ISE III

Sample Independent listening task – Routine

Examiner rubric

You're going to hear part of a radio programme about books. 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 the different ways the speaker evaluates the need for routine in our lives and whether you think he comes to a conclusion. Are you ready?

The task will play once.

Now tell me the different ways the speaker evaluates the need for routine in our lives and whether you think he comes to a conclusion. You have one minute to talk.

Audio script

In my recent book, I discuss the subject of routine and the effects it has on our lives. Actually, my original idea was to look at the working methods of successful creative people like writers and artists to see if there were any helpful lessons to be drawn. The more people I examined, the clearer it became that there was one thing the vast majority of them had in common: they had a regular working routine and stuck to it strictly, even obsessively. Their habits and routines often ended up being more like rituals. To take one example, the composer Beethoven apparently used to start each day with a cup of strong coffee made with exactly 60 coffee beans, which he insisted on counting out personally. And that's by no means the oddest ritual I discovered. Obviously we don't all have to behave like that, but it does appear that routine is something most of us need.

Most humans function better when they have some kind of structure to their lives. In fact, without routines for day-to-day activities, nothing much would get done. Transport wouldn't run on time, schools and workplaces would be in a permanent state of chaos, and so on. So, society as a whole seems to favour, or even require, people with regular lifestyles. But there's a growing body of research suggesting that too much routine is bad for personal well-being, and it's this aspect that much of the book is concerned with. Breaking up your routine and doing something new, it appears, increases your happiness. It's not just a case of getting bored: routine also increases our sense of time passing by too quickly. When nothing new is happening, we're not so conscious of events and simply don't notice the days and weeks slipping away.

There's also an interesting connection between time and memory, or more exactly two kinds of connection. Firstly, a lot of what people accept as naturally increasing forgetfulness as they get older is actually more to do with their lives becoming predictable. It's not so much that they forget things that have happened but that they didn't really notice them in the first place because they'd become so automatic. The other thing that strikes a chord with me as I get older is the explanation for why childhood memories seem so vivid. When you're young, everything is new and your brain is working overtime to take everything in, so your impressions of events are much more memorable. What we need to do is to try and recapture that sense of newness by disrupting routines and actively seeking out new experiences.

Answers

Main point/gist: Routine is beneficial to some extent. But it is important to break routine and try new things for happiness and memory (any broadly similar formulation is acceptable).

▌ Successful people known to have routine, for example, Beethoven
▌ Not always healthy though – can become like a ritual
▌ Some routine is vital – transport, schools etc
▌ Also, people seem to need some routine to give structure to lives
▌ Society needs people to have routine
▌ But, doing new things is important for happiness/well-being – it means time doesn't seem to pass so quickly
▌ Also, newness important for forming and maintaining memory – memory loss in older age can be due to predictability

Conclusion: The speaker appears to conclude that a degree of routine is important for individuals and society as a whole but that it is very important to avoid becoming too predictable.