

ISE II

Sample Independent listening task – Wind turbines

Examiner rubric

You're going to hear a talk about renewable energy. 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 what reasons the speaker gives for and against the use of wind energy. Are you ready?

The task will play once.

Now tell me what reasons the speaker gives for and against the use of wind energy. You have one minute to talk.

Audio script

When it comes to investing in wind turbines to create electricity, there are various factors that need to be considered. Most obviously, the creation of wind energy is 'clean'. Unlike the use of coal or oil, generating energy from the wind doesn't produce pollutants or require harmful chemicals, and it's this factor which weighs most heavily with those worried about the future of our planet. Moreover, wind will never run out, unlike other natural, non-renewable resources. So it would seem to be a winner in at least two very significant areas.

There are those, however, who continue to argue against the use of wind turbines – but it has to be said their arguments tend to focus on much more detailed issues, and largely ignore the bigger overall picture. It's claimed, for example, that the blades of wind turbines can sometimes be dangerous to wildlife, particularly birds. This may be true, but it seems a small price to pay compared to using other means of power generation, which could end up destroying the habitats of those very same birds. In addition, the sound turbines create can, admittedly, be a problem for those nearby. Perhaps a more significant point, though, and certainly one often mentioned by those who object to turbines, is that it requires a lot of open land to set them up, and cutting down trees seems to defeat the green purpose.

Those who criticise wind energy point out that the wind doesn't always blow consistently. And that's certainly a drawback right now – turbines typically operate at only 30% capacity. If the weather isn't in your favour, you may end up without electricity. And when there is wind, well, severe storms or extremely high winds might damage turbines, especially when they're struck by lightning. As such weather already damages existing methods of power production, however, this line of attack seems to be without much merit.

Ultimately, wind is free. In suitable geographical locations, it's there for the taking. While start-up costs are still off-putting for some, it's undeniable that the overall costs of producing wind energy have been dropping significantly in recent years, and as it gains popularity, it'll continue to become more affordable. In many countries, the costs of purchasing and installing turbines are subsidised by government schemes aimed to promote expansion. There are, no question, a number of problems associated with turbines which still require solutions – but in the longer view, the case for them appears beyond doubt.

Answers

If the candidate asks, the examiner may repeat the questions once.

Main point/gist: Wind energy may be a good way to reduce damage to the environment, but there are drawbacks. Overall, there is a strong case for using them (any broadly similar formulation is acceptable).

Arguments for	Arguments against
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Clean energy – no harmful chemicals or pollutants involved/produced ▶ Will never run out ▶ Doesn't destroy habitats as other power generation means do ▶ Essentially free/any associated costs falling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Turbines dangerous to wildlife, especially birds ▶ Noisy ▶ Require large area of open land – may lead to cutting down of trees ▶ Supply of wind not consistent – turbines operating at 30% capacity ▶ Bad weather can damage turbines