

# Examiners' Report/ Principal Examiner Feedback

June 2011

GCE German (6GN03) Paper 1A

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## Assessment Principles

This unit assesses understanding as well as communication and spoken language. It is marked out of 50, by Edexcel examiners, although the examination itself may be conducted by a visiting examiner, or by a teacher examiner. This was the second session of the new specification. Centres should be aware that short tests are limited on the marks that can be awarded, and that long tests are disregarded after 13 minutes.

Teacher examiners in particular should be aware that listening as well as speaking skills are assessed in Unit 3, which influences the way in which the test is conducted. Reference to the current mark grid is recommended.

## Candidates' Responses

The first part of the test is a discussion of a controversial issue, which has been prepared in advance. Candidates have up to one minute to present their argument, outlining whether they are for or against. The examiner then takes the opposing view and a debate should ensue. The total length for this part of the test is 5 minutes. Candidates should be aware that the issue chosen should be one for which there are two possible sides to the argument. The oral form which they have to submit clearly states this. Teachers should verify in advance that the topic is appropriate, otherwise marks can be lost needlessly. "Ich spreche über Schönheitsoperationen" is not exactly clear: this is particularly difficult for visiting examiners who are preparing in advance, not knowing which stance is going to be taken.

The most popular issues for debate remain Abtreibung, Sterbehilfe, Tierversuche, probably because there are obvious pros and cons which can be researched and expanded upon. But there were some more unusual ones such as "Gegen Ein-Kind-Politik in China", and "Kommunismus könnte viele der heutigen gesellschaftlichen Probleme lösen."

Many candidates had undertaken in-depth research, preparing excellent arguments with relevant lexis. The rationale of this part of the test is that the candidates are on familiar ground, and this should give them confidence. Pre-learned, regurgitated material will, as always, be penalised. Examiners should strive to engage in debate, rather than merely expecting a recitation of factual information. There should be evidence of research, but this should be used to back up a point of view.

The second part of the test covers at least two unpredictable areas. These are likely to be topics which have been discussed during the course, but the candidates must not know in advance what they are going to be. Examiners should prepare a wide selection of topics, so that each candidate discusses something different, as far as possible. If there are only about 3 topics, rotated amongst all the candidates, it looks as though these have been well prepared in advance and are not exactly unpredictable.

An excessive number of topics, for example 6 in as many minutes, does not permit the candidate to develop a line of argument in any depth.

Some centres are focussing on AS topic areas, with many questions on lifestyle, health and fitness, and the world around us. Although this is acceptable, it is important for candidates to show progression from AS in the A2 year if they choose to discuss these topic areas. It is to the candidates' advantage to display an ability to cover new topic areas.

### **Response**

This area is marked out of 20, amounting to 40% of the total marks. It should be noted that this covers not only spontaneous discourse, but also range of lexis and structures, and the use of abstract language.

The definition of what constitutes spontaneity seems to be the most vexed area. It is of course to be expected that candidates have prepared relevant lexis, and will know phrases related to discussion and debate such as langfristig/kurzfristig, Vor/Nachteile. But teachers should be wary of over-preparation, and over-rehearsal, as this will be revealed in the intonation and manner of presentation. With visiting examiners the spontaneity is self-evident, as they do not know what has been covered in class. To their credit, some candidates appear to have anticipated every possible question and line of thought, and are able to respond promptly and coherently to every question.

Examiners should be aware that it is perfectly acceptable to interrupt candidates, and in fact students should expect this. The ability to react quickly to a shift in emphasis can be rewarded here. A natural, spontaneous conversation will have minor hesitations allowing time to reflect, and then elaborate.

Abstract language was at times a difficult area. It depended to a certain extent on what the topic was. But many candidates were able to bring in discussions on discrimination, justice, fairness, and related issues.

It should be borne in mind that range of lexis and structures are also evaluated in this section. Candidates should be able to show progress from AS level, being more confident with for example the passive, indirect speech, and the conditional.

In the second section covering unpredictable areas, it is not appropriate to resort to personal anecdote of the "Was machen Sie nächstes Jahr?" variety. My suggestion would be to limit the number of topics to two, or maybe three, to permit the candidate to elaborate in greater depth, possibly referring to some research on the internet, or a recent TV programme. I would also recommend choosing unrelated topics, such as "Fremdsprachen" and "Studiengebühren", in that if they are Sterbehilfe, Abtreibung und die Todesstrafe, a large amount of similar lexis and constructions are covered.

Although there is no longer a section awarding marks for justification and debate, candidates are expected to express and defend their opinions. As a Volksabstimmung took place during this examining period, some candidates were excited at being able to vote for the first time, and some very well

informed discussions took place. There are also some mature candidates, who bring yet another dimension to the debate: I was very interested and moved listening to a debate "gegen den Krieg in Afghanistan" from a serving Sanitäter who spoke persuasively from personal experience.

### **Quality of Language**

This is marked out of 7, and assesses such grammatical issues as gender, case, singular/plural, past participles and word order. In addition, pronunciation and intonation, to a certain extent, are assessed. In many cases the influence of the first language is still very evident, either with anglicisms, or a noticeable Greek or Spanish accent. Centres should note that certain areas which used to be assessed as quality of language, have now been subsumed into the response grid, so it would be incorrect to assume that quality of language plays an insignificant role.

It is certainly not only native speakers who can attain full marks in this area. Candidates who have been well taught, probably visited a German-speaking country, had the opportunity to practise with a German assistant and have prepared well, are of course able to achieve 7/7 here.

