

A-level **GERMAN**

Unit 2 Speaking
Report on the Examination

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General comments

This has been another successful examination series and teachers must be thanked for preparing their students so diligently for the tests. Most schools who expected a visiting examiner were efficient and helpful in arranging mutually convenient days for the tests. However, schools and colleges need to bear in mind that while examiners will try to be as flexible as possible regarding preferred dates, busy examining schedules often do not make it possible to grant requests for the later dates in May.

Visiting examiners were once again made welcome and were well looked after by staff at schools. Invigilators and chaperones were provided and rooms for the test and the preparation were, in most cases, appropriate. Occasionally examination rooms were too small to accommodate three people, including the chaperone, comfortably, as well as providing space for the examination papers.

Paperwork was usually dealt with satisfactorily although on a number of STMS forms for the 'T' option, the nominated topic had not been entered. Teachers are reminded that there is no need to send the students' notes to the AQA examiner, but CDs should be wrapped securely to prevent damage. Most recordings sent by schools were of a good quality but in some cases the recording levels for both participants had not been checked sufficiently so that the teacher's voice was much louder than the student's. CD tracks were often labelled inadequately. It is not helpful for the marker to read only 'Track 1, 2' etc on the computer screen. Tracks should either be renamed with the schools' and students' numbers, or a clear insert provided with the running order, and all necessary details need to accompany the CD. Writing this information just on the CD itself is not helpful to the marker. Most teacher-examiners introduced the students in accordance with instructions.

There were very few instances this year where teachers failed to cover all four topic areas in the course of the test. The majority of teacher-examiners carefully observed the prescribed timings. A few were, perhaps, over-anxious not to overrun by even the slightest margin and regularly brought the discussion of a sub-topic to an abrupt end, often cutting off the students in mid-sentence. While adhering to accurate timings is important, students should not feel pressured or be unsettled by being interrupted in full flow. Problems with timing most commonly occurred when Part 1 overran unduly and/or where the nominated topic took up too much time thereby putting pressure on the time available for the two remaining conversation topics. Schools are reminded that at least two minutes have to be devoted to each topic within the overall time of 15 minutes, otherwise examiners are obliged to reduce the interaction mark. Thankfully, this kind of 'penalty' had to be enforced only rarely, but teachers are reminded that each of the conversation topics bears equal weight and should be covered for roughly 3-3 ½ minutes. Stop-watches should not be re-set during the test so that timings conform to the marker's timing device.

Examiners for both options observed that most students were well prepared for the test. Students were universally communicative and often gained good marks for fluency and interaction. Very low total marks equivalent to an 'E' grade or below were seldom awarded. As in previous years, visiting examiners were pleased to see that almost everyone, including less able students, 'had a go' and rose to the challenge of conversing with a 'stranger'.

Teacher-examiners' conduct of the tests once again varied considerably. Many teachers got the best out of their students through skilful questioning techniques that offered students regular opportunities not just to make use of what they had prepared, but also to react spontaneously and to develop ideas on the spot. However, some teachers still allowed students to rely exclusively on scripted and memorised material. They often seemed to follow a list of predictable but unrelated questions without attempting to develop points by following up on students' responses. Teachers

are reminded that higher interaction marks will be awarded to students who can, from time to time, ‘think on their feet’ and react in a meaningful way to unrehearsed lines of questioning.

Examiners of teacher-conducted tests regularly commented that many teachers did not use one form of address consistently but repeatedly alternated between *Sie* and *du*. It is not advisable to attempt a different form of address just for the test. Teachers should stick to *du* if this has been used in the classroom and should also adapt the stimulus card questions accordingly. Visiting examiners mostly use *Sie* by default but are always willing to change to *du* if asked to do so by students.

Part 1: Discussion of Stimulus Card

According to the mark scheme, answers to the printed questions should be relevant and developed. Many students succeeded in exploiting the stimulus material to their best advantage and offered full and developed responses by adding examples, reasons etc. to all their answers. In many cases, however, students’ answers to the first four questions were rather brief and were then frequently followed by a lengthy response to the last question which often consisted of standard utterances about the sub-topic.

A number of students took so long to answer the five questions that insufficient time was available for the wider discussion. Although it is of course possible to give meaningful and developed answers in only 1 ½ to 2 minutes, marks above 3 were rarely achieved where the discussion was very short.

The wider discussion should arise from points made by the students in their earlier responses and it should also address other related issues of the sub-topic. Unfortunately not enough teacher-examiners followed these guidelines by exploring the subject on the card further and following up on points students had made. Many teachers filled the discussion section with standard questions about the sub-topic even if these had no or very little connection with the subject matter on the card.

