



## KEP:Episode 32 Why You're Stuck at IELTS Band 6 (and How to Finally Reach Band 7)

Hello and welcome to Kev's English podcast, real English every week, with your host Kev Dean. Hello, hello, hello, hello, hello. It's Kev here.

Back, back so soon. Only two days after my last episode of Kev's English podcast, now on [theenglishnative.com](http://theenglishnative.com). I'll just close my office window, so I'm not interrupted, and let me tell you something. Now, if you listen to my previous episode, which was two days ago, I think, I was talking about last week, and actually this week too, it's Tuesday the 22nd.

So last week I got a lot of new Chinese IELTS students. I think it's because somebody shared something on Xiaohongshu on the red note, so I got a lot of new students. Quite interesting.

The thing was, most of them, I think, all of them, they take an IELTS 2, 3, 4, I think one girl took it five times, and every time they got 6, 5.5, 6, 6, 5.5, and infinitum, so they're stuck. You know, every time they take it, we're not making any progress, we're getting 6 every time, so, you know, based on my long years of experience with students all over the world for IELTS, and most of them in China, because I don't forget, I used to live in China a long time ago, I used to have jobs there at college, and so on, so I do kind of know a bit about how it works, not just for the Chinese, but for other country candidates as well. And I was explaining about what mistakes they kind of make, what the tendencies are, they give too short answers, they're too formal, not natural, they don't develop the vocab, they're using repetitive language all the time, etc.

Now, what I wanted to talk about today is unrealistic expectations, or why your IELTS progress isn't as fast as you think it should be. The main reason is people don't prepare correctly, they don't give themselves sufficient time, and they misunderstand the nature of IELTS, what it is they're actually doing, or what they should be doing to get a high score. Instead of focussing on tips and tricks and hints and what's the latest topics and questions, what we need to do is to instead develop their overall English ability.

That's it, not rehearsing questions and topics, that doesn't work. So, one of the most common things, I need a 7, I need a 6.5, but I'm stuck at 6, I'm stuck at band 5.5. And I'm going to explain why

moving up even half a band score takes much longer than you think it actually should. More importantly, I'll explain what you should be doing to make that progress occur.

So, talk about expectations, the myth of fast progress, as it were. So, in China, especially, other countries too, but there's a strong cultural belief that hard work brings fast results. The more that you study, the more test practise, the more courses, all of this should mean faster improvement.

But IELTS doesn't work in that way, that's a misconception. What the IELTS is actually designed is to measure your real world English ability, especially in a speaking. Can you naturally interact with a native speaker? Can you communicate in English naturally? Yes or no? Not, can you memorise this answer? What do you know about this particular topic? What band 9 vocabulary you can recite? What idioms you can memorise and insert into your speech? What complicated grammatical structures you can include when you're speaking? It's none of that.

It's none of that. It takes time because it involves changing how you think, how you write, how you speak, how you understand. It's about developing deeper language skills, not surface stuff.

So, let's break it down. What's the difference? So, this is all based on the criteria. You can find it, the public version, it's freely available.

So, band 5.5 means you can communicate but your grammar might be a bit off, your vocab is repetitive, you give too short answers, etc. A 7 means that you can clearly and fluently express ideas. Your vocab is more precise.

For example, one of the recent questions is flowers. So, I asked the girls last week, do you like flowers? Oh, I like flowers. Flowers are great.

We love flowers, flowers, flowers, flowers, flowers. I said, yeah, but is it like roses, chrysanthemums, tulips, orchids? Well, you know, what is it? Oh, like international food. You know, in your city, can you find international food? Oh, international food, international food, international food, international food.

Yeah. So, more precise vocabulary and you sound natural, less rehearsed. All right, I was just talking to somebody just a little while ago, 10 minutes ago, and we're talking about something that we did yesterday.

I asked a question, which country would you like to visit? And she said to me, in regard to the question of which country I would wish to visit, I said, is that natural? Is that a natural way? If you're talking to a friend, how to answer that? Obviously not. Examiner is going to notice. So, you know, to get from 5.56 upwards, it's about raising your overall level of communication.

