

A-level **GERMAN**

Unit 2 Speaking
Report on the Examination

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General comments

Once again, examiners can look back on a successful examination series. Visiting examiners were pleased about the cooperation from schools and colleges in arranging examination dates and providing accommodation, invigilators and chaperones. When drawing up schedules for the tests schools need to bear in mind that visiting examiners should not be examining more than 6 students in each session. Breaks are of course necessary but they should not be unnecessarily long and should allow the examiner to keep to a smoothly running rota of preparation time and examination. Examiners were grateful for the hospitality shown by many schools towards visiting centres with a small number of students. We are grateful to all schools and college, whether acting as host centres or not, their efforts in allowing the tests to run as smoothly and efficiently as possible.

While most centres followed all guidelines regarding administration and paperwork, there were a few cases where STMS forms had only been partially completed and CD tracks had not been labelled adequately. All the required information regarding administration can be found in the Instructions for the Conduct of Examinations and teacher-examiners are urged to acquaint themselves with all necessary procedures.

Very few recordings were submitted on cassette tapes and centres are reminded that these will no longer be accepted next year. Recording quality on CDs and USB sticks was generally good but at a number of centres recording levels for both participants had not been checked sufficiently and the students' voices were often much fainter than the teacher's.

In the majority of teacher-conducted tests, the prescribed timings were observed. Fewer teachers than in previous years re-set their stop-watches between parts 1 and 2 and thus avoided discrepancies between their own and the marker's timing of the test. Unfortunately there were again a number of centres where tests were too long or in some cases were more than half a minute short. Teachers should take particular care not to overrun on part 1 unduly and should also ensure that adequate time is allocated to each of the conversation topics. Not observing accurate timing can lead to a reduction of interaction marks as outlined in the Instructions for the Conduct.

Visiting examiners were generally impressed that most students were so well prepared and complimented them on their willingness to communicate in German. Being interviewed by an external examiner often brought out the best in students. Less able students were often surprised about their ability to participate in the exchange and to interact with a degree of spontaneity. Many teacher-examiners displayed skilful and efficient question technique and tried to enter into a genuine conversation rather than conduct an artificial question and answer session. Apart from giving students opportunities to use prepared material, they also facilitated a more spontaneous participation by following up on students' responses and enabling them to develop their ideas.

By contrast, many students were not helped by teachers who wanted to 'play safe' and avoid questions of a more unpredictable nature. Examiners listened to numerous tests where the teacher never entered into a more in-depth discussion of aspects of the topic, but instead asked a sequence of unconnected and usually rehearsed questions. Most students at AS-Level will rely to some extent on memorised phrases but if they are not also confronted with more unpredictable questions from time to time they are unlikely to gain high marks for interaction. Where markers of centre-conducted tests have doubts as to how rehearsed a student sounds, they will give the student the benefit of the doubt. However, if the range of vocabulary and quality of grammar in Part 2 are markedly above the level demonstrated during the response to the stimulus card or if a teacher-examiner asks the same questions of each student, this has to be taken as a sign of over-reliance on rehearsed responses.

Part 1: Discussion of Stimulus Card

Students are expected to spend approximately equal time on the two sections relating to the stimulus card. It is of course impossible to time prepared answers precisely but students should aim to spend at least 2 minutes and not more than 3 minutes, on answering the 5 printed questions. Students are likely to complete this first task successfully and within a reasonable time if after a brief summary of the subject matter on the card each of their subsequent answers is relevant and contains some development e.g. reason, consequence, example. Many students followed these guidelines and achieved good marks for the section. However, as in previous years, a large number of students gave only brief and under-developed answers to Questions 2 to 4 but used Question 5 to launch into a lengthy personal response containing pre-learnt but not always entirely relevant information. This year, examiners also reported many instances where the student took so long to answer the printed questions that very little time - in some cases no time at all - was available for the more general discussion and few or no marks could be awarded for this section. Teacher-examiners are reminded that extensive extra time must not be given to the discussion in such cases. Part 1 should still last approximately 5 minutes.

Most teacher-examiners adhered to the ruling that no additional questions should be asked until the students has responded to all the printed questions. Only if the student's first answer does not clearly describe the subject of the card can a supplementary question be asked. Several teachers interjected with questions between the five printed ones. Answers to these did not attract any credit and they potentially took valuable time from the wider discussion.

Examiners reported that many students could have done more to exploit the content of the stimulus card in their prepared answers. Opportunities were missed to use the information and cues on the card to full advantage and to include examples, interpretations or opinions. In addition, many teachers made very few attempts in the ensuing discussion to follow up on the student's earlier responses. Often they could have developed interesting points and explored the subject matter of the card in more detail. Too many teachers immediately progressed to unrelated issues (albeit within the confines of the sub-topic) and students were often allowed to produce a series of pre-learnt responses. This approach to the conduct of the wider discussion is not entirely within the spirit of the examination and may sometimes disadvantage students.

All six stimulus cards were accessible and handled with approximately equal success. Vocabulary on the cards rarely posed any difficulty but students often struggled to convert information presented in single words or short phrases into appropriate full sentences. Some cards showed simple statistics and many students successfully summarised and interpreted the statistical information, as the question *Was zeigt die Statistik?* invites them to do. Unfortunately, many students still read or attempted to read out every heading and number without further explanation as to the underlying meaning of the figures.

