Unfortunately, SATs and ACTs are not the only tests that you will have to take. As an international student, you will also have to take tests to demonstrate your English language proficiency, how good your English language skills are. There are many English language tests available, but the two tests that are accepted by most U.S. colleges and universities are the TOEFL and the IELTS. So we're going to focus on them during this discussion. For the most part, everything that we said about the SATs and the ACTs is the same for the English language tests. One big difference with English language tests is that they're only testing one thing, your English language abilities. Although it's not just your English, but really, your academic English. Academic English skills are those necessary to read textbooks, listen to lectures, write research papers, and even present to a class. Generally, they're the skills needed to succeed in college. Your English might be good, but how good is your academic English? Universities have set school requirements based on the level of English skills required to succeed at that university. Schools understand the tests and they use them as a tool. So, if a school requires a 100 on the TOEFL, then you know that your English has to be really good to keep up with the level of work at that specific school. You might also notice that schools have section score requirements. A school that requires a lot of reading as part of their academic studies might have a higher reading section score requirement. Sometimes you'll even see these score requirements by major. A major like nursing, for instance, that requires students to communicate and interact with patients might have a higher speaking score requirement, or maybe even a higher listening score requirement. Nonetheless, these tests are a measure of your language ability, not your academic ability. The two are related. Your language ability will, of course, affect your academic ability, but they are definitely not the same thing. Another big difference is that while schools have a range for SAT and ACT scores, they often have minimum scores for TOEFL and IELTS. If a school says they want 100 on the TOEFL, then they want 100 on the TOEFL. While not true at all schools, missing the TOEFL requirement by one or two points might actually lead to a denial. Some schools will list two scores, a minimum score and an average score. In these cases, you always want to aim for the average score. You'll notice that the average score can sometimes be significantly higher than the minimum score. To give yourself the best chance of admission, you want to reach that higher average score instead of just meeting that minimum requirement. For the most part, schools don't care how high your scores are, as long as you meet the requirements. This is especially true at schools with high score requirements. For example, if a school requires 100 on the TOEFL and you score a 105, you really don't need to take the test again. Scoring a 110 on a retest is not going to significantly improve your chances for admission. So it's better to use that time, money, and effort to improve another part of your application instead. For schools with lower score requirements, remember to check the minimum verse the average. If a school requires a 79 on the TOEFL and you have an 80, it meets the requirement, but you could probably help your chances of admission by increasing to an 85 or a 90. Another big difference is what kind of proof of English language proficiency a school will accept. While schools largely do not care if you submit the SAT or the ACT, some schools do care which English test you submit. Some schools accept the TOEFL or the IELTS. Some schools prefer one test over the other, or even only accept one test or the other. Some schools will even waive these tests requirements based on other qualifications in your application. The most important thing you can do is understand a school's English requirements so that you can fulfill them and also, so that you don't do extra work to, to
fulfill them. Otherwise, there are a lot of similarities with the other tests. When submitting your English test scores, the scores must be sent to the university directly from the testing agency. Photo copies or scanned copies of your score report will often not be accepted to meet application requirements because they’re not official. Now when it comes to timing, again, you first have to decide which test to take. And again, I have seen students do great on the TOEFL and not so great on IELTS. And I've seen students do great on the IELTS and not so great on the TOEFL. Both tests are similar, but they are not the same. Both tests have sections for reading, writing, listening, and speaking. But one big difference is that the speaking section of the IELTS is actually done face-to-face with a person, while the speaking section on the TOEFL is done through a headset on a computer. Like any test, the style of the questions and the pace of the tests are very different. Once again, I would encourage you to take practice tests for both exams to see which one you prefer, which one clicks with you and your English skills as well as your style of testing. If the practice tests are not enough, take each of the real tests once before committing your preparation to one test or the other. Now take out your planning calendar, look at your deadlines, and think about your current English language abilities. Where are you starting and where do you need to get to? How long will it take you to get there? Can you get there before your application deadlines? Remember that with English language testing, you want to give yourself some time in between the tests to actually improve your skills. Taking a test every month, for instance, might not give you enough time between tests to improve your language abilities. Mark some potential dates on your calendar, and again, if you can, start early so that you can leave space in between each testing. Remember, these tests are all about your language skills. If your skills are good, your scores will be good too. Focus on your skills and your scores will come. [BLANK_AUDIO]