It's not about learning more tricks or tips, more idioms to include the strategy, etc. Okay. Now, this is the interesting part.

And this is based on research. This is based on research by the University of Cambridge. Obviously, people who do the IELTS test and there's other studies available.

So, if you ask most teachers, all right, and you say, how much time, all things being equal, to move up one complete band, whether it's from a pre-intermediate to intermediate to upper intermediate to advanced, or the IELTS go from five to six to seven, etc. So, according to Cambridge, if you search this or you ask GEPT to show you the studies, okay, so according to them, it typically takes about 200 hours of study to improve by one band. 200 hours.

Now, that's not 200 hours of tuition with a teacher. That's you doing 200 hours of deliberate study or practise, listening, reading, writing, speaking, getting feedback, etc. So, if you're at 5.5 and you need 6.5 or 7, realistically, you need to be doing six months.

If you're doing eight to ten hours a week, it's going to take you six months maybe to reach those 200 hours. And it needs to be productive, active, not just doing tests, tests, tests, tests, or watching random videos on the internet. That doesn't work.

That doesn't work. Which shouldn't come as a surprise or a shock that that doesn't actually work. You know, endless tests without feedback, memorising some templates for writing and speaking, doing these expensive courses that promise fast results.

You're not improving your general English skill. You're trying to get around it with tips and tricks or hints or whatever. It doesn't work.

It takes time to move up a band around about 200 hours. Obviously, there's many variables involved, but in general terms, that's what Cambridge says. That's what most linguistic academics would argue.

So, what does work? Honest feedback, detailed feedback from an experienced person or teacher. Practise every day real English, authentic stuff that natives use, writing, reading, listening, and speaking. Identifying your weak points and working on those.

Gradually building your vocab, accuracy, and confidence. IELTS measures your English, not your ability to memorise strategies, hints, and tips. The only reason why I tell students the strategies is because, for the most part, they come and they've got a week, a day, a couple of days, two weeks, maybe three weeks to get a certain score.

And in that time, there's a limited amount we can do. I can guide them. There's a limited amount that we can do because they don't have sufficient time.

So, that's why I give them some strategies to maximise a score, especially for the speaking. It's all realistically speaking I can do. So, what's the main idea here? So, if you really want to get a good IELTS score, focus on becoming a better user of English.

Not just a better IELTS taker, learning strategies, and hints, and kind of tips, constant testing, testing, you know, constantly testing. All that a test does, it tests what you know when you take the test. What a surprise.

So, once again, all that a test does, it tests what you know when you take the test. It doesn't help you to learn anything new. It doesn't teach you any new vocabulary.

It doesn't teach you any new grammatical structures. It doesn't help you to improve your fluency by naturally speaking. It doesn't.

How can it? It's a test. It tests what you know when you take the test. So, you need to focus on becoming a better user of English.

You need a plan of study. Be patient. Be smart.

Get regular feedback. Practise every day. I know you might not like this, but, you know, slow,

steady, incremental improvement.

So, if you want to find the article, because I can't give you a link here, all you've got to do is search into Google or it's your search engine. How long does it take to improve IELTS Cambridge? It's out there. You can find it in a couple of seconds and it confirms what I'm telling you.

So, anyway, thanks for listening. I hope this episode helps you reframe how you think about IELTS. If you want help with feedback, your planning, etc., feel free to reach out.

Contact me anytime, wherever you're listening to this, watching. Links below, etc. You can contact me.

You can find me on italki. If you're not listening to this on italki, all you've got to do is type in italki, I-T-A-L-K-I, plus Kevin, a Dean, Native English teacher, and you'll find me in a second. And, of course, if you're listening wherever, check out my channel on YouTube, The English Native, and my podcast site, theenglishnative.com. Anyway, that's enough for today.

I've got some more students coming in a little while, so I'll call that quits. I hope it helps and hopefully see you next time. Or, well, see, maybe speak to you next time.

Okay, bye  
for now.