



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
June 2012**

German

GER2T/V

(Specification 2660)

Unit 2: Speaking Test

Report on the Examination

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Unit 2

General comments

As in previous years, visiting examiners encountered very few problems during their visits. Most schools and colleges provided suitable accommodation as well as the necessary personnel for invigilators and appropriate adults. The cooperation of teachers in the administrative procedures prior to the examiner's arrival is appreciated; examiners reported only a few instances where the STMS forms had not been completed as required or where the necessary paperwork arrived late.

The great majority of schools and colleges who conducted their own tests recorded the tests on digital media and consequently there were few cases of bad recording quality. Nevertheless schools are reminded to check the volume levels for student and teacher-examiner; in some cases the student's voice was considerably fainter than the examiner's.

Other points to remember regarding CDs and USB sticks are:

- Each track should be labelled with the centre's and student's numbers as laid down in the instructions.
- A label with the centre number must be attached to USB sticks.
- CDs and USB sticks should be packed carefully in order to prevent damage in the post.
- Please note that recordings will be accepted on cassette tape for the last time in 2013.

Once again, examiners observed that in general students were well prepared for the test, in some cases perhaps too well when they tried to deliver lengthy rote-learned answers to the examiner's questions. Students and teacher-examiners need to bear in mind that operating from a script for large parts of the test does not enable students to access the higher marks for interaction. Teacher-examiners can provide opportunities to demonstrate spontaneity if they regularly follow up on students' responses in order to develop points and if they refrain from asking a series of unconnected questions. While markers of centre-conducted tests listened to many tests with very good examining technique from the teacher they also commented on many cases where the teacher-examiner 'played safe' and often denied students opportunities for a higher score.

There were generally few problems with accurate timing although some tests over-ran by more than an acceptable margin. Centres are reminded that marking stops at 15 minutes and that the discussion of each topic must take up a minimum of 2 minutes. Failure to adhere to these timings will result in a reduction of interaction marks. Teachers are strongly advised not to re-set their timing device during the test.

Compared to previous years fewer problems arose with the testing of native speakers as far as appropriate topic coverage and overall timing were concerned. Nevertheless, schools and colleges who enter native speakers need to remember that the same regulations and guidelines apply as with all other students.

AS Unit 2

Part 1: Discussion of Stimulus Card

All six stimulus cards were accessible and handled with equal success by students. Cards C and D were the least popular ones. Students should use their preparation time to look carefully at all the information on the card including pictures and captions, they should think through the implications of the questions and consider their own reactions, views or

experiences for a developed answer. Many students did so while many others prepared rather narrow answers to the printed questions and ignored helpful cues on the stimulus. Examiners noticed a general improvement in the timing of the two sections; however there were still many students whose answers to the printed questions were too short and underdeveloped while others had prepared such long answers that the ensuing discussion was too short to deserve high marks. Teachers are reminded that they should not interject any supplementary questions between the printed questions except after the first one if the student's answer lacked sufficient detail; answers to such additional questions cannot be credited.

The following were common factors in preventing students from achieving high scores in the response to the stimulus questions:

- over-long answers to question 1 anticipating a lot of the information contained in later questions and leading to repetitive answers
- using words and phrases on the card verbatim without rephrasing them and embedding them appropriately into linguistic structures
- long-winded recitation of statistics with little or no interpretation
- lack of development in answers to Questions 2, 3 and 4
- over-long, sometimes irrelevant answers to Question 5.

According to the guidelines, the more general discussion should focus on the subject matter of the stimulus card and should arise as naturally as possible from one or two aspects on the card and from the student's responses to the printed questions. Many if not most teacher-examiners failed to exploit the card more fully. Students could often have been invited to expand on or explain some of their previous answers to the printed questions and to develop other interesting points in relation to the stimulus card. While very few teacher-examiners digressed into different sub-topics during the discussion too many embarked upon a predictable line of questioning about the sub-topic with no or very little reference to the theme of the stimulus. Schools are reminded that students who are allowed to produce a lot of pre-learned material in the discussion cannot be awarded high marks for this section.

Card A - *Musik aus dem Netz*

The card was generally well handled; students had a lot to say about how young people obtain their music and about their own preferences in music. Most made use of the opinions under the photographs but usually without adding anything for development. The second part of Question 4 (*Musik-DVDs*) was often ignored and many students had problems in converting *Verluste* into an appropriate phrase containing the verb *verlieren*. Mispronunciation of *Lieder* ('*Leider*') and English pronunciation of CD and DVD were widespread.

