

ISE III

Sample Independent listening task – Dolphin communication

Examiner rubric

You're going to hear part of a radio programme about dolphins. You will hear the talk twice. The first time, just listen. Then I'll ask you to tell me generally what the speaker is talking about. Are you ready?

The task will play once.

Can you tell me in one or two sentences what the speaker was talking about?

Give the candidate some blank notepaper.

Now listen to the talk again. This time make some notes as you listen, if you want to. Then I'll ask you to tell me if the speaker believes that dolphins have something that can be called a culture and why. Are you ready?

The task will play once.

Now tell me if the speaker believes that dolphins have something that can be called a culture and why. You have one minute to talk.

Audio script

Many scientists are now interested in whether or not dolphins can be said to have a culture. The answer depends partly on how culture is defined. Culture is generally seen as shared behaviours which are transmitted across generations. To be regarded as cultural behaviours, they need to be taught – or 'socially transmitted'. For a long time scientists have agreed that dolphins have a complicated form of communication, which some people regard as language – a clue that dolphins do transmit behaviour. Their language consists of various noises, including whistles and clicks, and also involves body language – that is, physical movements that convey meaning.

Bottlenosed dolphins are often seen imitating other members of their group, suggesting that some social learning does take place. Recently there has been some excitement about a particular behaviour among a group of dolphins in Australia. One way for dolphins to find food is to forage on the seabed, that is, they use their noses to dig up fish hiding under the sand. But this can be quite uncomfortable for the dolphins because it hurts their noses. Some Australian dolphins were observed carefully selecting pieces of sponge which fitted on to their noses. They used the sponge to protect their nose when they were foraging. This is known as sponging. Sponging is practised mainly by female dolphins, and the daughters of those sponging dolphins are often also spongers. Scientists therefore believe that they have taught their daughters how to use sponges.

Unfortunately, due to the fact that dolphins spend so much time deep underwater, it is difficult to actually observe this teaching going on. Other behaviours that suggest that dolphins might learn from each other by watching and copying are the various ways in which they play. One particular game involves blowing a ring of bubbles and swimming through it. Dolphins who are cared for by humans seem to learn new games very quickly and it seems most likely that they learn the new games through imitating one another, so games provide more evidence of the social transmission of behaviour. These examples of socially transmitted behaviour support the idea that dolphins do indeed have some kind of culture.

Answers

Main point/gist: Aspects of dolphin behaviour that have led to the suggestion they have a culture (any broadly similar formulation is acceptable).

The speaker believes that dolphins do have a culture because there is evidence that suggests that some dolphin behaviours are socially transmitted/taught/learned/acquired through imitation, for example:

- ▶ Language
- ▶ The sponging behaviours passed on from mothers to daughters
- ▶ Bubble blowing
- ▶ Games.