have a history of violence and drug and all that type of situation.

So it wasn't like that popular and people were scared of coming, right? No, we've all heard about it. But yeah, I mean, yeah, I remember like that in the past, though. Yeah, yeah.

All these old films on television, it's always Cartels, Colombia, Mafia, Cartels. It's like, yeah, I had a funny time in South America is a shithole. We all get that.

I know, I know it's unfortunately because Colombia is a very nice country and that we have what different weathers we have. Like it's very, it's very nice. And I heard that people coming from, you know, from other places that they love Colombia and, you know, like you can kind of get people, you know, like coming to retire here in Colombia, especially because of the money, you know, the currency.

I have heard that plenty of Americans like to retire in the south because of the the purchasing power of a dollar. In your country, Costa Rica was popular with American pensioners because pension in America wouldn't get them a great deal. But in countries such as yours, maybe in Costa Rica and similar, it would buy them quite a lot.

That's kind of like English and Australian pensioners going to live in Indonesia or the Philippines, especially, you know, exactly. No, no, right now it's getting better here. At least the people that are coming, it's safer.

It's way safer than before now. I was thinking of coming over to work in South America some years back, different countries, because I heard there's demand, but I've been doing this. Internet thing now for some years, so we'll see.

So can you tell me a bit a little bit more about OET then? So in preparation, what did you do exactly? So you went to OET.com and you read all that stuff. You watched all that stuff and you also watched some videos on YouTube. Yeah, I went to the OET website, but someone recommended me a course online and an online course.

But I don't know when I mentioned it because I didn't feel like completely comfortable with that. I found better stuff on YouTube, to be honest. And then I found that your videos and that's how I contact you through your videos in YouTube, through your channel.

And I watch a lot of videos. You actually have to be careful and try to use the material you're going to watch because I felt like good stuff. But I also like, for example, especially with the letters, there are like a bunch of samples on the Internet.

But you should just try to do that's what I did, try to work my way, you know, my style, my own style. It's not about just I think it's way harder if you try to just copy one style and try to work that style in the whole process. It's just better just to.

As you said, you have to be very careful and circumspect about what material you use find on the

Internet, because I keep getting people, obviously, I have students from all over the world and they send me stuff, writing and different like things. And it's a load of shit, really. And I say, when did you get this? And they said, oh, from the Internet.

To which I always say what that magical land where everything is 100 percent true and accurate. And when I say that they start going, oh, well. So, you know, I guess all the time it was, oh, I got it from the Internet.

OK, but, you know. So you have to be very careful about what you what you use, what you choose, etc. But.

So. You basically did your own kind of a book. Now, you you mentioned the course, which you I think you told me about it once.

I can't remember who it is, but we won't say. But a lot of these group courses, they're OK, but because it's a group, they can't really give you any individual feedback on your writing or your speaking, can they? If it's a sort of group, it's like it's kind of like if you go to a language school, you know, institute, say, like in Bogota, like if you go to British Council, English Time or whoever, and even a group, you know, it could be four, could be eight, six, eight, 12 people, perhaps. And how much speaking time are you really likely to get in such a scenario? Maybe a couple of sentences every every hour or two hours, which is not enough.

Yeah, that's that's true. Do you need something like especially for writing? Because I use a chat GPT to to try to correct my letters. You can actually personalise that and just like write down like, OK, got a score.

These are according to the OIT criteria. But like you get what I what I notice is that chat GPT is kind of flexible. It used to give me a very high score.

I said, yeah, that's not that's not the way it works. So I started to take a bit more straight with it, with this and be more with that. So I used to try to be, you know, like it's it's not realistic.

So you you have to be careful with that chat GPT because it's not the person, you know, you need to actually, you know, make a pair of eyes, you know, to take a look at your writing and especially a person who kind of know what about the criteria. And that's why you can't like write a bunch of letters. But if you don't have like maybe, you know, like some guidance, it's and it's hard.

You said you have the criteria in the OIT website, but but you need to kind of understand how to apply that to a letter. And it's it's simple if you if you get it, you know, but it's good to have like a human just reading your letters and the speaking part is very important to like that you need to practise with someone on that and to just be comfortable. It's a it's it's different in my case that if I see patients in here, I never speak in English.

So so you need to practise and chat GPT that in that part that you can actually just send up your recordings on it and all that thing. But they're not going to that that, you know, the programme will not give you like an exact like review, you know, you know what I mean? It's not that spontaneous. I don't know how to explain it, but but I think it's in the classes, those courses that you take, they're not personalised.

Like, for example, I said I had in the in the package that I got the two letters that they will grade me. And it was like, OK, yeah, you got this grade that you have. They gave me just a very brief review.

But I when I was at the end, OK, chat GPT gave me a little bit more of that, you know. So I was a little bit disappointed about that part. But but I just I kept going.

