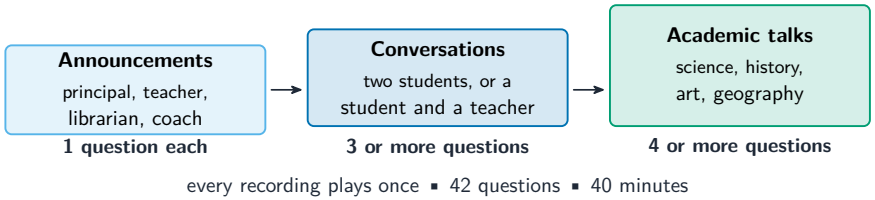
Listening Comprehension

TOEFL Junior

What this topic covers

Listening Comprehension is the first Standard section: **42 questions in 40 minutes**. You hear every recording **once**, then answer questions with four options. The talks come from three parts of school life that ETS calls domains : social and interpersonal, school navigational, and academic.



Three kinds of talk, from short to long

- **Announcements**: a principal, teacher, librarian or coach speaks to students. One question each.
- **Conversations**: two students, or a student and a teacher, talk about school life. Three or more questions each.
- **Academic talks**: a short lesson in science, history, art or geography. Four or more questions each.
- A narrator introduces each recording: *"Listen to a teacher talking to her class."* That one line already tells you who, where and why.
- Memory hook: **news, chat, lesson**. Each needs a slightly different kind of listening.

Announcements: purpose first, then the new plan

The first sentence usually tells you the purpose : *"I have some news about…"*, *"Before you go, a quick reminder…"*. The question is often *What is the announcement mainly about?* or *What should students do?*

- Listen for instructions: *please, remember, bring, don't.*
- Listen for change words: *instead, not … but …, from now on, was going to … but.* When a plan changes, the answer is almost always the **new** plan.
- The correct option rarely uses the speaker's exact words. It is a paraphrase : *"bring your projects to the cafeteria"* becomes *"take their work to a different room"*.

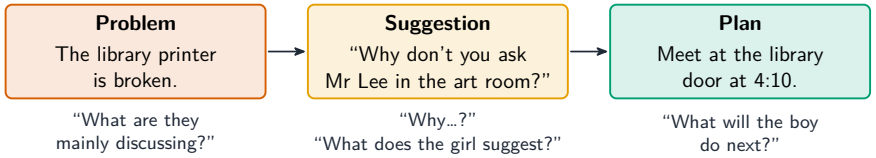
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Example. "The science fair was going to be in the gym, but the floor is being repaired, so it will be in the cafeteria instead. Please bring your projects before eight thirty on Wednesday." *What should students do?* → Take their projects to the cafeteria before 8:30 on Wednesday. The gym is the old plan.

Conversations: gist, problem, plan and feelings

The first question is often *What are the speakers mainly discussing?* That asks for the gist , which is usually clear in the first two or three lines.

Most school conversations follow one shape:

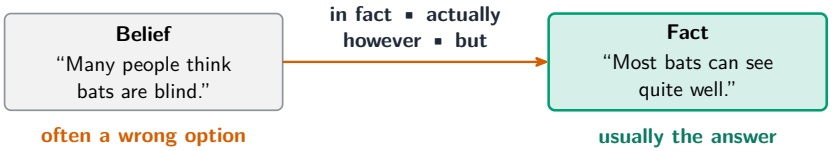


Problem → suggestion → plan: Why? questions point at the middle, Next? questions at the end

- *Why…?* questions: listen for *because, so* and suggestions such as *Why don't you…?*
- *What will the boy do next?*: the plan is near the end.
- Feeling questions: speakers rarely say *I'm annoyed.* You infer from tone and small words: *"Again? That's the third time."* → annoyed. *"Perfect!"* → pleased. *"Great, another test,"* said with a sigh → not happy at all.
- Keep the two speakers apart. A wrong option often gives one speaker's plan to the other.

Academic talks: belief, then fact

Teachers often start with a popular belief and then correct it. The fact after the contrast word is what the question asks about.



After a contrast signal comes the idea to remember

- The topic comes early: *"Today let's look at…"*, *"We've talked before about…"*. The main-topic answer must cover the **whole** talk, not one example.

- Process talks use order words: *first, second, then, finally.* Cause-and-effect talks use *because, so, that's why.*
- Questions also ask **why** the teacher mentions something: to give an example, to compare, or to correct a belief.

Notes and signal words

You may write notes in the test book while you listen. Short notes keep the plan of a long talk.

