

A-level **GERMAN**

Unit 4 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. AQA is grateful to all schools and colleges, whether acting as host centres or not, for their efforts in allowing the tests to run as smoothly and efficiently as possible.

While most centres followed all the 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 more than half a minute short. Teachers should take particular care not to overrun 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.

Part 1: Discussion of Stimulus Card

Students and examiners have generally become very accustomed to what is required here and many interesting and stimulating debates took place. This part of the test can be a valuable tool to differentiate between higher and lower levels of ability. Students with good language skills, who can express genuine opinions on quite complex issues and are confident in reacting spontaneously to being challenged, will usually score highly in this part of the test.

There was a smaller proportion of students this year whose, initial presentation contained points that were irrelevant to the chosen statement on the card. There also seemed to be some improvement in students' willingness and ability to develop these points briefly by giving reasons, justifications or examples. Some students however did not focus enough on the issue on the stimulus, talking in general terms about the topic or sub-topic. This will not ensure a good score for the presentation. Examiners observed that accurate timing of the presentation had improved. Nonetheless, students who only took 30 or 40 seconds for to outline their views were unlikely to mention sufficient points for a mark above 3. Where the presentation was considerably longer than one minute it potentially limited the student's opportunities for effective participation in the discussion, and examiners must be prepared to interrupt students who are in danger of delivering a presentation which is too long. The most successful and time-efficient strategy for students in this section is to list a few succinct points with some development, to avoid protracted general introductions or summaries of the topic, and to refrain from reading out the content of the chosen 'speech-bubble'.

While most students were able to hold their own in the discussion and defended their views effectively, often vigorously, some students had not thought about sufficiently diverse arguments during their preparation time to enable them to find relevant counter-arguments to the examiner's challenges. In the discussion, most examiners effectively followed up on some of the points made in the presentation, proving that they had listened carefully to the student's outline of views. The notes in the examiner's booklet can be helpful pointers for the development of the debate and are meant to aid examiners in their preparation. Some teacher-examiners could have made more effort to adjust and rephrase the notes that contained no conjugated verb. In a few schools and colleges, teachers seemed to be under-prepared for this part of the test and found it challenging to develop the discussion and to fill the four minutes discussion time with valid and helpful arguments or challenges. Examiners are also reminded that the discussion should focus closely on the issue on the card and if students digress from it the examiner should bring them back to more relevant aspects.

Most examiners of both the V and T option used imaginative prompts, questions and challenges and demonstrated that it is possible to challenge students' views without being unnecessarily antagonistic or even aggressive. There were however a few teachers who found it necessary to directly contradict many responses from the student which prevented the discussion from unfolding more naturally. There were also quite a few instances this year where, instead of arguing for the opposite view, the teacher-examiner simply asked questions about the issue or even the wider sub-topic. Neither the former nor the latter approach will enable students to explain and to defend their standpoint successfully. Teacher-examiners are also reminded that they should keep their own contributions as brief as possible.

All cards were accessible but cards A, B and E were the most popular choices. Centres are reminded that it is essential to adhere to the prescribed card sequence as laid down in the instruction booklet.

Karte A: *Schluss mit Atomstrom?*

Arguments for and against nuclear energy are very familiar to most students so that this card and the discussion were usually handled successfully. While the majority of students supported *Meinung 1* a considerable number argued strongly for the retention and extension of nuclear power. Most presentations and discussions focused closely on the issue although some points relating to renewable energies were quite naturally touched upon.

Karte B: *Offene Tür für Einwanderer?*

This was a popular choice and views on this topic were much more divided than in previous examination series. Many students spoke out strongly against allowing more immigration. However, it often became obvious that students had not thought enough about why immigrants may be considered as either an advantage or a burden to the host country. Frequently, arguments did not go much beyond the familiar and slightly simplistic 'immigrants are doing jobs we don't want to do' or 'they take our jobs away'. As one examiner commented, for some students the proliferation of foreign restaurants is the main advantage of immigration. Nevertheless, many interesting discussions were held about the issue on this card although examiners had to be careful to prevent the exchange drifting too much into the sub-topic of 'Integration'. Students - and some examiners - were occasionally unsure as to whether to refer to Great Britain or Germany. There is no need to have in-depth knowledge of the German society and it sounded at times rather artificial when students pretended to speak from the standpoint of a German citizen e.g. talking about the number of Turkish people living 'among us'.

