

We Love IELTS

All you need for IELTS Success podcast

Series 2: Episode 1: How to manage IELTS test anxiety

Speakers:

Host: Liz

IELTS expert: Pete Jones

00:00

LIZ: Hello, and welcome to the new series of our We Love IELTS podcast. I'm Liz, I'm part of the We Love IELTS team in Cambridge, and I'm delighted to be back with you with a new series featuring some great episodes to really help you prepare for your IELTS test.

00:24

If you haven't listened to our first series, go and find them today wherever you listen to your podcasts and take a listen. All you need to do is search 'All you need for IELTS Success'.

00:33

Over the next few weeks, we'll be joined by experts in the world of IELTS with information about preparing for the IELTS test, so make sure to subscribe so you don't miss out. We know preparing for IELTS can be tough, which is why we're here to help you.

00:50

Today, I'm delighted to be joined by IELTS expert Pete Jones. We know a lot of you will be feeling worried about your IELTS test. So in this episode, we'd like to offer you some advice on how to manage this anxiety. I've been really looking forward to this episode for so long as I know it'll be a real benefit to anyone preparing for the test.

01:08

Before we start just some quick background about Pete for those who don't know him. Pete is from Auckland, New Zealand and has over 15 years' experience of helping test takers prepare for the IELTS test and helping teachers teach IELTS. So let's get started. Pete, it's only natural for people to feel anxious before the test, isn't it?

01:29

PETE: Yes, it is. IELTS is a really high stakes test. And I know for most of you listening today, the results are going to be really, really important. The results might help you move on to the next stage of your life, whether that's going to university, living or working in a new country, or getting a new job, you may be worried about whether you can get the score you need, or whether you have enough time to prepare in order to get the score that you need.



Some of you may have taken an IELTS test before and not have got the score that you wanted, or not have performed at your best. And this may be impacting on how anxious you are feeling about the next test, or even previous test experiences at school if they didn't end positively for you, then this may also be impacting on how on how anxious you feel about IELTS or even the expectations of someone else, a parent, for example, who doesn't really understand what it means to get a certain band score in IELTS, maybe expecting you to get that score.

02:49

So all of these things may be adding up to make you feel anxious, or there might be one or two of them that are causing you to feel more nervous. It's important to realize that feeling anxious can be a positive thing. It can keep you motivated and focused, which you really need to be to reach your goal. It's only when it starts having negative effects that you need to find ways to manage it. And this isn't just on test day itself. This is during your preparation, or even after your test day while you're waiting for your results.

03:29

LIZ: So given that anxiety about the test can be both positive and negative, how do you know if the anxiety you're feeling is a good thing or not? How do you know if it's affecting you negatively?

03:48

PETE: I think it's important to look for signs that you're too anxious. And there are many. And just a few of the most obvious ones are that you're constantly worried about your IELTS test. Even when you're not preparing for the test, you're still thinking about it and worried about it. You might have negative thoughts while studying or low self-belief. You might be saying things like, what if I don't get the score I need or I can't do this my English isn't good enough. This negative self-talk is a sign of being too anxious.

04:32

You might experience big changes or sudden changes in your mood, you know, while doing some preparation activities. You might feel positive one minute because you're doing quite well and then feel really negative. If you come up against a bit of a problem, you might have difficulty remembering information that you know that you've learned before, studied I'm sure everyone can relate to this. You know, you might forget vocabulary that you knew before, your motivation might disappear, you might feel really unmotivated at times. Or even have some physical symptoms like sweating, trembling, a sick feeling. I've certainly experienced some of these myself in tests that I've taken, difficulty recalling information and then worrying that this is going to happen in the test. That's something I've certainly experienced. But the good news is, there are things you can do about feeling too anxious, both during your preparation and during the test itself.

05:51

LIZ: I've experienced some of those symptoms myself in the build up to a test, can you give us some examples of what students can do to reduce their anxiety about the test?



PETE: There are lots of things you can do to reduce your anxiety about the test. If you're preparing right now, one of the most important things you can do is become familiar with the format of the test. The more you know about the IELTS test, the more confident you'll feel that you know what to expect, and that you won't be surprised on test day. Having strategies for the different parts of the test and having strategies for dealing with problems is another way to feel less anxious. For example, you can decide right now which of the two writing tasks you feel most confident with and plan to start with that one during your test. If you start with the writing task you're more confident with you're more likely to finish it in the recommended time, which means you won't be under added pressure doing the other task.