And then I found you. And then that's how we work. We work it out at the end because I really took your advice and it was really helpful.

It was really, really helpful. And we you know, we work with this writing and speaking. Well, yes, I'm kind of glad it worked out as it obviously did.

So just to wrap things up, would you recommend OET to other people that I mean, because, you know, there's quite a lot of because it's like 12 categories. So you obviously got doctors, nurses and veterinarians and paediatricians and so on. So it was quite a lot of people want to take it.

Do you think it's is it worth it? I mean, because I don't know how much it costs in your part of the world, but it's certainly not a very cheap exit. Yeah, it's expensive for obviously it's very expensive for us. It's twice the cost of IELTS.

Yeah. It's like five hundred Australian or something. So I just so is it is it like really expensive in your country or is it just quite.

Yeah, for example, it's like four hundred seventy five dollars, I think it was exactly what I pay. I mean, it will be like four times what it's expensive because our currency is like way lower than that dollar. So if you if you make the conversion, it's not like something that.

OK, yeah, let's let's repeat it. I think people come on and they've and they take it and they're not ready and they say, oh, I can take it again. I said, well, you know, it's like it's such an expensive examination.

Surely it would be better to prepare sufficiently first and then only take it once. Yeah, because it is such a an expensive examination. So one last question I'd like to.

Did you. Did you have a plan of study? Did you actually have like a like, you know, one day I'll do this and I'll do that. And did you have a plan like a routine? Like, for example, when I started with the self-assessment, I took what I did to one of the PDF and the OET website and I and I, you know, like I said, and I did my with the timing and timing my, you know, the test and and then I, you know, to have an idea where I was.

And I did. I always thought I scored a passing, had a passing score for listening and reading. And so I said, OK, I'm not going to forget about this.

So I used to to do like a mock test of reading and listening once a week, once or twice a week just to keep, you know, and then what I focused the most was writing, because I noticed that it was taking like for me, it was taking like forever to finish a letter because I wasn't insured. And we don't do like letters, the referral letters in Colombia. We just have like a, you know, like in the system, a clinical history and we have an analysis at the end.

And it's kind of the analysis, but this is more like the letter itself is very different from what we do in Colombia. So I had to learn from the beginning, you know, like the the head of the of the letter, the the introduction, the body and everything. So I wasn't sure and I was doing it on my own.

So I, I, I focus on writing and then when I felt a little bit more comfortable with writing, I started just like working on speaking. I think speaking, I didn't practise that much because I was just like

working very hard in my writing. But as you notice, remember when we did the first practise, I was just so lost because you, you just as you told me, you just need to follow the script and you don't need to do anything else.

And it's easy that way. But I was just like killing myself. It's not a typical examination.

It's, it's something when people, I mean, most, you know, it's got about 85 percent pass rate, which is pretty high, right? So most, most people who have a reasonable command of English, I mean, either with my Turkish students a few weeks back, I didn't think he was going to pass, to be perfectly frank, but he did. And we just, we passed. So, you know, so anybody with a good intermediate command, as long as they have to get themselves routine, they do the work and they get somebody to help them with the writing and the speaking section, there's no reason why they can't get a pass.

It's only like if you need 400 and above, like some students do, because they have to apply for a fellowship or scholarship or some particular position and they specifically ask for 400 and above, which is a little bit harder and obviously takes a bit more time. But to just get a free 50B pass, that's something that's certainly possible, I think, for most people with just a bit of practise. Well, I'm wrapping up for today because I'm on, because I'm such a cheap bastard, I'm on the free version of Zoom.

So it's only 40 minutes. Oh, OK. Because I'm not paying however much I kind of want for the free version, so I'm on the free version.

In more than 40 minutes, people will just like sleep. And it runs out in like five minutes time. Anyway, thank you for coming.

Thanks for sharing your Story. Thank you for inviting me. And thank you for everything, like I'm telling you, you helped me tonnes with this and you helped me to build my confidence in the test, especially for my writing and speaking.

And you asked me if I can recommend this test. Yeah, I definitely felt more comfortable because I took a look at the IELTS and I took a look at the OET and I felt more comfortable. But I will recommend it.

And just if you feel that that you you try to, for example, in my case, I used to read a lot in English when I was studying in middle school, like all the videos I watched are in English. If you have to try to be involved in, even if you're not surrounded by that, you know, speaking English speakers, try to use like, you know, use all the technology and everything there just to be, you know, like involved in that. And I do recommend it for a healthcare.

I think it's better and it will make you just like, you know, like help you to be ready for the next step. But I'm really thankful, you know, I found you and you helped me. Maybe if you know anybody else, you can send them over and perhaps I can help them too.

Anyway, so thanks.  
Good luck for the future.