IELTS Podcast

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Useful synonyms to achieve a higher band in IELTS.

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Ben: Hello there, IELTS students. Welcome to IELTS Podcast. You no longer have to worry, fret, or panic about IELTS because we are here to guide you through this test of jungle. Enjoy these IELTS tutorials and if you need more help or want to access the famous online course, you can visit us at ieltspodcast.com.

INTRODUCTION

Ellen: Hi there, IELTS Podcast listeners. My name is Ellen and today, I want to talk to you about **synonyms for use in IELTS**. More specifically, we're going to talk about synonyms that are useful in Writing Task 2. Now, why are synonyms important? Well, because as you most likely know, lexical resource is one-quarter of your score for writing and so it's very important to have a wide range and to have a good solid base of lexical resources to use for your writing.

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Also, you don't want to keep using the same words over and over again in your writing. It becomes monotonous. It becomes repetitive and it most certainly will not help your score. So, since we mentioned band descriptors a little bit, why don't we start with the band descriptors? Specifically, I want to start and look at band 9 and then talk a little bit about band 8 and band 7 in terms of lexical resource.

So, band 9 tells us that the test taker uses a wide range of vocabulary with very natural and sophisticated control of lexical features. Band 8 says that the test taker uses a wide range of vocabulary fluently and flexibly to convey precise meanings. Also, the person can skillfully use uncommon lexical items even though there may be occasional inaccuracies. Band 7 tells us that the test taker uses a sufficient range of vocabulary with some flexibility and precision and also uses less common lexical items with some awareness of style and collocation.

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So, as you can see, band 9 and 8 refers to a wide range of vocabulary. Band 9 says that the use of this wide range is very natural and sophisticated. Band 8 tells us that it's fluent and flexible and in band 7, we hear about a sufficient range of vocabulary which allows some flexibility and some precision. I think one of my favorite words here and I think when I say favorite I mean I think it's the most telling is this word precise.

This is really very important when we're writing; this idea of precision. That the word you are using expresses exactly the meaning that you want it to express and so we're going to think about some of these key words like fluent, like flexible, and like precision. So, this is some of the information I want you to think about and what we're going to talk about today.

Now, some of you who may have heard some of my other podcasts here may have heard me talk about some words that I never want to see in IELTS. One of those words is the word good. Why? Because well, there are two reasons: 1) it's very elementary in terms of language ability. Good is

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probably one of the first adjectives anyone learns when they are learning English and so it really doesn't speak to any high level and it's just very basic English knowledge, but what's more important and what's more relevant for our purposes here today is that it's not particularly precise. Is it?

So, if you're going to talk about say for example, measures that would help solve pollution, it's really not precise to say there are several good measures that could be taken to solve the problem of pollution. A good measure doesn't really tell us very much, does it? So, there are other words we can use instead of good that are much more descriptive and much more precise.

Now, in the sentence that I just used as an example, I think for me personally, the word that fits best in this context is actually effective. So, it's much better to say that there are many effective measures to help tackle pollution or something along those lines. So, it's actually not a synonym of good at all although many IELTS test takers might be tempted to use the word good. Here

though, the word effective measures not only is it much more precise but it actually creates a lovely collocation and that's another thing that I want to talk about today while we're talking about synonyms.

It's very easy to look on the internet or to look online at a thesaurus and find countless words that are synonyms for the word good. These lists will be useless to you unless you know how to use them appropriately and one of the things you need to use words appropriately is to understand their collocations. So, if you're not familiar with what a collocation is, it's basically two or possibly more, but usually we talk about two words that go together and we're used to hearing them together, not for any particular grammatical reason but simply over time and through use, we become very used to hearing these words used together.

So, with that said, it is not enough just to learn lists and lists of words that are synonyms for words like good, bad, big, small, but it is really, really critical that you understand how to use

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them and which words they work with best. We'll talk a little bit more about that as we continue with this podcast.

So, as I already mentioned, one of the words that I never like to see in IELTS writing is the word bad and the reason is precisely what I said before about the word good. It's the same thing. It's just so basic and it doesn't really tell us a lot. So, take for example, if you have an essay about the environment and about things that are harmful for the environment, you might be tempted to say fossil fuels are bad for the environment or if you have an essay talking about advertisements aimed at children.

