

A-level **GERMAN**

Unit 4 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 diligently for the tests. Most schools who expected a visiting examiner were very efficient and helpful in arranging mutually convenient days for the tests. However, schools and colleges are asked to bear in mind that while examiners will try to be as flexible as possible regarding requested dates, busy examining schedules do not always 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. 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 by the schools although on a number of STMS forms, the Cultural Topics had not been entered. 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 school's and students' numbers or a clear insert produced with the running order, and all necessary information needs to accompany the CD. Writing, just on the CD itself is not helpful to the marker. Most teacher-examiners introduced the students in accordance with instructions.

Examiners of the 'T' option regularly commented that many teachers did not use one form of address consistently but repeatedly alternated between *Sie* and *du*. Teachers are strongly advised not to use a different form of address just for the test. Visiting examiners often use *Sie* by default but are always willing to change to *du* if asked to do so.

Part 1: Response to the stimulus material

Teacher-examiners must ensure that not only the card but also the opinion chosen by the student are clearly announced at the beginning of the test. The AQA examiner must know from the start which side of the argument the student wants to use in the presentation. Teachers should also explicitly invite the student to give a one minute summary and should start the timing device with the student's first sentence. In general, the timing of the presentation was well observed, and most students managed to convey and develop a number of points in approximately one minute. There were, however, examples of expositions being either far too short or lasting well over 60 seconds. Not all teachers interrupted students at around the one minute mark in order to start the discussion so that the time for this important section was unduly shortened. Examiners observed that a number of native speakers did not deal well with the presentation which often consisted of just two or three 'off the cuff' sentences about the issue. Like the students, they need to know and be prepared for what is expected of them in this section.

Although examiners heard many good presentations containing well defined points with some development, they also reported that too many students had not focused sufficiently on the issue on the stimulus, or on the content of the chosen statement, and filled their presentation with generalised arguments about the sub-topic. During their preparation, students need to look carefully at the title above the statements as well as the exact wording in the two opposing speech bubbles, in order to assemble arguments that are closely related to the issue. Reading out the chosen statement wastes valuable time as does an unnecessary essay-type introduction.

During the ensuing discussion, students need to be given the opportunity to explain, justify and defend their views. The (teacher)-examiner needs to pick up on the points made in the

presentation and to react continually to the students' responses. The notes in the examiner's booklet can serve as an additional help in moving the discussion on and providing ideas for challenges. However, a number of teachers relied too heavily or even exclusively on there instead of developing the discussion based on what the student said. The notes were often read out verbatim without any attempt to re-phrase them in a more student-friendly manner. This approach prevented the discussion from unfolding in a natural way. It is also important that teachers consciously avoid long-winded questions, prompts and challenges that may be confusing to the students and deprive them of valuable time to make their views clear. AQA examiners occasionally commented that some teachers were over-confrontational while in other cases, the discussion resembled a gentle question and answer sequence about the issue with few challenges or requests for clarification from the teacher.

Despite the foregoing comments,, many discussions were very well conducted. Most students were keen to participate and they demonstrated their ability to react spontaneously and to deliver an effective defence of their views. Marks below 6 were rarely awarded. All cards seemed to be equally accessible and problems with the vocabulary in the speech bubbles were not evident.

Karte A: *Wie nützlich sind Klimagipfel?*

This was a popular choice and most students defended *Meinung 2* in support of climate summits. Some good arguments were expressed by the students although many succumbed to the temptation to talk about climate change in general, its causes, renewable energy etc, rather than closely addressing the precise issue on the card. Not all (teacher-) examiners were willing or successful in re-directing the student's attention to the main issue on the card but the best discussions focused on the value or otherwise of large meetings, on the importance of international cooperation and on the role of industrial and developing countries within the climate debate.

