



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
June 2011**

German

GER2T/V

(Specification 2660)

Unit 2: Speaking Test

Report on the Examination

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Unit 2

General comments

Once again, visiting examiners were made welcome and well looked after by staff at centres; they expressed satisfaction with the efficient organisation at most centres regarding accommodation, and the provision of invigilators and chaperones. The majority of centres ensured that completed STMS forms, students' prompt cards and session timetables reached the visiting examiner in good time. Most but not all centres who conducted their own tests also took great care to carry out the necessary administration. Examiners welcomed the fact that this year a much higher proportion of centre-conducted tests were recorded on digital media. Poor quality or inaudible recordings were therefore much rarer than in the past although in some cases volume levels on digital recordings were too low. It is very important that individual tracks on CDs and USB sticks are clearly identified and labelled with centre and student details (as described in the Instructions for the Conduct of the Examinations). Centres must also make sure that CDs are packed carefully in order to prevent damage in the post.

As in previous years, visiting examiners were pleased to observe that students appeared on the whole well-prepared for the speaking test and showed genuine enthusiasm for the language and their learning experience. There may be some anxiety among students that being tested by an external examiner will put them under extra stress as they expect to be faced with unpredicted questions. But since visiting examiners have to operate within the same range of topics and issues as teacher-examiners students of all levels of ability found that they were able to make use of material they had prepared while also demonstrating their ability to interact with spontaneity. Examiners who marked centre-conducted tests complimented many teachers on their examining technique which enabled students to produce their best. Teachers who regularly followed up students' responses and asked for examples, clarification and justification provided their students with a wider scope and an enhanced opportunity to access higher marks for interaction. There were unfortunately still some teacher-examiners who allowed even their more able students to deliver great chunks of clearly rehearsed material and who predominantly asked questions from a 'safe' list. It is incumbent on the teacher-examiner to introduce some unpredictability into the exchange so that the marker can make a fair assessment of the student's ability to react spontaneously.

More often than in previous years, concern was voiced by 2T/4T examiners about the unsatisfactory conduct of tests involving native speaker students. Frequently the timing of such tests was erratic and some teacher-examiners partly or entirely ignored requirements for the coverage of topics (discussion of topics outside the prescribed list for Unit 2; absence of one or both Cultural Topics). It must be stressed that native speakers are assessed according to the same principles and criteria as other students and that examiners are instructed to apply if necessary 'penalties' in the interaction and grammar categories (see Instructions for the Conduct of the Examinations). Regrettably, some native speakers failed to access a considerable number of marks as a result of bad conduct.

AS Unit 2

Part 1: Discussion of Stimulus Card

There were many good or excellent performances. Students often prepared relevant and extended answers during the 20 minutes preparation time. However, there was also a general tendency to keep answers to the first four questions rather brief and follow these with a very lengthy, fully scripted response to the last, usually more personal question. This approach is unlikely to attract the highest marks and students need to aim for a balanced response to the five questions. Some students used up so much time in answering the printed questions – either because of overlong answers or their slow pace of delivery - that not enough time was left for the ensuing discussion.

Stimulus cards try to elicit students' views and opinions but some questions on the card relate closely to the content of the card. Students are expected to refer to such information when formulating their answers. Examiners noted that a few students paid only scant attention to anything presented on the card so that their responses while valid in the wider scope of the sub-topic bore little relevance to the stimulus.

As laid down in the Instructions, the examiner should not ask any supplementary questions between the five printed questions except where it is necessary to introduce the subject of the stimulus more clearly after the student's first answer. A few teacher-examiners still ignored this rule and inserted additional questions between the printed ones. Their attention is drawn to the fact that responses to any such questions cannot be credited.

The purpose of the discussion is to develop some of the student's earlier answers and to further exploit the subject of the card as well as related aspects of the sub-topic. It was pleasing to see that many more teacher-examiners than in previous years followed this practice; but there were still some teachers who after the last printed question immediately proceeded to ask 'safe' and predictable questions on the general sub-topic with little or any reference to the content of the stimulus card. Where it was felt that students mainly produced pre-learnt material in the discussion examiners were not able to award high marks.

All six stimulus cards made very similar demands on students; their content and the questions on the card were generally well understood. The reason why Cards A and F were less frequently chosen probably lay in the fact that 'Media' was a popular choice for the Nominated Topic. Examiners observed that verbal and visual information (pictures, captions, titles) on the cards were often not exploited sufficiently and that many students again found it hard to summarise statistical information without reading out each number in a table. Similarly, students often lifted words or sentences from the card without adapting them into their own structures or explaining and developing them; they are reminded that answers of this kind will usually not gain much credit.

Card A - Zu viele Köche?

