



Episode 33: “IELTS Writing Task 2: The Phrases You Must Avoid for Band 7+”

Hello and welcome to Kev's English Podcast, real English every week, with your host Kev Dean. Hello, hello, hello, it's Kevin here. Welcome back to the English Native, the podcast that helps you write smarter, clearer and more confidently for the IELTS exam.

Well, that's one thing that it does, it also does many other things. But for this episode, there's something in particular I want to talk about. So, let me set the scenario.

So, if you listened to my last two episodes, I probably mentioned July, I was nearly entirely booked out by Chinese students on Italki. I don't know quite how that occurred. Somebody must have spread something about me on social media on their Xiaohongshu rednote.

But anyway, so, you know, I've had many Chinese students before, I used to live and work in China, a long time ago now, I have to say. So, I do have some familiarity with the peculiar characteristics of Chinese writing and speaking for the IELTS test, as in, why do a lot of them get 6 and 5.5 for both writing and speaking? Well, they need 6.5 or maybe 7. Now, the last two episodes, I specifically spoke about realistic expectations or unrealistic expectations. I pointed out from a speaking session, how much time it really takes to get from 5.5 to 6, to 6.5, and above.

So, what I want to talk about for today, in the same vein, is for writing, especially writing test 2. One problem you may remember I mentioned, was that people often rely on memorised phrases or they have, so, you know, they memorise particular phrases or they rehearse some answers and they try and incorporate these in the exam. Obviously, the examiner can hear these a mile away, that they're not natural, it's not natural communication. So, looking at many essays over the, I don't know, was it 11 years since I've been on italki, was it 2014? 11 years? Yeah, dear.

So, the number of essays that I've looked at in that time, I don't know if it's in the thousands, but it's in the hundreds, for sure. And there's certain things, I mean, it isn't just me, all other italki teachers who specialise in IELTS and examiners will tell you the same thing, okay. It's something that we've all noticed over the years.

So, we're going to look at phrases to avoid, okay. So, this is one of the biggest traps, as in the

speaking section, candidates fall back on memorised phrases and expressions in the same way for the speaking. They can actually lower your score in writing test too.

So, if you're aiming for band seven or above, keep listening. So, first, why certain phrases hurt your score? First, let's be clear, as I explained before from speaking section, the IELTS writing test, it's not about big words or fancy expressions. It's about expressing original ideas in your own voice using natural academic English.

But the problem, many test takers rely on memorised sentences. For example, and this is a particularly egregious one. So, for the outline sentence, right.

So, what some people do, they have this, they have a scope sentence at the start, you know, something like, in the contemporary era, the issue of blah blah blah is a controversial topic and highly debated or some similar kind you don't need it. All that you need to do is simply restate the topic. According to some, so and so, so and so, I agree because blah blah blah.

That's it. If you want to see some specific examples, check out my YouTube channel. I've got about 400 videos, well 600 videos, maybe 400 for IELTS writing.

I'm not entirely sure, but I think it's, yeah, 600 videos now on, mostly on writing stuff, OET IELTS. Anyway, links in my profile, wherever you're listening. So, what was I saying? Yeah, yeah.

So, they have a scope sentence, in the contemporary era, the issue of so and so is a controversial, hotly debated topic. Recognising the validity of both arguments, I endorse the latter perspective. Somebody actually sent me that last week.

Recognising the validity of both arguments, I endorse the latter perspective. What does that even mean? So, saying I agree, I disagree in my view, etc. Or something like, what's another one? Another good one.

Yeah, you know, this essay will discuss both sides and give a conclusion. In this essay, both perspectives will be analysed, leading to a conclusion. Anyway, something similar, right? So, that's a waste of, you know, I'm not going to go into references, but the author of the IELTS, you know, Pauline Cullen.

Check out her work. Check out her book. She does actually say that.

IELTS layers, advantage. Everybody says it. Don't use these scope sentences in the contemporary era.

Don't use this essay. We'll consider both perspectives and discuss the view. Don't do it.

Simply restate the topic, answer a question. Okay, so, you've got stuff like, this essay will discuss both sides in the modern era, technology, the crux of the matter is. So, these phrases are overused.