07:08

If, for example, you have a problem when you're writing and you've forgotten the word that you need to express what you want to say, having a strategy for dealing with this is going to help you reduce your anxiety. So one strategy would be to just leave a gap and continue writing. And then if the word comes to you, you can go back and fill the gap. Or if you get to the end of your piece of writing and you still don't know the word, then you can go back and put in a more basic word with a more general meaning or maybe rewrite the sentence in another way.

07:55

But knowing what you're going to do in these different situations, increases your confidence. And this is something you can work out during your preparation. It's also important to consider your well-being you know, making time to get some exercise, whether that's a walk or something more physical, eating and sleeping well doing other activities you enjoy. Are you listening to music reading, meeting friends? Now, I know you may think this is taking time away from your preparation but if it's what you need to do to reduce your anxiety, then when you do have time to prepare, you're going to be more efficient, and your preparation is going to be more useful.

08:49

LIZ: That's so important. I know I find having timeout heading out for a walk or run just about half an hour really helps you and I'm feeling anxious about something. You mentioned one of the signs of anxiety is having negative thoughts come into your head. Is there anything you can do to get rid of these?

09:12

PETE: If you're about to take your test and you're having your negative thoughts you need to replace these negative thoughts with positive ones. So if you hear yourself saying, I'm not going to get the score I need I can't do this, you need to consciously replace this with positive ones like you know, I've prepared, I know what to expect in the test, I've done well in the practice tests I've done. I can do this.

09:51

In the test itself, you need to focus on what you're doing and not what other people around you are doing. If you're taking the paper based test, for example, just because someone has turned over a page of the reading test doesn't mean that you're behind time. It might mean that they are deciding to start on



a different text. Or it might mean that they didn't know any of the answers, and they're looking for an easier place to start.

10:29

And talking about time, managing your time is something very important in the test in order to manage your anxiety, so being aware of the recommended times in the writing test, and the reading test, and sticking to those times is really important so that you don't have added time pressure by not having long enough to complete one of the writing tasks or one of the reading passages. When you finish the test, rather than thinking, you know, if it didn't go well, rather than thinking, Oh, I haven't got the score I need, I think it's going to help you if you say okay, well, that didn't go well, that didn't go as well as I wanted. If I don't get the score I need, what can I do differently next time?

11:32

All of these things are going to help you reduce your anxiety, and make the most of your preparation time and enable you to perform better in the test.

11:51

LIZ: There are some great tips there. Thanks, Pete. So do you have any final words of encouragement or advice for our listeners?

11:59

PETE: I think it's really important to understand what's making you most anxious, and turn this into something positive. Taking time as an example, if you're worried about having or not having enough time to prepare, and not having enough time to get to the level you need to be at then look at your schedule, and create more time to prepare, or change the date of your test. If you have to. This will you take the pressure away.

12:34

It's also really important to take some action. You know, listen to this podcast, it's unlikely to make any difference to how anxious you feel unless you take some action. Even a small step could be enough to start a more positive process. You know right now, if you're familiar with the Writing test, decide which task you're more confident with and make a decision that you're going to start with that task when you take the test. If you're not familiar with the writing tasks, make that your focus now and look at some look at some examples on the We Love IELTS website. Remember, understanding the format of the test is one of the most important things you can do to manage your anxiety.

13:22

Learning isn't about knowing what to do, it's about changing your behavior. So when this podcast finishes, take some action.

13:32

LIZ: Some great suggestions from Pete there, thank you very much.



We hope you found this podcast useful and will go into your IELTS test feeling much more confident. What action will you take after listening to today's podcast?

13:45

If you liked the episode, don't forget to subscribe. More information about preparing for IELTS can be found on our website, welveielts.org. You can also find us on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, where we'll be sharing even more useful information and advice.

14:00

If you have something you'd like us to discuss on our podcast do get in touch with us on social we'd love to hear your suggestions. Next week we have IELTS teachers, Emma Cosgrave and Liz Marqueiro on the podcast discussing common mistakes students make in the IELTS test. Make sure to tune in it should be a good one.

14:16

And finally, all that's left to say is good luck to those of you taking your test in the next few days.