Karte C: Der überwachte Bürger

This was a less popular card but led to some interesting discussions. Students who chose it - a slight majority favouring *Meinung 2* – seemed to have a genuine interest in the issue and usually defended their views about CCTV cameras well without resorting to pre-learned responses. Most discussions centred on the fight against crime and terrorism as well as personal safety, but surprisingly seldom on the issue of invasion of personal privacy.

Karte D: Billig fliegen oder nicht?

Like any stimulus on the topic of environment, this card carried with it the danger that students saw it as a chance to use rehearsed arguments rather than concentrating on the actual issue. The majority of students supported *Meinung 1* but in their presentation, many focused entirely on environmental pollution through planes without making reference to the question of cheap flights. However, most examiners steered the discussion towards this issue and while some arguments brought forward may not have been entirely realistic, e.g. going on overseas holidays by ship, most students defended their viewpoint well.

Karte E: Sprachkurse – Pflicht oder Wahl?

This card also dealt with a very specific issue within the wider topic of integration. *Meinung 1* was the more popular one and most students naturally argued for the need to learn the host country's language. Unfortunately many ignored the cue 'gezwungen' and thus missed a vital element of the stimulus. When asked by the examiner whether and how immigrants should be forced to attend a language class, most students found it challenging to give a valid answer. All students explained the necessity to speak the language in terms of obtaining or keeping a job, but few had thought about other benefits, e.g. for non-working women, free time activities, contact with children's teachers, doctors and hospitals.

Karte F: Unmoralische Ausbeutung oder ein Weg aus der Armut?

The card covered an extremely topical issue as most tests took place in the aftermath of the disaster in Bangladesh. Although chosen less frequently it facilitated some convincing performances. Support for either standpoint was equally divided and most students gave clear arguments as to why 'sweat shops' are important for developing countries or why they provide immoral profits for companies in the industrialised world. However, the point as to whether or not to boycott products from 'sweat shops' was often left aside. Students only occasionally offered thoughts about their own shopping behaviour and whether they would be prepared to pay more for clothes.

Part 2: Conversation

The range of Cultural Topics has more or less remained the same compared to last year. There was perhaps a slight increase in the popularity of geographical topics and once again many students had combined the study of a historical period with a film or book set in the same period. Timing within the 10 minute conversation was generally good but several teacher-examiners spent too long on the first cultural topic so that in some cases, less than the required minimum of four minutes was available for the second topic.

Examiners listened to many students who were pleasingly fluent and confident. There were some outstanding performances and fluency marks of 3 and below were relatively rare. The score for interaction depended not only on the student's ability or willingness to contribute but to a large extent on the examiner's questioning technique. There were perhaps fewer instances than in previous years where students were allowed to talk at length and often in 'rehearsed mode' about facts, plots and story-lines, but these still occurred. Within the five minutes allocated for each Cultural Topic, it is impossible for students to demonstrate all the knowledge they have acquired. The main emphasis in the speaking test is students' reactions to and opinions about the topics. It is

undoubtedly easier to express views on a work of literature or a film than on geographical and historical facts but examiners must regularly attempt to elicit opinions on all topics. There is no need for examiners to pretend that they do not know what topics have been studied and questions like *Was wissen Sie über...?/Worum geht es in dem Buch.....?/Was passiert...?* should be avoided as much as possible. As in previous years, there was again a widespread reluctance among teacher-examiners to challenge the student's views on their topics despite the fact that 'countering views' is an important element in the descriptor for the highest interaction marks. However, there were many teachers who, through imaginative questioning and prompting, provided their students with ample opportunities to express and defend opinions and to develop their ideas with spontaneity.