Karte A: Urlaub im Freien

This was a popular card and prompted some good responses although in line with other cards students could often have exploited the visual and verbal material better. Answers to questions 2 and 3 about the advantages or disadvantages of camping holidays were often a little unimaginative and underdeveloped, quoting not much more than ‘*Sport treiben*’ or ‘*das Wetter*’. Some good responses were given to question 4 although *familienfreundlich* was not often developed. The wider discussions varied from simple GCSE-type exchanges about ‘*Meine Ferien*’ to more interesting explorations of the effects of modern tourism.

Karte B: Freizeit!

This was one of the most popular cards and presented students with a wide range of points for discussion related to their own lives. Students had very few problems with referring to the statistical information but the plural *Freizeitbeschäftigungen* in question 2 was often missed or ignored; most students talked only about *Freunde treffen*. A number of good reasons were given for the relatively low popularity of books and TV and questions 4 and 5 also elicited many good answers. There were concerns among some teachers about a possible deviation into ‘forbidden’ sub-topics’ during the discussion. However, if examiners - as they are expected to do - followed up on a few points raised by the students and developed ideas relating to music, the internet etc. such concerns were unnecessary. A strict separation of sub-topics or indeed topic areas is not always possible. Trends in free time activities is listed as one aspect within Popular Culture but it obviously contains a few elements that encroach into other topic areas. Many discussions rightly identified that *Einkaufen* was not among the activities on the card and then focused on shopping as a modern pastime. Some teachers changed the focus by discussing *Vorbilder/Stars/Image*. Only a few students

compared the fact that German teenagers apparently have six hours of free time per day to their own situation.

Karte C: Auszug von zu Hause

This card was handled with a varying degree of success. A lot of verbal information was given to students on the card and some students used it well by incorporating the words and phrases into extended utterances. By contrast, many students lifted the words and phrases more or less verbatim from the card without adding anything of their own. Question 3 elicited some imaginative answers beyond *anrufen*, *SMS schicken* and *skypen*. In answer to Question 4, only relatively few students offered ideas other than the need for financial help from parents. Most discussions concentrated on the students' own relationship with their parents but less often on students' own views about leaving home and becoming independent.

Karte D: Zu viel Fernsehen?

This was a popular card and not done as well as could have been expected. Few students made reference to the three very different photos and captions on the card while explaining the impact of television on families. Question 2 required students to deal with fairly straightforward statistical information, yet many students struggled to convey the content of the table without simply reading out numbers. The more able students were able to explain the numerical information with phrases such as *mehr als die Hälfte*, *ein Drittel*, *nur sehr wenige*, *fast niemand* etc. A few students had misunderstood *Fernsehgeräte* and interpreted it as viewing hours. Question 3 often produced disappointing answers as many students could not find any valid reasons for eating in front of the television other than the vast range of programmes available. *Mahlzeiten* was frequently not a familiar word and only very few students compared eating in front of the television with having a meal around the family table. The photo with the caption *Gemeinsam Sendungen ansehen* was hardly ever referred to, but most students expressed strong and mostly negative opinions about children having their own TV set. The exact wording of Question 5 (*eine zu große Rolle; in unserem Leben*) was often overlooked so that many students simply talked about the role of television in their own lives. Most teachers chose standard aspects of the sub-topic for the discussion, such as students' views on certain programmes, on adverts, on the dangers of watching too much TV etc. Some examiners commented on the over-use of the colloquial term *Glotze* and that unfortunately many students still used *der/das Fern* for *der Fernseher/das Fernsehgerät*.

Karte E: Der Trend zu Bio

This card was the least popular choice. There may not be a direct British equivalent to a German *Bio-Laden* but the sentences and pictures on the card gave most students enough useful information. The card discriminated well between levels of ability. More able students were able to use the verbal stimuli appropriately for their answers to questions 2 and 3 whereas less able students often read out the content of the bubbles without using a verb. Many students struggled with the correct pronunciation of *Pestizide*, *Gentechnik* and *regional* as well of *Bio* itself. The last question gave all students the opportunity to produce well practised responses about healthy eating although many students talked at length about *Sport* which was not pertinent to the actual question. The sub-topic of Health and well-being offers a wide range of issues for discussion but many teachers did not exploit aspects of healthy eating further, and instead immediately turned to matters concerning alcohol, smoking and drugs as well as stress in modern life.

Karte F: Kommunikation im Netz

This was a popular card and was generally done well. Questions 2 and 3 often produced comprehensive answers although some students did not make full use of the prompts on the card or failed to turn the verbal clues into full sentences. Not many students offered more expansive and personal ideas about *Freunde weltweit*, *Schutz der Privatsphäre* or *Daten weitergeben*. Question 4 often produced irrelevant answers as a considerable number of students did not know the verb

umgehen and had also overlooked *lernen*. Many replies to this question repeated ideas expressed in previous answers and stated what one should or should not do rather than how young people can learn what or what not to do. Examiners also commented that students' answers to questions 3 -5 frequently referred to the internet in general rather than social networks in particular. Discussions usually dealt with other aspects of computers and the internet but some teachers asked unrelated questions about mobile phones.

