



General Certificate of Education

German 1661 *Specification*

GER2T Speaking

Report on the Examination *2010 examination - January series*

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Unit 2

General comments

Candidates and teacher-examiners coped very well with the format of the examination; in most cases the various guidelines for the administration of the tests were observed including the careful completion of STMS forms and the labelling of tapes, CDs or USB sticks. Teachers should be thanked for their professional and conscientious approach in carrying out the demanding task of conducting the speaking tests.

Quality of Recordings

Examiners expressed some disappointment at the fact that the majority of centres were still recording the tests on audio cassettes rather than embracing new technology. It must be said that using and often re-using old tapes increases the chance of poor recording quality, a crucial point for the marking of centre-conducted tests. All examiners commented on the superior quality of CD and USB recordings they had received from centres.

Centres are reminded that AQA has produced the AQA Audio Recorder based on *Audacity* to assist them in making recordings of speaking tests as sound files. The AQA Audio Recorder and a comprehensive User Guide can be downloaded from AQA's website using the following link: http://web.aqa.org.uk/mfl_audio_recorder

Please note there is an underscore (_) between *audio* and *recorder*

Most teachers adhered to the prescribed timings, but there were again a number of tests which unduly overran or which were far too short. It was very pleasing to see that only very few teachers failed to comply with the rules regarding the coverage of the four topic areas and inadvertently either missed out one topic all together and/or discussed one topic twice. For those centres which did not adhere to the prescribed timings, the following guidance is provided as a reminder.

The test itself should last a total of 15 minutes and examiners stop marking at the end of 15 minutes. Within this time the "very best practice" test will have kept to the following timings:

Part 1 Discussion of the Stimulus Card

5 minutes (approximate split 2½ for printed questions and 2½ minutes for discussion)

Part 2 Conversation

- Discussion of candidate's nominated topic: 3 minutes 20 seconds
- Discussion of second topic: 3 minutes 20 seconds
- Discussion of third topic: 3 minutes 20 seconds.

Obviously it is difficult to achieve exactly this allocation of time and so, for example, a Part 2 that was divided 4 minutes, 3 minutes and 3 minutes across the 3 topics would be perfectly acceptable. However, if any of the Part 2 topics is discussed for less than two minutes, the Interaction mark is reduced by one band. This is why it is important to keep the Part 1 discussion to only 5 minutes since any over-run at this stage can have an adverse effect on the time spent on the last topic before the total 15 minutes are over and marking stops.

As in previous January series, examiners encountered comparatively few candidates from the very low range of ability. The majority of candidates were well-prepared and spoke with pleasing fluency and confidence often expressing their genuine ideas and interests. But there were also many candidates who relied too heavily on pre-learnt material and produced monologue-like answers without regard to the actual question that had been put to them. Whilst

it is acknowledged that most candidates including those at the higher band of ability will prepare thoroughly for the examination by memorising phrases or entire responses in order to use them at appropriate times during the test it is also important that all candidates are given regular opportunities to react in a spontaneous way and thus raise their chances of a higher score for interaction. To ensure that candidates are given this opportunity teachers are reminded that they need to follow up on candidates' responses whenever possible in order to elicit the spontaneous development of ideas. Some teachers still worked from a pre-set list of questions and used them regardless of what the candidate said. It should also be reiterated that the suggested list of questions issued by AQA is meant to give examiners some ideas as to what could be a suitable starter question into a particular aspect of the sub-topic under discussion. In a few cases, teachers used these lists extensively and almost exclusively with every candidate.

The question of what form of address to use with candidates again caused problems for some teacher-examiners. As has been pointed out in previous reports there is no need to artificially change the form of address for the examination; using 'du' consistently is by far better than inadvertently and regularly switching between the formal and the informal address as happened in a good number of centres. It is also sensible to adapt the printed questions on the stimulus card if 'du' is to be used throughout the test.

Part 1: Response to Stimulus Card

Achieving a good balance of timing between the two sections within Part 1 still posed some problems because too many candidates did not give sufficiently developed answers to the printed questions and thereby failed to gain higher marks for the first section. Even where a question requires mainly factual information contained in the stimulus candidates need to seek ways of developing this information whether by referring to other elements on the card such as pictures, captions etc, by speculating on possible reasons, by adding their own experiences and opinions or by developing any other point relevant to the question.

Ideally, the ensuing discussion should arise seamlessly from this initial section. It can and should pick up on points made by the candidate in response to the five questions and explore any relevant issues suggested by the stimulus before proceeding to other relevant aspects of the sub-topic. It is therefore not a recommended practice for the teacher-examiner to start this section with '*So und jetzt noch ein paar andere Fragen*' as if the discussion had no link to the stimulus material. Some teachers limited the scope of the candidates' performances by immediately moving away from the stimulus material into a more or less rehearsed question and answer sequence within the given sub-topic. This practice denies candidates the chance to develop further ideas and opinions they had expressed in their earlier responses to the printed questions.

Although most teachers kept the discussion within the sub-topic on the card there were some instances where teachers strayed into other sub-topics.

Karte A: Jeden Tag im Stress

This was a frequent choice and on the whole handled well. However, some candidates resorted to reading out verbatim the captions on the card rather than integrating them into their answers and developing the information. The right-hand picture could for example have served as a prompt for candidates to talk in more detail about the way many women – perhaps even the candidate's own mother - combine or struggle to combine work and family. Only few candidates took up this cue. Many also found it difficult to turn the information about health problems into simple sentences and instead read out the words on the card with often faltering pronunciation. The best discussions continued to explore stress in the modern world which often led quite naturally to burning issues like alcohol, drugs, obesity etc.