Karte B: *Ursachen von Rassismus*

This was the most popular card and the majority of students defended *Meinung 2*. Those who supported *Meinung 1* usually did so vehemently and with conviction. Within the general topic area of the multicultural society, the three sub-topics cannot always be treated entirely discretely and aspects of one sub-topic can be relevant to others. Nonetheless, many presentations and discussions contained too much general discourse about immigration and integration without keeping the causes and problems of racism in sharp focus. Very few students picked up on the word '*Schutz*' in the speech bubble to develop ideas relating to the individual's responsibility in the fight against racism.

Karte C: *Welche Strafen sind wirksam?*

This card which was a fairly popular choice often led to interesting and wide-reaching discussions. Most students supported *Meinung 1* and their presentations usually contained relevant and sufficiently developed points. Most students were then able to respond to the examiner's suggestions and challenges with valid counter-arguments. Occasionally, the discussions deviated too much from the main focus of '*gemeinnützige Arbeit*' into a discussion about the advantages or disadvantages of prison.

Karte D: *Energie sparen – sinnvoll oder nutzlos?*

This card produced mixed results. Most students chose *Meinung 1* but many presentations, rather than concentrating more on the individual's responsibility, offered a wealth of general statements about global warming and renewable energies. Environmental issues are, of course, complex and not easy to compartmentalise into separate sub-topics but students should only pick a card if they feel able to find a sufficient number of arguments that focus closely on the issue under scrutiny. During some discussions, the students were steered back to the actual subject with appropriate

challenges but many teachers made it more difficult for students by failing to develop the discussion from what they said and by artificially going through the bullet points in the examiner's booklet.

Karte E: *Recht auf Asyl für alle?*

This was a popular card and most students chose to support *Meinung 1*. Those that chose to argue for the opposite stance usually argued with vigour in both presentation and discussion. Many examiners commented on the fact that the majority of students did not seem to know the difference between asylum seekers and immigrants. Although war and persecution were widely mentioned as reasons for seeking asylum, most lines of arguments did not differ in any way from those offered in discussions on immigration as a whole, e.g. jobs, integration, language, cultural enrichment etc. Nevertheless, as most students were eager to defend their own views, the card did produce generally good performances.

Karte F: *Der Einfluss moderner Technologie*

As in previous examination series, the topic title seems to deter many students from choosing this card. For the relatively few who did so the outcome was usually very positive. This sub-topic should not be regarded as being more difficult or requiring more sophisticated language than others. The card offered students and examiners a number of distinct points for development and on which to base the discussion. Most students supported *Meinung 1* and made the benefits of modern communication technology the main focus of their arguments. Teachers and visiting examiners had to be mindful of the need to lift the discussion above the level of the equivalent AS topic. Medical research, gene technology and the use of robots in industry and daily life also featured in interesting and lively discussions.

Part 2: Conversation

The range of cultural topics has stayed more or less unchanged and some examiners thought that the variety of books, plays and films has narrowed over the years. Architects, painters, poets or musicians featured rarely but some examiners listened to or participated in enjoyable discussions about Heinrich Heine, Beethoven or Friedensreich Hundertwasser to name but three. Most students had clearly enjoyed studying their topics and many admitted to having learnt a lot about German culture, history etc. When students expressed critical opinions about a novel or drama this usually led to interesting exchanges and gave examiners opportunities to ask for explanations or to challenge students' views.

Examiners regularly consider that historical topics often cover too long a period e.g. *Deutschland 1945 – 1989*. Dealing with such a large time span often means that students acquire only superficial knowledge without developing a deeper understanding of more complex issues, events or personalities. Geographical topics were on the whole handled slightly better than in previous years. Students who have studied a region need to have analysed and understood economic and social matters, current problems and potential development in the future. Students' contributions, however, were frequently restricted to predominantly factual descriptions of people, countryside, customs and tourist attractions alongside a few 'token' opinions.