They don't show critical thinking. Examiners see them all the time and they're trained to spot this. They can spot memorised templates.

The same in the speaking, which is why you all get a 6 or 5.5 because they know you've memorised this. They know it. So, that can hurt your lexical resource and coherence.

So, let's take a look at some phrases, the most common ones that you must definitely avoid. This

essay will discuss, right, why not? Because it doesn't tell the examiner anything about your opinion. What you can do instead, write a thesis.

Although remote work increases productivity, it can also lead to social isolation. Right, you know, so, I agree because, so, instead of saying this essay will discuss both views and come to a reasoned conclusion, you say, in my view, although remote work increases productivity, it can also lead to social isolation. So, that outline sentence, the examiner knows what the essay is talking about.

When you've got stuff like, in the modern era, since the dawn of, since the dawn of time, people keep on writing that. Irrelevant, it's too general, irrelevant, all you need to do, paraphrase the topic clearly, specifically. Some people say this, I agree because, I disagree because.

Or you might get, it is an undeniable fact. Actually, somebody sent me that yesterday, one of my students, you know, I did say something about it to her, but she actually said something, it was like, it's undeniably something, let me just have a look, could she say it? It's undeniable that someone, so I said, what, really? Are you sure? So, no one can deny this? Can you prove that? That no one can deny this? Can you prove that? Obviously not. So, this is why you don't use it.

It's meaningless, it doesn't have any, you know. So, better phrases, you could say, according to some, it has been argued, it is widely believed, many people believe, something such as that. Instead of sounding like saying it is an undeniable fact, which you cannot prove.

Obviously, if you've got a lot of informal, vague language, like kids, stuff, things, many people, children, items, all be specific. At the end of the day, in a nutshell, idioms and conversational phrases don't belong in academic writing. Simply, in conclusion, that's all that you should ever use, in conclusion.

And another one, yeah, the aforementioned... this one just made me laugh, right? The aforementioned arguments offer insights into vindications for the impression that... what a load of tripe. So, it's better to be clear than clever. Don't be too clever.

You have to treat the examiner, the reader, as if we are an idiot. You need to explain things, don't just say, you know, stuff. Don't just make a statement, simple assertion is not an essay.

So, you know, using idioms is good in a speaking test. At the end of the day, kids these days, you know, if you're talking to the examiner. But if you're writing, you must be formal and academic.

So, if you think of it like this, and this is key, speaking should be natural conversational, which is what I've been teaching people for the last two or three weeks now. Because they will come in, I'd ask them questions and they'd be very, very formal. It wouldn't be natural.

I said, you know, is that how you would speak to a friend in a discussion, a conversation? And they all said no. So, why do you do it with the examiner? So, natural conversation for speaking, but for writing must be clear, specific and formal. So, how to practise this? Well, for a challenge, right? So, if you take a recent essay, essay question, maybe from Cambridge 20 or 19, try writing an introduction without using any of the phrases I mentioned.

If your sentence starts with a nowadays, stop, try again. If it says, I will discuss both views in this essay, I will do this and that, scrap it, rewrite it with your real opinion. Actually, if you go to my YouTube channel, if you can, I've got something like 101 IELTS introductions.

So, what I did there, this was in association with IELTS 9 PRO, run by my friend in Iran. So, what

we were doing, we would give a topic and I would comment on people's introductions. So, it's about 100 videos, just about that.

So, you can see where I explain how to paraphrase. So, check out those if you want to get some ideas. So, to sum up, in conclusion, avoid memorised phrases.

Don't use slang, idioms, be specific, original and clear. Writing for IELTS isn't about sounding advanced. What that means is about communicating your ideas naturally like an educated person would.

OK? Anyway, so, if you enjoyed this, don't forget to follow the podcast, share it around. If you need some more ideas, head over to theenglishnative.com. Check out my YouTube channel, The English Native. If you're listening on italki, me and I have got about 30-odd episodes now and I'm going to try and do an episode a week, every weekend, if possible.

Well,

I'm going to definitely try to do an episode every Saturday, you know, try and get the content more regular. Anyway, I hope that helps. So, write smart, stay sharp and don't forget, keep it native.