### **Reading and research**

7 marks are allocated for evidence of reading and research. This applies to both the chosen issue and to the unpredictable areas. Clearly candidates are more able to show their knowledge in the prepared part of the test, and indeed, many had done laudable amounts of research, providing statistics, examples, and reference to newspaper articles and TV programmes. It is of course more difficult to draw on prior knowledge in the unpredictable areas, in that the candidate should not know what is going to be discussed. However, since many topics will have been included in the GCE curriculum, many candidates were still able to cite examples to illustrate a point which they wished to make: for example, many had strong feelings about "Studiengebühren", and had been involved in recent protests, and were well-informed on these issues. Preparation for this should be a willingness to stay "auf dem laufenden", by keeping up-to-date on current controversial topics.

## **Comprehension and development**

This area, marked out of 16, is aimed at assessing understanding and the ability to deal with questioning. In order to respond, one has to have understood the question: in other words, listening skills are tested. This does have implications for the way in which questions are formulated and asked, in that there should be a wide variety in order to provide evidence of the candidate's ability. Many candidates were able to cope with every form of questioning, including in some cases analysing an imaginary scenario of "Was hätten Sie gemacht/gesagt, wenn Sie.....gesehen/gemacht hätten?"

Development pre-supposes that the candidate has fully understood the question, and is then able to sustain a detailed response, giving not a one-sentence reply, but several sentences, developing a line of discussion en route. Many candidates had been advised to do this: however, repeating the question in a statement form is not really necessary, and can be a waste of time, especially now that the test is considerably shorter.

For this reason too, I would suggest that it may be better to focus more closely on two unpredictable areas, rather than superficially covering five or six. This enables the candidate to explore the subject in greater depth, showing ability to develop a line of thinking. The reference in the mark grid to a wider variety of question forms means not only linguistically more complex, but also conceptually. This is the point where listening skills, the ability to analyse what has been heard, and to respond, are being tested.

## Advice and Guidance

- 1. Issue:** candidates must choose a genuinely controversial issue, and argue consistently for or against it. The teacher/examiner should take the opposing view, but aim to end on a conciliatory note.
- 2. Timing:** the presentation may take the maximum time of one minute. Anything longer should be interrupted. Overall the chosen issue should last 5 minutes. If it is longer, this erodes the time available for the unpredictable areas, namely 6-8 minutes, for a total time of 11-13 minutes. Please note that the timing of the test begins **when the candidate begins to speak**, not from the initial introduction of name, candidate number etc.
- 3. Conduct:** Teacher examiners should look closely at the mark grid to see what is being assessed, as this has implications for the conduct, not least on the style of questioning, which can no longer be minimal, otherwise there is no evidence of the candidate's comprehension abilities. Teachers may like to consider preparing a hierarchy of questions, ranging from the very simple, to the more challenging. A range is essential.
- 4. Oral chosen issue form:** this should be filled in correctly, in German, with the stance clearly stated. This is particularly important for candidates with a visiting examiner.
- 5. Recording:** Good sound quality is essential. The microphone should be nearer to the candidate than the examiner. All mobile phones must be switched off (not just on silent, as there is otherwise electronic interference) and there should be no background noise or interruptions. AS and A2 oral tests must be recorded separately. If cassettes are used, please check that the tape is long enough: one candidate on each side of a C60, two on a C90. Please also check that every candidate has been recorded, that it is audible and at the correct speed. It is helpful to label the cassette as well as the box. Please ensure that every cassette is rewound to the beginning before posting them off. Markers can lose valuable time if they have to rewind a large number of cassettes. Please ensure that CD recordings can be read on any machine and are not merely computer-compatible. A label with the candidates' names and numbers should be included with the CD. With a large number of candidates, centres may find that a memory stick is the best option. This is returned to the centre in the same way that cassettes and CDs are returned.

# Unit 3: Understanding and Spoken Response

## Marking guidance for oral examiners

### Tests that are too short

A test is too short if it is less than 10 minutes 30 seconds. Candidates are allowed a 30 second tolerance.

Drop down one mark band to the corresponding mark across the following assessment grids:

- 'Response'
- 'Comprehension and Development'

e.g.

5-8	Limited incidence of spontaneous discourse; limited range of lexis and structures; very little evidence of abstract language.
9-12	Satisfactory incidence of spontaneous discourse; range of lexis and structures adequate with some ability to handle language of abstract concepts.
13-16	Frequent examples of spontaneous discourse; good range of lexis and structures; good use of abstract concepts.

If a candidate would have scored 12, they should be given 8, if they would have scored 9, they should be given 5. The penalty should not be applied to 'Quality of language' or 'Reading and research'

### Test that are too long

Once the 13 minute mark has passed, the examiner stops listening at the end of the next sentence.

### Tests that do not move away from initial input

e.g. spontaneous discussion is not initiated/further unpredictable areas of discussion are not covered.

Candidates are limited in the amount of marks they can score. Please see the grids.

Response	
No unpredictable areas discussed	Only <b>one</b> unpredictable area discussed
No more than 8 marks	No more than 12 marks

Reading and research	
No unpredictable areas discussed	Only <b>one</b> unpredictable area discussed
No more than 3 marks	No more than 4 marks

Comprehension and development	
No unpredictable areas discussed	Only <b>one</b> unpredictable area discussed
No more than 7 marks	No more than 10 marks

### Tests that are pre-learnt

Candidates are limited in the amount of marks they can score. Please see 'Response' grid.

- 'Response' - cannot score more than 8, irrespective of use of lexis/structure/abstract language.



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