

Be a Realistic Walker During the Dark Time: A Mirror Dream

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Introduction

Jianqiao Chen's journey into an English-language post-secondary institution began with the International English Language Testing System, otherwise known as the IELTS exam. In this story, written for WRS 101 class, Jianqiao takes the readers on his personal quest as he prepares to take the exam. Part realistic struggles, part dream, the paper shows how hard work, self-reflection and regular practice yield positive results.

Keywords: dream, IELTS, mirror, pressure, writing practice



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² *Writing across the University of Alberta* (WAUA) publishes undergraduate student writing from writing studies courses and courses focused on writing studies practices and scholarship at the University of Alberta. You can find WAUA online at <https://writingacrossuofa.ca/>.

Two years ago, I was still in China. During that time, I was doing my university studies. To get into a good foreign university, I kept on studying English to get a perfect International English Language Testing System (IELTS) score. This was my first time learning about writing in English around the world, and I took a serious attitude about writing.

When I was a kid, I hated language learning because I thought it was boring and useless. Sleeping in classes, getting bad scores on exams—those things always happened. So, when I wanted to get perfect IELTS grades for a good foreign university, I felt helpless. To be honest, a fear came out of my mind during that time. I just couldn't stop thinking, "I'll never write an essay which can be called good; what am I gonna do?"

I felt lost, and, unfortunately, countless and repetitive assignments were making this feeling even worse. I was under huge pressure for the IELTS exam. "I just can't believe what I am doing! English is too hard for me!" I said millions of times to myself. Sometimes, I even tried to find some reasons for my failures. "I was born in a small town in a small province where there are few people who are good at English. So, it's reasonable that I suck at English, isn't it?"

The IELTS exam is a marathon, which means that time is a challenge. People need to be quick and correct when they are doing the exam, which means they feel huge pressure. Well, I was doing my practice exams again and again every day, due to the asking of my teacher. Her idea was practice makes perfect. However, I just felt much more stressed than before. There were a couple of times that I wished I could give up.

For the four parts of the IELTS exam (reading, listening, writing, and speaking), reading and listening were the most stressful for me. Time was limited, and I had to make decisions as fast as I could. Luckily, my writing was not bad (when compared with the other three parts of IELTS). Honestly, my writing skill level just met the standard. My whole essay was messy and terrible on practice exams. Actually, when I think about it, my Chinese writing had the same problem. "What? Does that mean I do not get a chance to fix it? No way!" I said. Although the situation seemed worse than ever, I still didn't want to give up. I really hoped to go abroad. But my past told me to give it up.

One day, when I was doing my daily assignment of the practice exam, again, I tried to do my best on the questions. It was already midnight. I wished to be perfect. But it seemed impossible. I still wanted to continue. The last score of my written essay was still 5.0 out of 9; I hated this terrible score. However, my eyes couldn't stop from closing, and I fell asleep. In a dream, I saw an old man standing in front of a flock of sheep, and the fence was broken. Lots

of wolves came to catch food. The number of sheep was dropping rapidly. I was worried, and I asked the old man, “Why didn’t you do anything to fix your fence?”

He said, “Who are you? How dare you say that? You don’t know what happened at all! At first, it was a small piece broken in my fence, so I didn’t care. Then, the broken piece became bigger and bigger. I can’t earn thousands of dollars anymore! I won’t waste any more time on it!”

Hearing about that, I got very angry and turned my face away. Damn it, I was gonna help you; why don’t you just listen and try one time? Is it the point to earn lots of money right now? Shouldn’t you aim at how to keep your money right now, OLD MAN? I turned around and tried to argue with him, but he had disappeared. In front of me was a lake now. I looked around, and suddenly, I found the old man was on the surface of the lake. I was so surprised. The weirder thing was he looked as surprised as me. I was scared and stepped back; he also stepped back. Then I realized the old man was my reflection on the surface of water. But why?

I looked at the surface of the lake, and I understood. Oh, oh, oh, I shouldn’t be angry with you, because I am you. I am doing the same thing as you! Exactly! How dare me? That’s right: I can’t face the failure of my English, even if it meets the deadline. Just like you can’t face your broken fence. At first, the broken part of your fence was too small to notice; when I was a child, I also didn’t care about my English learning. Similarly, you want to give up just because you can’t become a rich man. But isn’t it kind of crazy for a shepherd to become a rich man? What you need to do is to try to be realistic—to fix your fence and save sheep as much as you can. Same for me—do I really need to master English? No, I just need to pass the exam! Try to fix the problems you can do right now instead of thinking about your past troubles. It’s useless, and it keeps adding stress on you.

I started to check my writing problems carefully, first my grammar and second my structure. I thought I had lots of work to do. All of them were totally fresh for me. It was huge work for me. Unluckily, I didn’t get too much time to prepare. My deadline was coming soon. But I just kept writing. I wrote an essay and edited it, fixing the problems I could see, again and again. I tried to improve, bit by bit, piece by piece. The second thing is that I lowered my expectations about my scores. I used to aim for 6.5 on the IELTS written scores, and I changed it to 5.5 or 6.0. Because of what I did, some surprises happened. I felt much more relaxed than before, and I got the motivation and power to deal with those tons of assignments. I was looking forward to it. HAHA, who is the best now? Finally, the day of the IELTS exam came, and I successfully finished it. After days of waiting, when I saw my grades, I knew it would work. Well, I just met my goal: no more, no less. Don’t dream too big; instead, move step by step. It’s what we do during hard times. Thanks to the old man!

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