You might want to say something like advertisements aimed at children are bad. Advertisements aimed at children are bad. You can see that okay, there is meaning that comes across and we understand what you're trying to say. You're conveying what you're trying to say, but it's not particularly precise and it's certainly not less common and it's certainly not fluent or

sophisticated as we saw is expected of us at a band 9, but there's really very little precision here or higher-level language. So, what you could say instead of bad is you could say fossil fuels are damaging for the environment.

You could say that advertisements aimed at children are harmful and it's far more appropriate higher-level language for sure higher-level than bad and also far more precise, but here it's also really important to understand collocation because if you're looking at a list of synonyms, you might find that a synonym for bad is evil. Now, could you say that fossil fuels are evil for the environment? No. It just doesn't make sense. It doesn't collocate like this.

Or you might find in a list atrocious is a synonym for bad, but would it be appropriate to say advertisements aimed at children are atrocious? No. Again, it really doesn't work. So, not only

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must you learn different words that are synonyms for some of these ideas but that's only half the battle. You also need to learn how to use them appropriately.

So, you may wonder how to do this. Well, the internet is a wonderful resource. So, one thing you can do and one thing that I recommend to students that they do is they find out how to use words in a sentence. So, you could literally type into your favorite search engine atrocious in a sentence and then it will give you examples of how atrocious is used.

Another thing you can do is write atrocious collocation and there will be sites, reputable sites that will show you what words are used with atrocious and this is really important because otherwise you're just learning words and not how they're used and that's only really half of the picture.

Another word that students often need to find good synonyms for is the word big. Again, very low-level and not precise in any sense. So, what could you do instead of big? Well again, here context is everything. Where are you using the word big? How are you using it? So, these are all really important questions that must be answered first.

Let's say, for example, you have to write an essay about pollution in cities. If you want to describe those cities and you want to use a word instead of big, could you use the word substantial? Well, substantial is a synonym for big as is mammoth. Mammoth is also a synonym for big, but you certainly wouldn't use it in front of the word city or cities. So, what could you use in this context?

Well, you could talk about large cities. You could talk about cosmopolitan cities. You could talk about metropolitan cities even. So, these are some of the words that we frequently use with cities. Again, all you have to do is essentially do a little research on the internet if you don't have

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the appropriate books in order to find what words work here. The words mammoth, for example, or substantial are wonderful in many other contexts, but not here.

So, where could you use a word like substantial? If you were talking about substantial funds; substantial funds are needed from the government in order to create the infrastructure necessary for green energy. So, in instances like this. So, yes. Learn the words. Learn them. Learn what they mean, but just as important is learning how they're used.

Another word that comes up a lot in IELTS essays is the word important. Now, importance certainly isn't as basic as a word like big, good, or bad, but it's still kind of elementary language here and you may want to use something, again, less common, more precise. So, again here collocations though are important. So, if you want to say that pollution is an important issue in

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our days, you could certainly say that, but you may want to say that it is a critical issue in our day and that really has a nicer ring to it. It feels a little less common, a little more precise.

However, another synonym for important is essential. Could you say that pollution is an essential problem in our days? No, definitely not. Essential is used far differently. So, you could use a word like essential instead of important in a context like this. It is essential that governments fund the infrastructure necessary to make green energy a reality. So, you could say it is important, it is essential, it is critical. All of these words would work quite nicely in a sentence like this, but you can see that in the previous example, essential just doesn't cut it.

Now, sometimes-- I think I mentioned this before-- we want to use synonyms, not necessarily to show higher-level but just so that we're not so repetitive and this happens a lot when we're writing essays that have to do with children. So, children in schools, advertisements aimed at

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children, what have you. So, a lot of times IELTS test takers really go to great lengths to find synonyms for the word children.

Now, one word that you should never use in place of children in an essay is the word kids. Kids is informal and it really has absolutely no place in a Task 2 essay or in a Task 1 for General IELTS. So, avoid it at all costs. You could only probably use it in writing for General Task 1 if it's an informal letter. Otherwise, forget it.