Karte B: Stundenlang vor der Glotze

This was a popular choice and was generally tackled well by candidates. Examiners observed that few students made a clear reference to the increased TV consumption between the years stated on the card. Also, many candidates ignored the fact that question 2 mentioned not just one section of the population and thus denied themselves the chance for a fuller answer. Question 3 often resulted in rather brief and unspecific explanations despite the help given on the card. Most candidates had clear ideas about the damaging effect of too much TV among small children, although the very best performances also took into account possible educational benefits from good TV programmes. During the general discussion teachers had to be careful to keep the exchange above GCSE level and to focus on general and current issues concerning television (which may occasionally have made some overlap between different sub-topics unavoidable e.g. online television).

Karte C: Was sind echte Freunde?

This was also a frequently chosen card about which most candidates had a lot to say. The nature of the material induced some candidates to simply lifting text from the card rather than assimilating it into their answers. Teachers who used a pre-set list of questions in the discussion tended to go over the same ground that had already been covered in the five questions (e.g. conflicts between friends) so that candidates often repeated previous answers but were given little or no opportunity to develop them.

Karte D: MP3-Spieler: Spaß oder Risiko?

This was used less frequently. Candidates often found it difficult to integrate the statistical information on the card into their prepared answers without reading out all the numerical information. Only few candidates clearly spelt out the causal link between loud music in MP3 players and loss of hearing which may reflect a lack of concern about the chance of becoming deaf among young people. Most candidates were however able to suggest relevant solutions – technical or educational - for minimising this risk. Teachers usually kept the subsequent discussion within the sub-topic of media but there were some incidents where a major part of the discussion was taken up with the candidate's own taste in music and thus the exchange strayed into the topic of 'Popular culture'.

Karte E: Wer bleibt zu Hause?

Candidates coped fairly well with this stimulus card but regularly failed to concentrate on the question why fathers do not often take paternity leave. Question 4 elicited quite mixed responses but most candidates spoke up for parents' right to financial help because of lost earnings. Nobody expressed surprise at the comparatively generous nature of current German legislation concerning the support of young families. All candidates had plenty to say in the general discussion. However, there was often a danger of losing the focus of the sub-topic as candidates were asked about relationships within their family rather than concentrating on marriage/partnerships.

Karte F: Rock und Pop – auf Deutsch?

This was a popular choice and usually dealt with well. Good candidates managed to illustrate the success of German groups by summarising the detailed information about prizes and tours without quoting too many names and numbers. Answers to question 3 about German texts could often have been more differentiated by picking up on **both** contrasting viewpoints seen on the card. Only very few wider discussions included less personal but nevertheless interesting aspects of popular music such as the importance of texts, their potential effect on young people, the predominance of English in popular music etc.

Part 2: Conversation

As mentioned above, the great majority of teacher-examiners covered three topics during the conversation and managed to allocate sufficient time for each. Very rare incidents where a topic was discussed for less than 2 minutes had to result in a limit to the marks for interaction. Examiners also observed that there were only isolated cases where the discussion of the nominated topic featured an initial presentation from the candidate rather than the required question and answer format.

Candidates seemed equally well prepared for each of the topic areas and in general appeared to benefit from discussing their nominated topic at the start of the conversation. As stated earlier, the examiner should aim at developing the conversation on the basis of what the candidate says; limiting the exchange to a pre-set and rehearsed list of questions is not in the candidate's best interest. It is therefore the preferable strategy to concentrate on one or perhaps two of the sub-topics within each topic area and to discuss these in more depth. Where teachers went through the entire range of sub-topics the result was usually a rather superficial discourse or in worst cases an unnatural form of 'interrogation'.

Overall knowledge of grammar and vocabulary:

All examiners commented favourably on candidates' eagerness to communicate. This includes candidates whose grammatical skills are less developed but who can nevertheless achieve a decent result by showing initiative and the willingness to 'have a go'. Very low marks on interaction were indeed quite rare. The majority of candidates also displayed a satisfactory or good standard of pronunciation. Weaknesses existed frequently with *z* and *v* consonants as well as differentiation between *ei* and *ie* vowels (e.g. *Schiedung/gescheiden* [sic]); mispronunciations of *Idee*, *doof* and *Familie* occurred with regularity.

Examiners reported that most candidates had a good range of vocabulary at their disposal. It was pleasing to notice that many more candidates used *Ernährung* rather than the inappropriate *Diät*; topic-specific words such as *herunterladen*, *süchtig*, *Verhältnis* were well-known but *Gesundheit/gesund* and *Übergewicht/übergewichtig* were still used wrongly by many candidates. There was also widespread uncertainty about the difference between *entspannend*, *entspannt* and *Entspannung* as well as *interessiert* and *Interesse*. Examiners remarked on the persistently high number of candidates who are unaware of the simple expression '*im Fernsehen*' and substitute it with the unacceptable '*im Fern*' or even '*auf dem Fern*'.

The level of grammatical proficiency was wide-ranging. Candidates at AS Level should be able to construct basic German sentences with confidence. Many candidates demonstrated that they had acquired secure grammatical knowledge and attempted more complex clauses regularly; less able candidates often succeeded in recalling memorised subordinate clauses accurately. However, persistent weaknesses in the areas of basic word order, subject/verb agreement and elementary adjective endings became apparent during many candidates' performances. Appropriate and accurate use of past tenses was also an area of concern. Despite these critical observations it was gratifying to see that instances where grammatical shortcomings caused communication to break down were quite rare and there were many tests which examiners described as a 'pleasure to listen to'.

Annual Teacher Support Meetings

Centres are reminded that language-specific Teacher Support Meetings for the Conduct of the Speaking Tests will be held in Autumn 2010 covering both Unit 2 and Unit 4. These meetings will be full day meetings and free of charge. Further details can be obtained from the Events page of the AQA website (www.aqa.org.uk) in due course.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.