Topic: emperor penguins survive winter (3 ways)	
main points	details
1 feathers + fat	several layers, tightly packed
2 huddle	outside → middle, all take turns
3 save energy	move little; dads 2 months, no food

Two columns: main points on the left, one detail each on the right

Signal	Job	Example
first, second, finally	Next point in a list	*Second, they huddle.*
for example, such as	Example	*for example, the Gobi Desert*
but, however, in fact, actually	Contrast or correction	*In fact, they sleep in the water.*
so, that's why, as a result	Result	*That's why the forest gets drier.*
here's the clever part, surprisingly	Key idea coming	*Here's the clever part: they change places.*

- Use arrows (→ causes), numbers instead of words, and the first letters of long words.
- △ Never write full sentences. While you write one, the speaker says the next point.

The four trap shapes

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Question: Why do emperor penguins huddle?

Correct
same meaning, new words
"They take turns in the warm middle."

Echo
same words, changed meaning
"The middle penguins stay outside."

True but not asked
in the talk, answers another question
"Their feathers are tightly packed."

Too big
always, all, every: more than was said
"All penguins huddle all year."

Match the meaning of the question, not the words of the talk

- **Echo**: repeats words you heard but changes the meaning. *"The fathers keep their feet warm with eggs."*
- **True but not asked**: a real fact from the talk that answers a different question.
- **Too big**: adds *always, all, every* when the speaker said *often* or *some.*
- **Old plan**: in announcements, the plan the speaker changed.

Watch out: traps for Chinese speakers

- △ **Waiting to hear a word you know.** If you translate in your head word by word, you fall behind. Listen for the plan of the talk: topic, points, result.
- △ **Choosing the option with the most familiar words.** That is the echo trap. Prefer the option that **means** what you heard.
- △ **Missing weak forms.** In fast speech *can* sounds like *kn*, *to* like *tə*, *and* like *n.* Practise with recordings, not only with transcripts.
- △ **Going back.** You cannot replay. If you miss an answer, guess, mark it and listen to the next recording. A missed point costs one question; worrying costs three.

Try it

Read each transcript once, as if you heard it, then answer without looking back. Cover the answers first.

Announcement. *"Hi everyone, this is Coach Ruiz. Basketball practice is usually on Tuesday, but this week the gym is being used for exams. So we'll practise outside on the field on Thursday instead. Bring water and a cap, because it'll be sunny."*

1. What is the announcement mainly about? A) New exam dates B) A change to basketball practice C) Rules for the gym D) How to stay safe in the sun
2. Where will practice be this week? A) In the gym B) In a classroom C) On the field D) At another school

Conversation. *Girl: "Did you finish the history poster?" Boy: "Not yet. I can't*

find a picture of the old bridge. The library computers are all booked." Girl: "My uncle took photos of the bridge last year. I can ask him tonight." Boy: "That would be great! Then I can finish it tomorrow morning."

1. What is the boy's problem? A) He lost the poster B) He cannot find a picture he needs C) He doesn't like history D) The library is closed
2. What will the girl do tonight? A) Finish the poster B) Book a library computer C) Ask her uncle for photos D) Visit the bridge

Academic talk. *"Many people think camels store water in their humps. Actually, a camel's hump is mostly fat. When food is hard to find, the camel's body uses the fat for energy. So how do camels go without water for days? Their bodies lose very little water: they hardly sweat, and their kidneys save water."*

1. What does the teacher correct? A) Camels live in deserts B) Camels store water in their humps C) Camels need energy D) Camels sweat a lot
2. Why can camels go without water for days, according to the talk? A) They drink a lot at once B) Their humps hold water C) Their bodies lose very little water D) They eat wet plants

Answers. 1 **B**: the change from Tuesday in the gym to Thursday on the field. 2 **C**: *outside on the field … instead*; the gym is the old plan. 3 **B**: *I can't find a picture of the old bridge.* D is an echo: the library is open, but the computers are booked. 4 **C**. 5 **B**: the belief before *Actually.* 6 **C**. B is the belief the teacher corrected.

Check yourself

Answer first, then read the explanation.

1. How many times do you hear each recording? – **Once.** Answer, then get ready for the next one.
2. A speaker changes a plan. Which plan is usually the answer? – **The new one**, after *instead* or *but*.
3. A teacher says, "Many people think…, but in fact…". Which part is tested? – **The part after "in fact"**: the correction.
4. An option uses three words you heard. Is it right? – **Check the meaning.** It may be the echo trap.
5. How should your notes look? – **Short**: a topic line, one line per main point, arrows and numbers.

Vocabulary card meanings

domains: Areas of life or study that a test takes its topics from. narrator: The voice that introduces a recording and says who is speaking. purpose: The reason why someone says or does something. paraphrase: Saying the same idea again in different words. gist: The main idea of a text or talk, without the details. infer: To work something out from clues when it is not said directly.

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