So, if you don't want to keep using the word children, children, children, I understand that it gets really, really monotonous, what can you use instead? I have seen students write a million different things. One word that I know a lot of students like to use instead of children is the word offspring and okay, it's all right, but really what it does is it makes us think of animal babies. For

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example, the deer was found in the wood with two of its offspring. So, we kind of use this word like this, not so often to talk about human children.

So, what could you use instead? Well again, it depends on the context. One word you could use is youth. So, the youth of the country or the youth of today, for example. Another word you could use is young, so the young. The young prefer to watch videos on the internet rather than read the news in the newspapers, so something like this.

A couple of other words you could use instead are minors or juveniles, all right? These are all synonyms that you can use to avoid using children. Sometimes I see students try to use the word adolescents or toddlers. Now, adolescents and toddlers are in fact children. So, they are people under the age of 18. However, they both refer to rather specific age groups. So, if the essay that you're writing on is just talking about children in general, it may be inappropriate to try to use the

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word toddlers unless we're talking about a child that is 1 or 2 or up to 3 and adolescents are any children going through the period of adolescence, so puberty 12, 13, 14, 15, around there.

So, you have to be careful with these words. So, yes, in a sense we can use it as a synonym, but again, it doesn't carry exactly the same meaning. It's far more specific and it may not fit your purpose in a particular essay.

Now, another set of words that I want to talk about deals with expressions; idiomatic expressions. Idiomatic expressions are things you probably want to avoid in your Task 2 simply because they don't have an academic feel. They sound rather informal. So, you would really want to avoid words like this or expressions like this and I prefer more academic-sounding words. So, what kinds of words am I talking about?

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Well, I'm talking about words like do. So, you don't want to say, for example, it is important to do a good job which sounds really rather low-level. Instead you would want to say it is important to perform well where doing good job is synonymous with perform well or you could say that fossil fuel does damage to our environment. Well, rather than saying that it does damage, you could say it causes damage or it is harmful. These are some other synonyms you could use instead of using the word do here.

Another really popular one is do research. Scientists have done research on this issue and have found xyz. Well, rather than to do research, you can say conduct research or they have published studies which is also great, but to do something, to do research in this case, really just sounds rather basic and low-level. So, you can replace it with another expression or another word and really it just kind of boosts up the language in the sentence.

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Another word which is kind of lower-level is make. It's really found very often in, again, these idiomatic expressions. So, for example, you could say that-- again, going back to this idea of pollution, you could say governments must make great efforts to solve the problems of pollution. Well, rather than saying must make great effort, you could say that solutions for the problem of pollution demand considerable effort on the part of our governments or you could say in order to overcome the problems of pollution, great efforts must be devoted to this issue. So, to devote great effort or that a problem demands considerable effort. It really sounds much more fluent and much more sophisticated-- again, to use those words from the band descriptors-- than make an effort.

Another word that we often find with a lot of these idiomatic expressions is the word get. It's so easy to use and it's used in so many different contexts like get money, get a degree, get fame. So, we hear it in a lot of contexts and so it's an easy word to kind of pull out of our bag of lexical

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resources, but again, it's probably not going to give the impression you want the examiner to get of your writing. So, it's easy depending on what you're trying to say to find a great synonym for get that carries the meaning with a lot greater sophistication.

So, for example, if you wanted to say get money, you could say earn money or get a degree, again, you earn your degree or you obtain your degree. These have a much more advanced sound to them both. So, you could also say that people acquire riches or acquire wealth rather than saying that they get rich or maybe they gain fame rather than get famous. So, a couple of these little changes with just a little higher-level vocabulary will really make all the difference in your writing.

So, I hope this information today was helpful. I hope you now have some tools to not only improve your vocabulary, but really kind of meaningfully improve your vocabulary by

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understand words that work together, words that can replace other words, and the contexts that different words belong in.

So, I wish you all the best of luck with your IELTS preparation. The team here at ieltspodcast.com is always here by your side to help whether it's through our online course or with our essay corrections or to answer any questions you have about the exams. So, definitely seek us out and we would love to hear from you. So, best of luck to everyone.

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