Hardly any students expressed amusement at some of the names of the cookery shows or surprise at the high number of such programmes on German television channels. Answers to question 3 were often disappointing as many students simply quoted the two criticisms from the card without making any further use of them. Well-conducted discussions explored diverse aspects of television and its influences on our lives but some students limited their contributions to talking about their own viewing habits and what they liked or disliked. Examiners had to be careful not to focus too much on the use of the computer although it is acknowledged that an overlap between sub-topics is sometimes unavoidable.

Card B - Leben nur mit Drogen?

This was generally handled well and seemed a subject on which students had strong feelings. Question 3 produced some enlightened answers beyond (or instead of) the one suggested on the card. The final question also elicited interesting responses as students expressed different opinions on the danger of the three substances. Further discussions of the issues relating to drug consumption among young people often arose naturally from the stimulus and it was interesting to hear that almost all students when asked condemned the idea of the legalisation of cannabis.

Card C – *Scheidung: die beste Lösung?*

This was a popular card and produced fairly successful performances. Many students had difficulties in explaining the statistical information succinctly despite the simple nature of the table of percentages; there was widespread uncertainty in the use of relevant vocabulary such as *ist gestiegen/viel höher als/ fast die Hälfte* etc. Many students failed to find distinctly different answers to questions 3 and 4 and very few referred to the question asked by the boy in the photograph (*Zu wem gehöre ich?*). The discussion usually revolved around the status of marriage in today's society and the roles within marriages or partnerships. Visiting examiners treated the potentially sensitive subject of the stimulus with care and discretion; yet many students who had themselves been affected by their parents' divorce or separation spoke frankly and thoughtfully about their own experiences.

Card D – *Musik für alle*

The content and questions on this frequently chosen card posed few problems. However, answers to the printed questions were often too brief and lacking in imagination. Many students used the captions under the pictures without embedding them into a real sentence and explaining them. English pronunciation of *Konzentration* and *Koordination* was almost universal. Responses to question 5 revealed that a high proportion of students were actively involved in music-making and played one or more instruments while the discussions mainly focused on students' musical preferences and occasionally on more profound aspects such as the role of lyrics or good and bad influences of music on young people.

Card E – *Lieblingsfach Sport?*

This card required students to study the information and the questions carefully in order to formulate answers that were relevant to the stimulus i.e. the role of sport in German schools and the attitude of German pupils. Many students misinterpreted the second question and talked about the general importance of sport. The opinions in the speech bubbles supplied ample material for answering question 3 and many students used them as the basis for appropriate and extended responses; but other students simply read the German students' opinions out in truncated phrases. There was a range of suggestions how sports lessons could be made more attractive and in the general discussion most students had plenty to say about sport and exercise in their own lives or in general terms. Examiners were surprised that *Sport treiben* was so little known and almost always supplanted by *Sport spielen*.

Card F – *Kinder und Werbung*

This card, although less frequently chosen, was generally handled well; even less able students were usually familiar with words like *Einfluss*, *beeinflussen* and *Wirkung*. Question 3 differentiated well between students: many students read out the *Neue Regeln* without real understanding and without adding anything of their own, others misunderstood the question as *'Was sollte man tun?'* which resulted in irrelevant answers; only able students rephrased the information in the box in a meaningful way and contributed their own views. In the discussion students talked freely about the merits, or otherwise, of advertising and often supported the need for further controls regarding products such as alcohol and junk food.

Part 2: Conversation

The conversation must comprise the three remaining topics which should be given fairly equal time. It was noticeable that many teacher-examiners devoted too much time (occasionally as much as 6 minutes) to the Nominated Topic at the start of the conversation. This is not in the student's interest as he/she needs to demonstrate knowledge of all the topic areas and the ability to talk about a range of subjects. Furthermore, since questions on the Nominated Topic tend to follow a more predictable path, students are more likely to produce

rehearsed responses and if the discussion of the first topic is too long this may reduce opportunities for spontaneous interaction during the conversation.

Prompt cards may be of help to students during the test and visiting examiners rely on them in order to conduct this part of the conversation appropriately. It is easier for the visiting examiner to focus the discussion on what the student has prepared if the headings on the prompt card are not too general (e.g. *Handys, das Internet* etc.). Teachers and students are reminded that prompt cards must be written in German, should be in bullet point rather than question format and must not contain any conjugated verbs.

Examiners of centre-conducted tests reported with satisfaction that in most centres the discussion of the Nominated Topic was conducted as a proper conversation rather than as a sequence of mini-presentations. However there were still a number of teachers who with questions like *Was kannst du mir darüber erzählen?* invited the students to produce pre-learned monologues and took only a minimal part in the discussion. Here as in the remaining conversation the examiner should aim to follow up the student's responses and it is therefore not possible or indeed desirable to address each bullet point on the prompt card in the time available. Examiners were pleased to notice that for the remaining conversation many teachers had heeded advice given in support meetings and discussed only one or two sub-topics within a topic area rather than covering each available sub-topic superficially.