Karte A – *Wieviele Freunde braucht man?*

This was a popular choice and most students used the content of the speech bubbles on the card appropriately without reading out too much of the sentences. Some students forgot to address the second part of Question 3 (*Wie denken Sie darüber?*) and answers to Question 4 often lacked imagination. In the discussion which usually centred on the nature of friendship and students' own friends, all students had a lot to say but examiners observed frequent problems with the distinction between *Freund*, *Freunde* and *Freundin*.

Karte B – *Spielen in virtuellen Welten*

This card was chosen frequently and usually handled well. Many students were able to convey the essential information on the statistical table, while others read out all the percentages. There was a general belief among students that older people do not play as many computer games because of lack of time. Lack of familiarity with the technology was hardly ever mentioned as a reason.

Students often found it challenging to transform the cues about *Vorteile* and *Nachteile* into meaningful information. Question 4 dealt with the use of computer games and this also differentiated well between students. Given that in many cases the students' prepared answers ignored a number of points on the card, there was ample opportunity in the discussion to explore these further. It was therefore regrettable that most teacher-examiners only discussed very predictable aspects of the sub-topic such as the internet, mobile phones etc.

Karte C – Umweltschutz auch im Urlaub

This was a slightly less popular choice and discriminated well between students of different abilities. Much information about eco-friendly holidays was presented on the card but too few students made full use of it. Questions 3 and 4 produced some imaginative answers from students who could cope with less predictable issues, whereas answers to Question 5 and the ensuing discussion usually revolved around many familiar ideas about preferred holiday destinations and activities.

Karte E – Ist die Ehe von gestern?

This card was discussed frequently and produced performances of differing standards. In answer to Question 2, many students made an often failed attempt to read out the large numbers on the table rather than trying to describe the trends in marriage and cohabitation succinctly. A few students misinterpreted *Eheschließungen* as meaning marriage breakdown. Question 3 about possible reasons for the decline in the number of couples marrying produced surprisingly limited answers. Most students only mentioned the change in religious or moral attitudes. On the other hand, responses to Question 4 were usually thoughtful, well-argued and often based on students' own experiences. The use of vocabulary and structures around *heiraten*, *verheiratet*, *Scheidung*, *sich scheiden (lassen)*, *geschieden* often presented challenges and it was not uncommon to hear students saying *sie sind zusammenleben*. During the discussion, many examiners strayed into the sub-topic 'Relationships within the family'. As long as students were not allowed to produce largely pre-learned answers this 'infringement' did not lead to a deduction in marks. Teachers are nonetheless reminded of the importance of keeping the sub-topics distinct, even if there are similarities between them.

Karte E – Gute Vorbilder?

This was a fairly popular choice and handled with varying success. Examiners felt that many students could have used their preparation time more productively to think about the issues raised on the stimulus card. Some students read out the media headlines without attempting to express in their own words, what the problems with some celebrities are. Very often only drug and alcohol misuse was cited as unacceptable behaviour. The cues *Erfolg*, *Geld und Ruhm* which could have been helpful in formulating relevant and more comprehensive answers to Question 3, were often ignored. Many examiners commented on the fact that students usually named their parents as role models. Since the responses to the printed questions were often quite vague it would have served students better if, in the discussion, examiners had clarified or further explored some points relevant to the subject rather than immediately discussing *Mode*, as happened in most tests.

Karte F - Zu viele Raucher!

This card addressed a very familiar topic and usually produced good responses. Difficulties with the interpretation of statistics as described above also surfaced here. Some students succeeded in describing the essential message conveyed by the figures in the table while others quoted all the percentages with little or no additional comment. Examiners expressed surprise that, in their responses to Question 3, many students hardly made any use of the material on the card i.e. the health warnings on German cigarette packets. Some even suggested what should be done rather than what is done to inform the public about the dangers of smoking. As with other 'split' questions, the second part (*Wie denken Sie über diese Methode?*) was occasionally ignored or addressed with just a brief utterance. Answers to Question 4 were wide-ranging if sometimes well-rehearsed,

whereas Question 5 generally elicited a limited number of suggestions as to how to make smoking less attractive. Examiners pointed out that *Rauchen ist süchtig* was a fairly common phrase and *Warnungen* was often pronounced like *Wohnungen*.

Part 2: Conversation

As in previous years most students were very well prepared to talk about all topic areas. They were keen to communicate and did so with good or acceptable fluency. Fluency and Interaction marks below the 5-6 band were again quite rare in both the V and the T option. As mentioned before, many teachers conducting the tests could have done more to introduce some degree of spontaneity and unpredictability into the conversation and to steer students away from operating in 'speech-mode' by following up on their utterances. This was particularly true of the discussion of the nominated topic. An abundance of rehearsed material was frequently delivered in a series of mini-presentations rather than by way of a genuine exchange. Centres are reminded that it is not necessary to address each of the bullet points on the prompt card and that asking just one question on each point before going on to the next is not good practice. At every stage in the conversation a more detailed discussion of fewer points is preferable to a rather superficial coverage of many.

