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## WEEK 1: How the IELTS test is produced

### TRANSCRIPT:

**Jonathon:** Hello everyone, my name is Jonathon. I'm a teacher, and I've been helping students study for the IELTS exam for about 10 years now. Now, you might already know a bit about the exam, for example that there are four separate papers: Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking. And you may already know that IELTS actually stands for International English Language Testing System. But what perhaps you don't know is how the texts and questions that go into the exam papers are actually made, and what happens before you, the students, actually take the real test. So that's what I want to tell you about now.

The IELTS exam is jointly owned by three partners: the British Council, which is based in London, but has offices all over the world, IDP (an education organisation), and a department of Cambridge University called Cambridge English Language Assessment. *They're* the ones who basically write and check the questions in the tests, and I want to explain more about what that work actually involves.

Writing teams work in various countries: the UK has one team, Australia has another... These writers are then asked, usually twice a year, to produce a number of tasks for the paper they are working on, Writing, Reading or whichever. They need to follow detailed guidelines to ensure that the topic they write about is suitable, that the text is exactly the length that it's supposed to be, and so on.

Once the writers have sent the material they've written in to Cambridge, a 'pre-editing' meeting is held. This will involve the assessment manager (a member of staff at Cambridge) and also the person known as the chair, who is the team leader in charge of that particular paper. They discuss all the texts that have been written and sent in, and check that these and the answers are all clear. If everything is satisfactory, then they will produce feedback in writing for the writer, asking for certain changes to be made. This is what happens in most cases. But there are occasions when there are too many problems with a task, and if it's difficult to see how it could be made to work, then the task actually gets rejected, although the writer will always be told exactly why this was the case.

The writers then rewrite and resend their questions, and then a second meeting is held – the editing meeting. This has the purpose of getting the material ready, editing it, so it can be used in actual tests, and also it's a way of making sure that anyone who writes the test gets regular training.

This is the time when the questions are used with actual students, but they're not the 'real' IELTS tests yet. The tests are just being checked, and this is called pre-testing. The tests are all printed; the listening tests are recorded with professional actors. And then groups of students take the test, so they get useful exam practice. And Cambridge get data they can use to check the test, and measure how difficult it actually is, and see which questions still need changing.

All the questions that have gone through these stages are then stored – this is known as 'banking', and Cambridge English Language Assessment use software which they created themselves to record information about the task, such as the topic, the gender and accent in Listening tasks, and so on.

Now, when a student takes an IELTS test, the final score they get is a 'band', like 6 point 5 or 7, up to a maximum of 9. But the statistics people need to decide how many correct answers will get which IELTS band score, because that will be slightly different for each test. The information from the pre-tests is useful for this, in a process that's known as standards fixing.

So you can see that a lot of work goes into making and checking the IELTS tests, because it's really important that every test is fair and accurate. Anyway, I wish you all the best for preparing for your own IELTS tests.