

TOEFL Speaking Task 6 Sample Question and Answer

Text of lecture

It's always been one of those big sci-fi questions – is there life on Mars, or rather, could Mars ever support life? Well, it is generally assumed that in order to have life, you need water. Well, ever since the 1960s we've been sending out probes to Mars to try to... ascertain if there is water on Mars, or if there ever has been, and in the 1990s, 1996 to be precise, the U.S. Mars Global Surveyor was launched. The surveyor remains in orbit around Mars to this day, and has some rather nifty equipment on board, including a high-resolution camera, a sensor which can identify soil and rocks, and a laser that can take measurements and map the planet's surface.

So what have we learnt from the Global surveyor? Well, we've found out that yes, there was once water on Mars, and in great quantities too. I'm talking oceans, seas, lakes... - much like earth today. They have deduced this because of the shapes of the mountains and valleys on Mars – they are the same shape as those formations on earth that we know were created by water. In fact, some analysts are suggesting that there is still water on Mars to this day, but deep down, in holes 100 to 400 meters below the surface.

This idea created quite a stir, as you can imagine, and a number of scientists have tried to either prove... or refute this theory, using other evidence available to us. Some Chinese scientists, for example, have been studying a meteor that was collected from Antarctica in 2001, but they've found no evidence of water there, but that's not to say there isn't any water on Mars, as Mars and meteorites are separate entities entirely. Another source of evidence we have is images from astronomical telescopes, but we can't see much of the planet from this angle – just the poles, and they are covered in ice caps – dry ice, not H₂O – so that doesn't help us one way or the other.

Text of sample answer

Sample answer:

The professor tells us that there was once water on Mars. There was a similar amount of water on the planet as there is on earth now. We know this because of data retrieved by a probe which is in orbit around Mars. The probe was launched in 1996, and has been sending data back to Earth ever since then. It has taken photographs and measured the shape of the land, so that maps can be drawn. From this information, scientists have been able to deduce that there was water there, because the rock formations on Mars are similar to the formation on Earth that were formed by water. Some of those scientists believe that there is water on Mars even now, but there doesn't seem to be any evidence for this. Some studies have been done on a meteorite which landed on Earth in 2001, but there was no sign of any water there, although that doesn't mean there isn't any water on Mars, because Mars and this

meteorite are not the same thing. We can also get pictures from astronomical telescopes, but they don't really help us ascertain whether there is water on Mars or not either, because from this angle, we can only see the poles of Mars, and these are covered in dry ice. So, according to the lecture, we still don't know whether or not there is currently water on Mars.