Part 2: Conversation

Discussing a nominated topic for the first few minutes of the conversation is intended to give students a more confident start but it should not be seen as an opportunity to deliver pre-learnt mini-presentations. Teachers should avoid starter questions like *Was können Sie mir übererzählen?* Many teacher-examiners still appeared to cover all the bullet points on the prompt card rather than concentrating on just a few. They often asked one question about each bullet point and moved on to the next without trying to develop students' responses. Where students delivered a lot of rehearsed material their pronunciation often suffered. Some less able students tried to recall long memorised answers which contained sophisticated vocabulary and complex grammatical structures beyond their linguistic ability.

Many teachers have now become used to selecting just one or two sub-topics from the remaining topic areas for a more detailed discussion, but there were still some teacher-examiners who addressed all the available sub-topics in quick succession so that the conversation felt more like an interrogation with little room for spontaneous development of ideas. Teachers are also reminded that the transition from one topic to the next should be made clear to the student and the AQA examiner.

As mentioned above, the majority of students in both the 'T' and 'V' option were keen to communicate. Interaction marks in the 7-8 band were the most commonly awarded. Students who, in addition to using prepared phrases, also coped well with unpredicted questions earned marks in the highest band. Fluency was generally good. Few students were so hesitant that the flow of communication was seriously affected. On some occasions, students tried almost too hard to avoid grammar errors to the detriment of a steady and natural pace of delivery.

Examiners commented favourably on the general standard of pronunciation. Many students consistently pronounced typical German consonants (*ch, r*) accurately but some had made no attempt to abandon bad habits such as *ick/isch, mackt, moeckte* etc. Errors with *z* and *v* were common and examiners again noticed an abundance of intrusive *ä* sounds at the ends of words e.g. *Leutä*.

Common mispronunciations included *Famili* for *Familie*, *Jungenliche* for *Jugendliche*, *Kultjur/Kultür*, *duuf* for *doof*, and *losen* for *lösen*, *Erwaschene*, *Elten* for *Eltern*, *Fuschball* and wrongly handled abbreviations *DVD/CD (Dividi/Sidi)*.

Knowledge of Grammar and Vocabulary

Neither a marked improvement nor a noticeable deterioration in the quality of grammar/vocabulary was observed. The same areas of common weaknesses remain as in previous years. The majority of students did have a good enough knowledge of vocabulary and grammar to ensure they could, for the most part, communicate clearly. Marks below the 7-9 band were relatively rare and there were some outstanding performances.

Word order in main and dependent clauses was generally handled with a fairly high degree of accuracy. Even less able students, while regularly ignoring main clause inversion of verb and subject, often constructed common subordinate clauses (*weil, wenn*) accurately. Many students had learnt conditional phrases like *wenn ichwäre/hätte* and employed them appropriately

whereas only more able students consistently succeeded with infinitive clauses. A surprising number of students failed to use any adjectival endings where necessary. As in previous examination series, many examiners regularly expressed concern about a widespread inability to observe verb/subject agreement, even with very elementary verb forms (*ich hat, er kommen, ich wissen* etc.).

Other common grammatical errors included:

- putting the verb at end of sentences starting with *und, aber* and *deshalb*
- placement of adverbs before the verb e.g. *ich oft spiele, ich nicht esse...*
- common past participles e.g. *gelauft, geschrieben, geseht*
- use of common reflexive verbs (*wir verstehen gut, ich fühle wohl*)
- modal verb conjugations and structures e.g. *er musst, wir kann; man muss hat*
- use of prepositions (*auf dem Computer, drei Tage vor, ins/im, nach/zu*)
- basic personal pronouns e.g. *ich sehe er*
- wrong use of *sein* and *sind* (*ich muss...sind, weil sie teuer sein*)

Fewer students than in the past confused *Gesundheit* and *gesund* but there were insecurities with a few other frequently used adjectives e.g. *Internet ist süchtig, sie sind übergewicht*.

Other common errors with vocabulary were:

- *Zeit verbringen/spenden/verschwenden*
- *dürfen/erlauben*
- *schlimm/schlank*
- *entspannend/entspannt/Entspannung*
- *lassen/verlassen/verlieren*
- *jemand/jeder*
- *wissen* (often used as *weissen*) / *kennen*
- *helfen/hilfen*
- *Stunde/Uhr*.

Examples of anglicised vocabulary were the verbs *kontakten* and *pausen* as well as phrases like *in meiner Meinung, in/im General, Freunde machen*.

The annual report on the examination and on students' performances inevitably points out areas of shortcomings and may sometimes seem to paint too negative a picture. It should therefore be emphasised again that most examiners for both the 'V' and the 'T' option commended the majority of students for their hard work in preparing for the test, for their general enthusiasm for the subject and their willingness to communicate in German.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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

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