As requested, here are my tips (for IELTS CLB 9/10 aspirants) that I learned during my journey from IELTS overall band score 6.5 to 8.5.

1st attempt 6.5, 6, 6, 6.5 = 6.5

2nd attempt 7.5, 7.5, 6.5, 7.5 = 7.5

3rd attempt 8, 7.5, 7.5, 7 = 7.5

4th attempt 8.5, 7, 7, 7 = 7.5

5th attempt 7.5, 7.5, 6.5, 7.5 = 7.5 (I blew it!)

Getting the arsenal ready for war.

6th attempt 9, 9, 7, 8 = 8.5

(May 2019 to Feb 2020)

Just very quickly, in my opinion, IELTS is more of a skill than proficiency exam. Honestly, I don’t speak at band 8 level but scored 8 in speaking. I am not very good at listening but scored 9. So, your understanding about the exam is more important than your fluency. I have known few native speakers who sit for the IELTS exam time and time again because they have flawed understanding of the exam. Don’t believe when someone says ‘’just practice’’. I suggest you to stop doing YouTube listening tests immediately. Most of these practice papers on YouTube do not have IELTS standard and when you sit for the real IELTS exam, you are all confused because you do not know where the answers are. Doing the IELTS Cambridge practice paper twice is better than doing 10 random YouTube listening tests. Download/purchase IELTS Cambridge books, understand the standard of their questions and see how IELTS examiners fit in complex questions in different situations. Most of the time, real IELTS exam papers are easier than the tests in IELTS Cambridge books. Don’t go to the next practice paper even if you scored 38-39/40 at home. Try to understand why you failed to answer those 1-2 questions. Play the audio conversation again and try to answer the same question.

In your listening test, make the best use of time you are given before the conversation/lecture starts. Do not read options when the speaker is speaking. First read and underline questions (main point/theme only) and then if you have time, underline options given. Underlining only questions prepares you for the conversation better even if you don’t have time to read possible answers given for the questions. I always scored 20/20 in the sections 1, 4 and found the sections 2, 3 very confusing. So, for these sections, I read the question and close my eyes. I comprehend the summary, open my eyes, and choose an answer before the speaker jumps to the next topic. In sections 2 and 3, the speaker will almost talk about all the options you see for the questions. So, don’t choose the answer because you heard something that’s similar to answer choices given.

In my opinion, reading is the easiest of all modules in IELTS. As the last section always has maximum questions, except for that particular section, I always read questions first. Every time I was 100% sure that I would score 8.5 or 9, I scored 7.5 or less. In my last attempt, I wrote all my answers in capital letters instead of small letters.

Writing is my pain area. Instead of mugging up complex vocabulary and sentences, I learned all tenses, prepositions, coordinating conjunctions and subordinate conjunctions. I included them wherever possible in the essays and letters. I suggest you to write task 2 first which is worth more marks. I also practiced writing using IELTS writing answer sheets. This will help you to maintain word count properly and also boosts your confidence. In my last attempt, I used very complex vocabulary ex: espouse, overhaul, grave, ailments, vanity, engender, hanker etc., I only scored 7. So, structure of the essay matters more.

Speaking: Feel confident. Don’t panic. Assume the examiner doesn’t know anything. Don’t prepare too much. Basically, all the cue card questions (at least 90% of the time) can be categorized into person, event, place, thing or activity. Prepare a short summary for each of these categories - fit in this summary during your speech along with your extra answers as per the questions you get. But, be very careful if you are taking this tip. If you speak flowery language in cue card section and do not do well in other sections, the examiner would understand that you are using prepared notes. Do not stop till they ask you to. Even if you do not know the answer, say something that is most relevant to the question. Part 1 questions are very predictable, you should prepare these answers well.