Card B - *Teenager als Eltern*

The statistics caused a few problems; many students failed to notice that the figures referred to were out of 1000 so that 'only' 55 teenage pregnancies in USA was considered a good figure for such a big country. Hardly any student offered possible reasons for the statistical differences between the listed countries and virtually everybody ignored '*wachsende Sorge*' or '*steigende Anzahl*'. When describing possible problems for under-age mothers too many students read out the words on the card without any further addition. As mentioned before, all the information on a Stimulus card, whether verbal or non-verbal can serve as a cue to the student for developing relevant answers and for widening the scope of his or her contributions. Examiners expressed surprise that many students did not mention the possible consequences of breaking off school education and that hardly any students suggested childcare provision as one important area of support for teenage mothers. This card provided

a lot of material for interesting further discussions about the subject and it was therefore a pity that most teacher-examiners moved immediately to general questions about family life.

Card C - *Weniger Kinos - mehr Besucher*

This was dealt with successfully by most students who chose it although not many used the statistical information productively. The topic of cinema is popular among students and there were good contributions about the different types of cinemas. While most students frequent the big multiplex cinemas many were able to make some good points about watching a film in a smaller establishment.

Card D - *Probleme unter Freunden*

This card contained more text than the others but this did not prove to be a hurdle. *Vertrauen* seemed to be well understood, the identical verb was also widely used when talking about friendships. Successful students resisted the temptation to cling too closely and exclusively to the wording in Bettina's letter. Unfortunately, hardly any students focused on *Problemseite*; this could have provided a useful aspect about the role of 'agony aunts' in magazines. There were however many good and imaginative answers to questions 3 and 4.

Card E - *Das Frühstück – eine wichtige Mahlzeit*

Students related well to this subject although once again more use could have been made of some elements presented on the card. Hardly anybody used the pictures or the words *gut* and *ausreichend* to describe what a good breakfast means. *Konzentration* and *Leistungsfähigkeit* were often lifted without any further explanation and usually with stumbling pronunciation. If students are not sure about the meaning of a word on the card they should refrain from using it. Explaining the statistical information concisely and clearly was often a problem. Not many students successfully converted *Konzentration* into *sich konzentrieren*; *gehen ohne Frühstück* (without *aus dem Haus*) was often understood to mean 'go without breakfast'. Examiners pointed out that in answer to question 5 (*gesunde Ernährung*) many students had little to say beyond the '5 a day rule' which was often rendered as *fünf Obst und Gemüse*. Very often students drifted away from the focus of the last question by talking about the importance of sport in their lives.

Card F - *Das E-Book: Buch der Zukunft?*

This was a popular card and even if students had little personal experience with e-books many made their answers more convincing by referring to members of the family who use them. Question 2 tempted many students to simply read the short phrases on the card and it was not always clear whether *Taschenbuch* or *lesbar* had been understood. Question 3 elicited some interesting responses; it was surprising how many students firmly declared themselves to be in favour of reading traditional books. The word 'zu' in the last question was ignored by many students. Most gave general answers about the usefulness of computer technology rather than considering whether we are too dependent on it. Students need to look at each question carefully when preparing their answers but it is also the role of the examiner to re-visit if necessary certain aspects or questions from the card so that students are given a chance to improve on their original answer. Unfortunately few teacher-examiners followed this strategy.

Part 2: Conversation

In general, teacher-examiners followed the guidelines and treated the nominated topic as part of the conversation; on the other hand, some discussions of the first topic took on the form of a series of mini-presentations that left little room for any spontaneous development. It is not good practice to ask students *Was kannst du mir über.... sagen?* Visiting examiners tell students during their briefing session that there will not be time to cover all the bullet-

points on their prompt card and therefore teacher-examiners should not attempt this either. The bullet-points are a guide for the examiner as to the aspects of a particular topic or sub-topic which the student wants to discuss and more specific points are more helpful to the examiner than very general ones like *Das Handy*, *Die Ehe* etc. Schools are reminded that the bullet points should be written in German and that the nominated topic must come from the list of topics in the specification.

Students were generally well prepared to talk about all topics; the sub-topics of *Mode* and *Werbung* were slightly less popular choices for discussion this year. Most students – whether examined by an external examiner or by their teacher - showed laudable willingness to express their opinions, to talk about own experiences and to extend their answers beyond the minimum required. If higher marks for interaction are to be awarded students need to respond with some spontaneity; many able students achieved this while still making use of prepared and pre-learnt phrases. There were fewer instances where all students in a cohort were asked the same questions taken from a set list but some teacher-examiners still followed the same line of questioning with most or all of their students.

Teachers should note that '*Presse/Zeitungen*' is not part of the prescribed topic area Media.