Teachers also need to be mindful about timing within the conversation. All three conversation topics should be given approximately equal time i.e. 3 – 3 ½ minutes within the overall testing time of 15 minutes, in order that a fair impression can be gained of the student's ability to sustain a conversation on a range of topics. The instructions state that the minimum time required for each topic is 2 minutes. In many teacher-conducted tests the nominated topic took up considerably more time so that adequate coverage of the two remaining topics was often jeopardised.

Most teacher-examiners followed good practice by selecting one or perhaps two sub-topics of each topic area for discussion. At a number of centres, however, students were asked questions about each sub-topic. As a result the conversation often resembled an interrogation rather than a natural conversation and left little room for the appropriate development of ideas through follow-up questions. Teachers should also do their best to vary the sub-topics and questions with consecutive students in order to introduce an element of unpredictability into the lines of questioning and to avoid the impression of over-rehearsed performances.

The quality of pronunciation was much the same as last year and the majority of students achieved marks from 3 upwards. Perfect or near-native accent and pronunciation are not expected at this level and there were a gratifying number of students who were awarded full marks for pronunciation. German *ch* and *r* sounds were often produced well whereas weaknesses with *z* and *v* consonants were common. Pronunciation of diphthongs and in particular *ei* could be improved. *Weil* very often sounded like *waal*. Individual mispronunciations included *Famili*, *Jungenliche*, *Elten*, *duuf*, *Fuschball*, *Yob* as well as *ie/ei* confusion such as *ziegt*, *gescheiden*.

Knowledge of grammar and vocabulary

Most examiners commented that they had heard some impressive performances and that many students demonstrated good or satisfactory knowledge of vocabulary and structures to enable them to communicate effectively. There were relatively few students whose linguistic shortcomings regularly prevented immediate comprehension.

Knowledge of basic and topic-specific vocabulary was generally secure although familiar problems still existed. Prominent among these was a widespread confusion of *kennen/wissen*, *jemand/jeder*, *verbringen/spenden*, *bekommen/werden* and *übergewichtig/Übergewicht*. Fewer students used *Gesund* for *Gesundheit* but use of *also* for *auch* was surprisingly frequent. The inappropriate term *Diät* instead of *Ernährung* was heard less often than in previous years whereas *pausen* as a verb describing one of the advantages of DVDs has taken quite a firm hold in students' minds. Within

the context of smoking and drugs, phrases like *Zigaretten sind abhängig/Rauchen ist süchtig* were not uncommon. Literal transfer from English into German led to *alle die Zeit, auf dem Computer, die nur Lösung* and many students once again talked about what they watched *im Fern*. The simple phrase *meiner Meinung nach* was often rendered as *in meiner Meinung*. In contrast, some examiners observed that some students used certain sophisticated phrases such as *ich bin fest davon überzeugt* or *ich stehe auf dem Standpunkt* too often or in less appropriate contexts e.g. *Ich stehe auf dem Standpunkt, dass Musik wichtig für mich ist*.

Most students at AS level will have had little more than two full terms since the completion of their GCSE studies in which to increase their knowledge and mastery of German grammar. It was therefore pleasing that many students had obviously developed a good awareness of German structures and were becoming competent and confident speakers. Basic word order rules such as inversion of subject/verb and verb placement in *weil, wenn* and simple relative clauses were often handled accurately. Many students had memorised model conditional phrases such as *wenn ichhätte, könnte ich* and were able to employ them appropriately. Attempts at infinitive clauses were often less successful, especially when they involved a separable verb (*sie haben Druck zu gut aussehen*).

One of the main concerns raised by examiners related to aspects of basic grammar and especially to the inability of many students to achieve consistent verb/subject agreement. Errors such as *er habe, ich gehen, ich wisse, wir kann, man sparen* etc. were very common. Modal verb structures regularly caused problems not only with conjugation (*ich musse, er möchte*) but also with correct infinitives (*er kann nicht hat*) and a significant number of students were unable to construct simple negative phrases (*ich nicht rauche, even ich kein rauche*). Once again many students were in the habit of placing the conjugated verb at the end of a main clause, especially after *und* and *aber* (*...und meine Eltern immer da für mich sind/ aber ich das nicht glaube*). If students omit the *dass* conjunction after *ich glaube/finde/denke* etc, they should be made aware how the word order is affected. Phrases like *Ich finde, das gut ist* were extremely common. Finally, as students increase the complexity of their language and use structures containing a number of subordinate clauses they should become aware that there is no need to construct clumsy sentences like *...eine Statistik, die, dass Jugendliche oft Computerspiele spielen, zeigt/...weil sie, dass es cool ist, denken*.

As in last year's report it should be emphasised that despite the many possible areas for improvement mentioned above, examiners once again commented favourably not only on the thorough preparation done by most students but also on the obvious enthusiasm many students showed towards studying the German language. Meeting so many different students was again enjoyable and rewarding for visiting examiners and many teacher-examiners ensured that their students were able to reach their potential through the skilful and sympathetic conduct of the test.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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