When studying a book, drama or film, views and evaluations are obviously a key element of this study and the majority of visiting or teacher examiners focused, in their discussions, on the students' opinions. They sometimes challenged them and encouraged further development of points made. At the same time, too many teachers asked questions like *Worum geht es in diesem Buch/Drama/Film? Wer ist....? Was passiert am Ende?* or *Was können Sie mir über den Autor/Regisseur erzählen?* - questions that invariably led to pre-learned renderings of storylines or biographies and often wasted time that could have been used for exploring and challenging the

student's reactions and views spontaneously. Schools are reminded that examiners cannot award high marks for interaction if students rely, for the most part, or entirely on factual knowledge and pre-learned material. In addition, students' mode of delivery, their intonation and the quality of their pronunciation often change for the better if and when they have to react spontaneously.

The most popular Cultural Topics included:

- Author: *Der Vorleser, Der Richter und sein Henker*
- Dramatist: *Der Besuch der alten Dame, Andorra*
- Film: *Das Leben der Anderen, Good bye Lenin*
- History: *Berliner Mauer, DDR 1961-1989, Deutschland 1945 -*
- Geography: Berlin, Bayern

Most students spoke with good fluency and few were awarded marks below 3. The general standard of pronunciation was also pleasing with very heavy English accents being quite rare. Weaknesses with 'z', 'ch' and 'v' consonants persisted and examiners heard many instances of 'un-German' 'e' vowels (*gäht, Szäne*) as well as the tendency to raise the voice at the end of each sentence. Among the most common mispronunciations were *Juropa* for *Europa*, *Tecknologie*, *Regisseur* with hard g, *Lenin* pronounced as *Lennin*. As in previous years, it was surprising how many students consistently referred to DDR as DDA and how often the English pronunciation of *Michael* (from *Der Vorleser*) occurred.

Knowledge of Grammar and Vocabulary

The standard was more or less unchanged from last year although examiners felt that fewer students managed to slip into the top band of 13-15. Very weak performances with marks below 6 were also quite rare. Many students had obviously worked hard to prepare sophisticated structures and employed them accurately and appropriately. Even less able students often succeeded with conditional phrases such as *Wenn ich damals in Berlin gewohnt hätte...* At the same time, weaknesses in applying basic grammar rules became obvious from a great number of students across the ability range. Examiners particularly pointed at unsatisfactory verb conjugation (including the most elementary forms like *ich hat, er helfe, er wisst*) and insecure knowledge of past participles. Word order in more complex structures was sometimes better handled than in basic sentences as many students consistently ignored the inversion of subject and verb and often placed the verb at the end of sentences starting with *und, aber* and *deshalb*.

Other common grammatical errors included:

- reflexive verbs (*er fühlt schuldig*)
- confusing *konnte* and *könnte, mag* and *möchte*
- use of personal pronouns (*sie hat er geliebt*)
- use of *als, wenn* and *wie* (*als ich gesagt habe; wenn die Mauer gefallen ist; es ist besser dann...*)
- using *will* for the future tense
- wrong word order where *dass* is omitted (*ich glaube, das nicht richtig ist*)

The majority of students had sufficient vocabulary at their disposal to express their ideas clearly although the range of appropriate idiomatic phrases was rather limited. Some opening gambits such as *wenn es nach mir ginge...*, *ich bin fest davon überzeugt...* were sometimes over-used or not placed in an appropriate context. As in previous years many students were rather unsure about verbs or phrases expressing agreement or disagreement resulting in frequently heard expressions like *ich stimme (nicht), ich stimme mit dir/Ihnen/mit Sie; du bist/Sie sind (nicht) Recht*.

Other common vocabulary errors included:

- *die Sowjeten*
- *die Spreche* for *die Sprache*

- *jemand* for *jeder*
- *einige / einzige* (*die einige Sache* or *die nur Sache*)
- *sehr besser / schlechter*
- *treu* for *wahr*
- *nicht ein* for *kein*
- wrong use of *sympathisch* (*ich bin sympathisch mit Hanna*).

The annual report on this examination and on students' performances inevitably points out areas of shortcomings and may sometimes seem to paint too negative a picture. It must 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. Many students impressed examiners with the high standard of their German and with their willingness to discuss their ideas enthusiastically whether on current topical issues or on their cultural topics.

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