

Examiners' Report January 2009

GCE

GCE German (8GN01/9GN01)

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Unit 1

Assessment Principles

This paper carries 50 marks. It consists of a conversation between the visiting or teacher examiner on an AS topic area chosen by the student. The general topic areas available are:

- Youth Culture and Concerns
- Lifestyle: Health and Fitness
- The World Around Us
- Education and Employment.

2 stimulus cards are provided for each area. Before starting the examination, the candidate has 15 minutes to prepare for the examination with the stimulus card provided. He or she may make notes of up to one side of A4 in this time, and he or she may refer to these notes during the examination.

The conversation lasts between 8 and 10 minutes and is made up of two parts. In Part A, the candidate is asked 4 questions relating to the stimulus card which are set by Edexcel. These questions are mandatory and may be repeated, but not re-phrased in any way, although the examiner may change them to use 'Du' rather than 'Sie'. This is the only change that can be made. They must be asked in the order provided and at the outset of the examination. The first two questions relate specifically to information in the stimulus material, the second two to the wider issues developing from the stimulus material. It is expected that the candidate will give answers which are as full and detailed as possible. The candidate's understanding of this stimulus-specific topic area is marked out of 4.

In Part B, the examiner should move away from the specific topic on the stimulus card and develop a wider conversation about the general topic area. The candidate's understanding of the general topic area is marked out of a total of 10.

The marks of 8 for Quality of Language (Accuracy), 8 for Quality of Language (Lexis) and 20 for response apply to the test as a whole.

Candidates' Responses

This was the first session the test was conducted, and the entry was relatively small. There was unsurprisingly a very high number of native or near-native speakers, who are always likely, though not necessarily, going to acquit themselves well. This was certainly the case here. A number of centres did, however, enter non-native speakers. As a result, there were a few candidates who were less able, but also a number who acquitted themselves quite well, given they have only had one term post-GCSE.

Examiners felt that the stimulus texts were straightforward and accessible to candidates, although some seemed to struggle with 'Einfluss' and 'außer'.

In terms of topic area, the majority candidates opted for 'Lifestyle, Health and Fitness', followed by a few choosing 'Youth Culture'. There were only isolated examples of candidates who addressed 'Education and Employment' or 'The World Around Us'.

Accuracy and range were somewhat variable. Many of these candidates would have taken GCSE about 6 months ago, and had not made a lot of progress since then. Candidates who scored highly were those with a wide range of relevant lexis, and structures which were more adventurous than a 'weil' subordinating conjunction. The nature of the test does make it difficult to bring in any other tense than the present, although some examiners contrived a past by asking the candidate what kind of sport they did when they were younger. There is also a danger of making the conversation personal about what they eat, what they drink, if they smoke, and if they play sport. The specification states 'considered and informed responses' which implies an ability to analyse and justify.

Response was sometimes difficult to pinpoint. There was certainly spontaneous discourse, and many candidates had clearly been told to keep talking, so there was not too much hesitation. The mark grids do, however, refer to the 'development of responses'. Not all replies were 'ably developed': there was in some cases a tendency to give one-sentence answers and wait for the next question. This is different from the previous AS oral text where candidates have prepared a topic, and are therefore more able to speak at some length.

Understanding the stimulus posed few problems, although not many scored the highest mark as there was insufficient development of the broader questions 3 and 4, where an opinion needed to be expressed and justified.

Understanding the general topic area depended on how much research the candidate had done, and whether he or she had the linguistic competence to express his or her ideas.

Conduct of the Examination

The majority of Teacher-Examiners conducted the examination well, given that this was a completely new test. Centres seemed to have looked carefully at the specification, and there was evidence that they had also used the Oral Training Guide and practised with the specimen materials. There were, however, a number of issues which arose:

- Timing was accurate overall, although the anticipated even distribution of time between section A and section B did not materialise. The average time for section A was about 2 minutes, with 6 - 8 minutes being spent on section B.
- A number of examiners tried to rephrase the questions in section A, or asked supplementary questions in this section, which is not permissible. One TE asked the 4th question about 6 minutes into the examination after a good number of general topic area questions. As stated above, the questions may only be changed by the use of 'Du' and must otherwise be asked in the format and order on the examiner version of the stimulus card.
- Some teachers were inconsistent regarding the use of 'Du' and 'Sie', perhaps as a result of the Part A questions using 'Sie'.
- There were some isolated incidences where TEs tried to develop the conversation 'naturally' in section B from the stimulus in section A, which meant that there was a danger that the conversation would not move enough

into the general topic area. Candidates whose tests, which do not move away from the stimulus material, will not be able to access the full range of marks. It is advisable that TEs address a completely different aspect of the general topic area in Part B.

- Most examiners (and this is not surprising for a new examination) adhered very closely to the linked subtopics as outlined in the specification. This meant in some cases very repetitious questioning, with every candidate being asked much the same thing: Sport, gesundes Essen, Rauchen, Alkohol, Drogen, Krebs, AIDs in the case of Lifestyle, Health and Fitness. In large centres, the examiner has the unenviable but necessary task of finding a wider variety of questions relating to the sub-topics. It was good to note that the issue of pre-learning was not so much of a problem in this examination, and most tests were indeed authentic conversations, albeit of varying standards of dialogue. If, however, all the candidates are asked almost identical questions, it goes against the spirit of the paper.

Advice and Guidance

- Teacher-Examiners should consider the conduct of the test very carefully, as if this is not done according to Edexcel guidelines, candidates' marks may very well suffer. (We can only mark what we hear.)
- Candidates need to have the opportunity to think in depth about the topic area chosen, and the many related subtopics. Success comes from good preparation, detailed knowledge and the ability to express and justify opinions.
- Teachers should encourage candidates to say as much as possible in response to the questions in Part A, especially the more general questions 3 and 4. The usefulness of practice cannot be overstated here.
- Teachers should make use of the training opportunities provided. Teachers should use the oral training guide and published specimen material with the candidates. It may also be helpful to provide the candidates with a copy of the mark grid, so that they understand what is required in order to attain a high mark.

Statistics

Unit 1 Listening and Writing

Grade	Max. Mark	A	B	C	D	E
Raw boundary mark	50	38	33	28	23	18
Uniform boundary mark	60	48	42	36	30	24

Notes:

Maximum Mark (Raw): the mark corresponding to the sum total of the marks shown on the mark scheme.

Boundary mark: the minimum mark required by a candidate to qualify for a given grade.

Centres are reminded that this is the first examination for this new specification and that coursework boundaries may change in the following series.

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