TOEFL Listening

Academic Talks

Test #4

In this task, you will listen to an academic talk. You will then read four questions and choose the correct answer.

Talk 1: Art History

What is the main topic of the talk?

- ◯ The role of religion in shaping medieval art
- ◯ The development of Gothic architecture
- ◯ The transition from medieval to Renaissance art
- ◯ The techniques used by medieval artists

Why does the speaker mention that many people were illiterate?

- ◯ To explain why religious texts were simplified
- ◯ To show how art functioned as a teaching tool
- ◯ To describe the education system of the time
- ◯ To compare people's interest in books and art

According to the talk, how were important figures typically depicted in medieval art?

- ◯ With realistic proportions and perspective
- ◯ With brighter colors than the background
- ◯ Larger than other figures to show importance
- ◯ Surrounded by religious symbols and icons

What can be inferred about Gothic cathedrals?

- ◯ They were intended to inspire religious feelings.
- ◯ They were designed mainly for practical purposes.
- ◯ They represented religious sacrifice and atonement.
- ◯ They marked the decline of religious influence in art.

Talk 2: Astronomy

What is the main topic of the talk?

- ◯ The process by which stars form
- ◯ The stages in the life cycle of stars
- ◯ How stars end their lives
- ◯ The structure of galaxies

According to the talk, what happens when a small star runs out of hydrogen?

- ◯ It immediately becomes a black hole.
- ◯ It explodes as a supernova.
- ◯ It stops producing energy completely.
- ◯ It expands into a red giant.

Why does the speaker mention supernovas?

- ◯ To describe the violent death of massive stars
- ◯ To compare different types of galaxies
- ◯ To explain how small stars lose energy
- ◯ To show how bigger stars maintain stability

What can be inferred about heavy elements?

- ◯ They are destroyed during a supernova.
- ◯ They only exist in large stars.
- ◯ They are created and spread by dying stars.
- ◯ They prevent stars from collapsing.

Talk 1: Medieval Art

Listen to a talk in an art-history class.

During the medieval period in Europe, religion played a central role in shaping artistic expression. Most art produced at this time was closely tied to the Christian Church, which was the primary patron of the arts. Because many people were illiterate, art served as a visual means of teaching religious stories and values. Paintings, sculptures, and stained-glass windows often depicted scenes from the Bible, such as the life of Christ or the lives of saints.

Medieval artists were less concerned with realism and more focused on conveying spiritual meaning. Figures were often stylized, with little attention to proportion or perspective. For example, important religious figures were typically shown larger than others to emphasize their significance. This approach reflected the belief that the spiritual world was more important than the physical one.

Architecture also reflected religious influence. Gothic cathedrals, with their high ceilings and large stained-glass windows, were designed to inspire awe and direct the viewer's thoughts toward heaven. The use of light in these structures symbolized divine presence, reinforcing religious themes.

Over time, however, artistic styles began to change. Toward the end of the medieval period, artists gradually showed more interest in realism and the natural world, paving the way for the developments of the Renaissance. Still, the strong connection between religion and art during the medieval period left a lasting impact on Western artistic traditions.

Talk 2: How Stars Die

Listen to a talk in an astronomy class.

Today we'll discuss how stars die, a process that depends largely on their mass. Stars spend most of their lives in a stable phase, where nuclear fusion in their cores produces energy by converting hydrogen into helium. However, once a star runs out of hydrogen fuel, its life begins to change dramatically.

For smaller stars, like our Sun, the next stage is expansion into a red giant. As the core contracts and heats up, the outer layers expand and cool. Eventually, the star sheds these outer layers, creating a glowing shell of gas known as a planetary nebula. What remains at the center is a dense core called a white dwarf, which slowly cools over time.

More massive stars experience a much more violent end. After exhausting their nuclear fuel, their cores collapse under gravity, leading to a massive explosion known as a supernova. This explosion can briefly outshine entire galaxies and scatter heavy elements into space. These elements later become part of new stars, planets, and even living organisms.

In some cases, the collapsed core becomes an extremely dense object. If the remaining mass is relatively small, it forms a neutron star. If the mass is large enough, gravity compresses it even further into a black hole, from which not even light can escape.

So, while stars may die, their material is recycled, playing a crucial role in the ongoing evolution of the universe.

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