Among the most popular Cultural Topics were:

- *Schlink: Der Vorleser*
- *Dürrenmatt: Der Richter und sein Henker; Das Versprechen; Der Besuch der alten Dame*
- *König: Ich fühl' mich so fifty/fifty*
- *Films: Das Leben der Anderen; Good-bye, Lenin; Sophie Scholl – die letzten Tage; Die Welle*
- *Regions: Bayern; das Ruhrgebiet; Berlin*
- *History: DDR/Berliner Mauer 1961-1989; die Wende; Deutschland 1945-1990*

Clearly, most students had enjoyed studying their topics and those who also had critical opinions were able to express them well. Learning about a period of German history which for young people must be in the distant past can be challenging and some students gave the impression that despite being able to recite events and facts, their insight into social and political concepts as well as important personalities was quite superficial or one-dimensional and not founded in real understanding. For instance, descriptions of the 'positive and negative' aspects of life in the former GDR frequently consisted simply of 'everybody having a job' and 'lack of freedom to travel'. Conversations about a region in Germany or Austria often concentrated on facts, figures and descriptions. Students who had experienced life in the region were much more likely to evaluate factual information convincingly. Not surprisingly, many native speakers chose their home city or region as one of their topics.

The standard of pronunciation was generally good and examiners heard some excellent performances and relatively few students with heavy English accents. The most conspicuous weaknesses were poor *z*, *r* and *v* consonants and also some badly pronounced *sch* sounds as in *s-lecht*, *S-prache* etc. The English pronunciation of *Michael*, the protagonist in '*Der Vorleser*', was witnessed less often than in previous years, but there were several students who mispronounced key words of their topics, some examples being *DDR*, *Sozialismus*, *Kultur*, *Sowjetunion*, *Kaukasisch*.

Knowledge of Vocabulary and Grammar

Performances at either extreme of the mark scale were rare. Relatively few students achieved marks in the top band, having demonstrated a wide-ranging and secure knowledge of vocabulary and idioms and consistent accuracy in using basic and more complex structures. On the other hand, a relatively small number of students were unable to convey their ideas without ambiguity because of grammatical errors and lack of vocabulary. Few performances attracted marks below 6.

The main shortcomings identified by examiners related to:

- Accurate verb conjugation
- A secure knowledge of past participles (*er hat....geschrieben/ gedenkt/ geht* were not uncommon)
- Accurate word order in main and subordinating clauses
- Use of modal verbs i.e. *dürfen* vs. *müssen*, *wollen* with *zu*, incorrect imperfect forms

- Passive voice (*die Mauer war gebaut* was heard frequently)

The discussion of the Stimulus in Part 1 addresses current social issues and it was pleasing to see that most students had sufficient vocabulary to cope with the discussion. However, surprisingly, many students were unable to use correct phrases for expressing agreement or disagreement; *zustimmen*, *übereinstimmen*, *anderer/der gleichen Meinung sein* were often replaced with *ich stimme*, *ich stimme Ihnen* or *ich stimme das nicht*. The anglicised but wrong verb *affektieren* was used frequently and students had problems differentiating between *erhöhen* and *zunehmen* (*man muss die Preise zunehmen*) and between *Kultur/en* and *kulturell* (*Einwanderer bringen ihre Kulturelle*). For the Part 2 discussion most students knew a sufficiently wide range of topic-specific vocabulary. Examiners mentioned that many students who had studied *Der Vorleser* found the accurate use of *Analphabetin* and *Analphabetismus* challenging (*Hanna ist Analphabetismus, ist Analphabetikerin*). Other common problems with lexis included the use of *dafür* instead of *deshalb*, *strenge* for *stark* and the difference between *jemand* and *jeder*.

Naturally many students learn and memorise some complex idioms and structures for these tests. This can sometimes lead to an over-enthusiastic use of idiomatic phrases that would be more appropriate for essay writing and many students would benefit from being aware of some of the differences between spoken and written language.

As in previous years it is necessary to stress that despite the critical points contained in this report, examiners once again commented favourably not only on the thorough preparation undertaken by most students but also the enthusiasm shown by most students towards the German language. Meeting so many different students was 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

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

Converting Marks into UMS marks

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