Timing of topic coverage has improved in comparison with past years but it must be stressed again that the nominated topic should be given roughly the same time as the two remaining ones, i.e. 3-3 ½ minutes. There were many tests where the first topic lasted 5 minutes or more; leaving aside the obvious consequences this may have regarding the time allocation for subsequent topics and the overall length of the test it is also not in the student's interest to devote too much time to one topic. Students are expected to demonstrate their ability to talk about a range of topics and to demonstrate knowledge of a wider range of vocabulary.

The majority of students spoke with good or satisfactory fluency; very low fluency marks were rare. Pronunciation has slightly improved enabling examiners to award mainly marks of 4 and 5. Many students produced a good German *ch* sound (*Technologie* being a striking exception as it was almost always pronounced *Tecknologie*) but there was a more mixed picture with *v*, *r* and *z* consonants. Stronger attempts could often be made to produce properly rounded diphthongs and to avoid anglicised pronunciations such as '*Mjusik*' or '*popjulaer*'. English pronunciation also interfered with words like *Konzentration* or *Situation*; other common mispronunciations included *Jugendliche* (*Jungenliche*), *Familie* (*Famili*), *neue* (angl. *newe*) and *doof* (*duuf*); finally, students should be aware that *Industrie* or *Fußball* do not have a *sch* consonant.

Knowledge of grammar and vocabulary

By the time students reach AS Level they should have developed a good feel for the structures of the German language and many students demonstrated this by using a range of different structures; these included clauses with subordinating conjunctions, relative clauses and infinitive structures. Accurate word order was often observed after *weil* and *dass* but was less well handled in infinitive clauses; frequently *wer* was used in place of an appropriate relative pronoun. Attempting more ambitious constructions did not always go hand in hand with handling basic sentences accurately. There were many students who consistently ignored the inversion of verb and subject; English word order patterns such as *Es oft führt zu.../Ich auch gehe...* etc. were widespread and there has been little improvement with the habit of placing the verb at the end after *und/aber* (*und ich mit meinem Vater spreche*). Students also have to be careful when using a sequence of subordinate clause so as not to end up with clumsy constructions like *....weil ich, dass ich mich entspannen kann, denke*.

All examiners observed that many students still need careful practice with verb conjugation and the use of the perfect tense. Agreement of verb and subject – even with very common verbs - often seemed to be based on guesswork rather than knowledge and this was particularly true for modal verbs where forms like *wir kann*, *er magt*, *ich dürfe* were frequent

errors. Knowledge of correct past participles other than the most common verbs was fairly limited and many students were rather unsure about the appropriate auxiliary verb. Other frequent errors were: lack of adjectival endings (*ein gut Ding*), comparative forms following the English model (*mehr wichtig*) and confusion of the possessive pronouns *sein* and *ihr*.

Examiners reported that most students had good knowledge of topic-specific vocabulary but that errors with basic vocabulary were common; these included confusion of *Zeit* and *Mal*, *schauen* and *zeigen*, *bekommen* and *werden*, *Stunde* and *Uhr*, *jeder* and *jemand*, *seit* and *vor*, *eigene* and *einige*. Very often wrong decisions were made about using *sich entspannen*, *entspannt* or *entspannend* (e.g. *ich bin entspannend*). Problems with the correct use of related nouns and adjectives such as *Gesundheit/gesund*, *Magersucht/magersüchtig*, *Übergewicht/übergewichtig* were a little less widespread than in previous years but still fairly prominent. Other common vocabulary errors included once again *im Fern* for *im Fernsehen*, *nur* for *einzig* and wrong prepositions as in *auf dem Computer*.

Given that expressing opinions is a requirement of the test the temptation exists to use *ich denke* with almost every sentence. Students should consider replacing it with the more appropriate *ich glaube* and aim for a greater variety of phrases to convey views and beliefs. Despite all the weaknesses mentioned above examiners reported that the overwhelming majority of students succeeded in communicating what they wanted to say; real difficulties in comprehension arose relatively rarely so that the majority of marks for grammar were awarded in the upper three bands.

A report like this inevitably mentions a number of negative aspects of students' performances but it is important to stress that many students performed to an excellent standard. Once again all visiting examiners stated what a pleasure it had been to talk to the students during this series of the examination and complimented them on their hard work and enthusiasm. Markers of centre-conducted tests, while being critical of some aspects of teacher conduct, also gave credit to many teachers whose manner of examining was skilful, flexible and inventive and who got the best out of their candidates.

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

Teacher Support Meetings

Teacher Support Meetings for the Conduct of the Speaking Tests will be held in Autumn 2012 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.

Please note that this series of meetings will be the final opportunity to attend face to face training following Ofqual's decision to restrict face to face support for teachers. All materials used at the meetings in Autumn 2012 will be placed in the Teacher Resource Bank on AQA's website and will be available to download throughout the academic year.