



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

German

GER4T/V

(Specification 2660)

Unit 4: Speaking Test

Report on the Examination

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Unit 4

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 was appreciated, examiners reported relatively few instances where 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.

For both the V and the T option it is important that schools and colleges enter both Cultural Topics on the STMS forms. In some instances this information was not given. It is also not helpful if teachers only write an author's or director's name without stating which work was the main focus of study. Visiting examiners need to have this knowledge in advance of the test to enable them to do the necessary preparation. This is particularly true with less well known topics; visiting examiners try to obtain enough knowledge about less familiar topics before the tests in order to be able to ask in-depth-questions.

There were generally few problems with accurate timing although a number of tests over-ran by more than an acceptable margin. Schools are reminded that marking stops at 15 minutes and that the discussion of each Cultural Topic must take up a minimum of 4 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 there were fewer problems with the testing of native speakers as far as topic coverage and 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.

Part 1: Discussion of Stimulus Card

All Stimulus Cards provided opportunities for interesting discussions and students seemed to have few problems with understanding the language in the speech bubbles. Cards D and F were the most popular ones. Teacher-examiners need to make it clear at the beginning which of the two statements the student is supporting. The timing device should be started when the student starts the presentation.

The challenge for students in the first minute is to convey a few succinct points in support of the chosen stance and to develop these points briefly with reasons and examples. The quality of the presentations differed considerably; many students succeeded in outlining their

views in a meaningful and relevant way while many others filled the short time with rather general statements about the sub-topic that usually failed to address the issue described in the chosen statement. Presentations of this nature make it difficult for the examiner to pick up directly on points in order to formulate prompts and challenges. Students are strongly advised to look carefully at key words in both speech bubbles and to consider how they can use these as cues for their arguments. Taking the bold-printed title above the statements or the sub-topic title as the main reference point will in most cases not guarantee the presentation to be relevant and deserving high marks.

Fewer students than in previous years greatly exceeded the one minute time limit; on the contrary many presentations were rather short, both in time and substance and examiners remarked that students thereby wasted opportunities to gain higher marks. There were many students who lost valuable time by giving a general introduction into the topic area rather than coming straight to their first point in support of their chosen view. Reading out the text in the bubble is also not an advisable strategy although words or phrases contained in the statement can of course be used in both the presentation and discussion.

The great majority of students were ready to defend and explain their views in the discussion and most examiners skilfully steered them through the debate. Teachers need to keep in mind that their questions and prompts should be clear and concise so as to give maximum time to the student. Where the student's initial summary does not focus sufficiently on the content of the chosen statement it is the examiner's duty to lead the student into a more relevant discussion of the issue in question. Unfortunately this was often not the case; many exchanges, particularly those about environmental and multicultural issues concentrated too much on the general topic or sub-topic. Most examiners made use of the suggested points in the examiner's booklet and usually re-phrased them in order to make them more suitable and 'user-friendly'. However some teacher-examiners worked through the bullet points one by one often reading them out verbatim; such a strategy is hardly conducive to a natural development of the dialogue.

Card A - *Leben mit dem Klimawandel*

This was a fairly popular card about which students had a lot to say. Most supported *Meinung 2* and expressed optimism about our ability to halt climate change. However almost all students, whatever stance they took, ignored the cues *gemeinsames Handeln* and *anpassen* so that presentations and discussions often focused mainly on individual actions like switching the lights off, taking showers etc. rather than considering the need for global measures.

Card B - *Staatsbürgerschaft für Ausländer*

Opinions were fairly divided over which viewpoint was more preferable. Many students were once again tempted to take their cue from the sub-topic title 'Integration' rather than the wording in the statements; consequently there was much general talk about the advantages of immigration, problems with integration etc. Examiners had the impression that the concept of citizenship was often not entirely understood. Many students ignored the words *verdienen*, *strenge Bedingungen*, *längere Zeit* all of which could have been useful for preparing concrete and relevant arguments.

Card C - *Forschung ohne Grenzen*

This was a less popular choice but well handled by those students who chose it. Both viewpoints found their supporters in equal measure. Most students produced relevant arguments and examples for or against free scientific research and some interesting discussions took place. Gene technology and cloning were two of the most prominent aspects discussed. As in previous years, it seems that students tend to shy away from this sub-topic although little specialist vocabulary is usually needed.

Card D - *Wie lösen wir das Verkehrsproblem?*

Meinung 2 was by far more popular and students were able to make much use of material they had worked with in the classroom. However, presentations and discussions were often not as productive as expected; many students focused heavily on pollution through cars and on the advantages of public transport but not enough on whether building more roads is the answer. Surprisingly few students mentioned cycling and the suggestion that more roads may mean a better flow of traffic thus reducing pollution seemed quite foreign to most students. *Öffentliche Verkehrsmittel* was very often used as a noun in the singular.

Card E - *Fremdenfeindlichkeit – ein verständliches Gefühl?*

Most students supported *Meinung 2* but once again there was a tendency to talk in general terms about immigration without a strong enough focus on the particular issue. *Verständliches Gefühl, sich Sorgen machen, ernst nehmen, der Gesellschaft schaden* – these phrases should have served as a guideline to students when preparing their introductory talk and could have provided arguments for the discussion. The few students who defended the ‘politically incorrect’ *Meinung 1* usually argued their corner more successfully. Students should not be deterred from choosing the more controversial statement if they can formulate arguments in favour of it. After all, both participants take on a role in this part of the test and what students say does not have to reflect their real views and beliefs.