The majority of students were well-prepared for all the topic areas and were willing or indeed eager to demonstrate their skills in communicating. Very low interaction marks were therefore rare. While grammatical accuracy can obviously have a positive influence on a student's ability to express ideas and to communicate without ambiguity there were many less able students who despite quite conspicuous gaps in grammatical knowledge were able to respond fully to the examiner's questions and thus achieve a respectable outcome.

Most students spoke with reasonable fluency and acceptable pronunciation. There were some impressive performances from students who had acquired a natural, almost authentic German accent and intonation; but many students seem to find bad habits regarding *ch*, *v* and *z* as well as consistent errors with *Umlaute* difficult to eradicate. Among the more conspicuous mispronunciations were *duuf* (for *doof*), *Jungenliche* (for *Jugendliche*) and *DeWeDe* (for *DVD*). Other frequent errors were *Älten* (for *Eltern*), *Inschtrument* and *gescheiden* as well as the aforementioned problem with *Fremdwörter* like *Konzentration*, *Organisation* etc.

Knowledge of grammar and vocabulary

The range of vocabulary used by students was fairly wide-ranging and enabled most students to maintain a meaningful conversation. Examiners expressed disappointment how widespread some fundamental errors in lexis still were such as the use of *bekommen* for 'to become', *stehen* for 'to stay' and the confusion between *Zeit* and *Mal*; surprisingly many students used *also* instead of *auch* and *schauen* instead of *zeigen*. There was no noticeable improvement in students' ability to distinguish between *jeder* and *jemand*, *seit* and *vor* or *eigene*, *einige* and *einzig*; phrases like *das nur Problem* were not exceptional and many students were very unsure about the use of the possessive pronouns *sein* and *ihr*. Errors in topic-specific vocabulary occurred in the use of *gewaltig* for *gewalttätig* and the frequent confusion between *entspannt* and *entspannend*. Examiners once again expressed irritation about the use of *im Fern* for *im Fernsehen* and remarked on the arrival of the 'new' verb 'affektieren'; phrases like *die Scheidung /die Werbung affektiert die Kinder* were frequently heard. As mentioned above, the verb *beeinflussen* was well-known but the related noun was often rendered as *die Beeinfluss*. Many students still show a general reluctance to use *gern* preferring instead clumsier anglicised versions such as *Ich mag/liebe (zu) einkaufen gehen*. Finally, dismay was expressed by some examiners about the widespread inability to use the verb *verstehen* accurately (*ich verstande das*).

Examiners reported that instances where communication broke down because of grammatical errors were relatively rare. Many students regularly used more complex structures including phrases with the subjunctives *wäre*, *hätte* or *würde* and relative clauses. The effort they had put into learning and applying ambitious structures needs to be acknowledged. *Dass* -, *weil* - and *wenn* - clauses were used with varying frequency by most students and often with correct word order. More care needs to be taken when the *dass*-conjunction is omitted to avoid errors like *Ich glaube, die Sendungen interessant sind/ Ich finde, das langweilig ist*. The structure *Meiner Meinung nach ist, dass....* was also frequently heard.

While giving credit to students' efforts to use a variety of linguistic structures examiners nevertheless voiced concern about many students' inability to apply the fundamental rules of German grammar with consistency. Students who handled complex clauses accurately often ignored verb/subject inversion in main clauses; there was still a widespread tendency to place the verb at the end after *aber/und/oder* and knowledge of correct verb endings and accurate past tenses was often insecure. Inaccurate use of modal verbs abounded (*wir kann, er muss zu gehen*) while students who attempted infinitive clauses were often not able to avoid English patterns of syntax (*es ist wichtig zu fit bleiben*). Examiners also noticed with surprise how many students had not developed any habit of adding adjectival endings (*ein schlecht Einfluss*).

Marks for grammatical knowledge reflect the overall performance during the 15 minutes test and take into account the student's consistent qualities and general grammatical awareness. Examiners praised the readiness to communicate shown by almost all students and while they listened to many AS students with good or even excellent linguistic skills they also expressed regret for not being able to award very high grammar marks more often.

Teacher-examiners should once again be thanked for undertaking the demanding task of conducting the speaking tests while thanks are also due to all teachers for preparing students so thoroughly for the examination. The majority of students had clearly found their studies of language and culture interesting and rewarding and as in previous years visiting examiners overwhelmingly described meeting the students as a stimulating and enjoyable experience.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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

Convert raw or scaled marks into marks on the Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) by using the link below.

UMS conversion calculator www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion

Web pages

Centres are reminded that a wealth of support documents can be found on our web site at (http://web.aqa.org.uk/qual/gce/languages/german_materials.php?id=09&prev=09).

These include the latest version of the specification, past papers, reports on the examination and the Teacher Resource Bank (TRB). For GERM1 the TRB includes for the Writing Section additional specimen questions (to supplement past papers from previous series) and student exemplar work; this is an invaluable resource for preparing students for future examinations.