Card F - *Todesstrafe – ja oder nein?*

This was the most popular card with a clear cut and quite emotional issue; not surprisingly *Meinung 2* was the more favoured opinion. Whatever their viewpoint most students were able to defend it quite vigorously and convincingly which resulted in many interesting and wide-ranging debates. There were some difficulties with vocabulary such as *töten* versus *sterben*, *Mord* and *Mörder*.

Part 2: Conversation

The range of Cultural Topics had changed little from previous years although examiners noticed a slight decline in geographical and historical topics. Students studying the latter two had obviously learnt a wealth of facts but the main purpose of the conversation is to express and to defend views and to evaluate various aspects of the topics. This may be harder to achieve with historical and geographical topics but must be attempted in order to make higher marks available to the student. Unfortunately many teacher-examiners placed too much emphasis on factual information as well as the content of films, novels and plays. Questions and prompts like *Beschreiben Sie..... Was geschah.....? Was passiert am Ende? Worüber geht es in diesem Drama?* should be avoided as far as possible.

In a number of centre-conducted tests, students were allowed to deliver lengthy speeches about aspects of their topics without enough intervention from the teacher-examiner. It is the role of the examiner to follow up students’ answers, to elicit explanations or justifications regularly and to challenge students’ views at appropriate times. Students who rely to a large extent on pre-learned and rehearsed contributions are denied access to high interaction marks.

Popular Cultural Topics this year were:

- Period of History: *DDR* (within a given period); *Die Wende*; *Berlin* (within a given period); *Die Berliner Mauer*
- Region: *Nordrhein-Westfalen*; *Bayern*; *Berlin*
- Dramatist/Poet: *Der Besuch der alten Dame* (by far the most popular); *Andorra*; *Biedermann und die Brandstifter*; *Die Physiker*

- Author: *Der Vorleser*; *Der Richter und sein Henker*; *Damals war es Friedrich*; *Ich fühl' mich so 50/50* (which seems to become less appealing to students)
- Director: *Das Leben der Anderen*; *Good bye Lenin*; *Sophie Scholl – die letzten Tage*; *Die Welle*

Architects, painters and musicians featured only occasionally.

Schools and colleges who study *Berlin* must make it clear on the STMS form whether it has been studied as a historical or geographical topic so that the discussion can be given the appropriate focus.

Students who studied an extensive period of history had sometimes found it difficult to assimilate all the facts. The divided Germany, communism and life in communist regimes or the events leading up to German unification are not matters of common knowledge to young people of today; it is therefore not easy for them to avoid oversimplified statements about historical or social conditions and to form well founded opinions of their own.

Each topic needs to be given approximately equal time during the conversation. In many teacher-conducted tests, the first topic was discussed for 6 minutes or more; if Part 1 had also overrun, the second topic was in danger of not being given the minimum time of 4 minutes. Markers unfortunately had to reduce the interaction mark for some students because of inaccurate timing.

Examiners generally commended students on their thorough preparation and on the enthusiasm with which they talked about their topics. Most students had clearly enjoyed the subject of their studies and deserved marks in the top two bands. Best results were achieved by students who

- had in-depth knowledge but used factual information to evaluate aspects of the topic
- expressed their own views
- were asked to explain and defend their opinions on both topics
- did not rely too much on pre-learnt material
- developed points of their own accord
- ensured their answers were relevant to the examiner's question.

Fluency was generally good; very hesitant performances were quite rare and some students had developed a near-native pace of delivery. Examiners were on the whole satisfied with the standard of pronunciation. They commented on many students who spoke with a clear, almost authentic German accent but also pointed out the main areas of weaknesses, mainly *z* and *ch* consonants as well as *Umlaute* and diphthongs. Individual words that were often mispronounced included *Erwachsene*, *Komödie*, *Industrie*, *Mitglied*, *manipuliert*, *inhuman* (both anglicised), *direkt*, *Stadt/Staat*. It was surprising how many students who had studied the history of the GDR or the Berlin Wall failed to pronounce *DDR* correctly; similarly students who study a geographical topic should know the correct pronunciations of names of towns, regions etc.

Knowledge of grammar and vocabulary

It was encouraging to hear many students who could produce language of a high standard both in terms of grammar and range of vocabulary. Most students attempted a variety of complex structures such as subordinate, relative and infinitive constructions, occasionally also passives and subjunctives. However, examiners were concerned about the number of students who had problems with elementary verb forms and basic word order. Errors like *ich wisse*, *er möchtet*, *wir kann* occurred frequently, adherence to verb/subject inversion was often inconsistent and knowledge of past tenses too insecure. More students could have

resisted word by word translations of English constructions into German (*ein Mann heißt Wiesler; niemand zu sprechen mit*).

While most students had acquired enough topic-specific vocabulary for both parts of the test errors with basic vocabulary remained. *Zeigen* and *schauen*, *sterben* and *töten*, *Unterschied* and *verschieden* were frequently confused and direct translations from English occurred in phrases like *am ersten* (for *zuerst*), *im West/Ost*, *die Todesstrafe arbeitet nicht*. Disappointingly many students were not able to use *zustimmen* correctly (*ich stimme das nicht*); examiners also commented on the continued over-use of *ich denke*.

A report like this inevitably mentions a number of negative aspects in students' performances but it is important to stress that once again visiting examiners found conducting these tests an enjoyable and rewarding experience and paid compliments to the hard work and enthusiasm of students many of whom demonstrated that they could use the language proficiently and with consistent accuracy. Markers of centre-conducted tests, while critical of some aspects of the teachers' conduct, also gave credit to many teachers whose manner of examining was flexible, inventive and challenging and who enabled their candidates to perform to the best of their ability.

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.