



## **General Certificate of Education**

# **German 1661** *Specification*

**GER2T/V Speaking**

# **Report on the Examination** *2010 examination - June series*

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## Unit 2

### General comments

Visiting examiners generally expressed their satisfaction with the accommodation and the support provided by centres. Invigilators and chaperones were usually in place and staff at schools and colleges must be thanked for playing their part in making the examination run smoothly.

Examiners' reports on the use of AQA Audio recorder were largely positive, but inevitably there were some teething problems. These often arose from wrongly set bit rates, from unsuitable microphones and from screensavers not having been deactivated. Most centres had followed minutely the instructions issued by AQA for setting up and testing the equipment before the arrival of the examiner and had ensured that technical support was available throughout the session. Unfortunately, there were also a few centres where the technical preparation and support were unsatisfactory thus causing unnecessary stress to the examiner and diverting his/her full attention away from the conduct of the tests.

Centre-conducted tests were recorded on a range of media, but a greater proportion than last year was submitted on CDs and memory sticks. Recordings in digital format are now considered to be preferable due to their superior sound quality and their general ease of use, but centres should make sure that volume levels are set at a sufficiently high rate and that tracks are clearly labelled.

Students, teachers and examiners alike have 'settled in' well into the structure of the examination and many excellent conversations were conducted in both parts of the examination. Visiting examiners remarked that most candidates were keen to interact and were equally well-prepared for each of the four topic areas.

Examiners marking centre-conducted tests also commented favourably on the way in which tests had been conducted in general. Many teachers must be congratulated for following all the guidelines with great care and for getting the best out of their candidates through skilful examining technique. Very few teacher-examiners failed to cover the four topics and most succeeded in allocating the appropriate time to each topic although examiners did observe a tendency to devote too much time to the nominated topic.

Teachers are reminded that failure to cover a topic for at least 2 minutes within the overall time of approximately 15 minutes will lead to a reduction of interaction marks. Poor time-management and a rather casual approach to guidelines often existed in centres where all or most candidates were native speakers. They and their teacher-examiners must be clear that the same format and assessment criteria apply as with non-native speaking candidates.

Some teachers' inconsistency in addressing the candidates with either *du* or *Sie* caused again some unease among markers. There were numerous tests where the teacher repeatedly switched between both forms of address. As has been pointed out before, there is no need to suddenly use *Sie* on the day of the test if this is not what candidates have become accustomed to in the classroom.

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## Part 1: Stimulus Card

This part of the test was generally handled successfully and none of the cards proved either particularly difficult or easy. Nonetheless, each card contained elements that could discriminate between good and less able candidates. Stimulus cards usually present a combination of visual, verbal and sometimes numerical information and during their preparation time candidates should find ways how to exploit this material to their advantage. Verbal information on the card often does not contain a conjugated verb and candidates should refrain from simply reading it out verbatim. Changing information which is presented in bullet-point or statistical format into full sentences is a skill that still needs to be practised. Pictures and photographs on the card as well as their captions can often be used to illustrate and to develop an idea, but rather few candidates made use of such opportunities.

The majority of teacher-examiners asked the printed questions as instructed without any supplementary questions (although it is possible to put an extra question after the first one if the candidate's response failed to give a clear indication of the subject matter on the stimulus). It was pleasing to see that many more candidates than in previous examination series prepared extended answers to the five questions and were therefore able to gain marks above 3. However, candidates must also be careful not to devote excessive time to their prepared answers, as this will take valuable time away from the wider discussion of the stimulus.

During this discussion the candidate's responses to the printed questions should be developed and other related aspects of the sub-topic should be considered. Allowing the candidate to enter into a rehearsed exchange on the sub-topic with very little connection to the content of the stimulus is therefore not the correct approach, but unfortunately this was again employed by a few teachers. Markers are instructed that in extreme cases of this happening the mark be restricted to a maximum of 2. It must be stressed that many teacher-examiners observed good practice; they enabled their candidates to develop ideas and often to talk spontaneously about matters arising from the stimulus card and relevant aspects of the sub-topic.

Time-keeping in Part 1 was generally good but there were some cases where this first part of the test lasted as long as seven or eight minutes. Such disregard for accurate timing makes it difficult to achieve appropriate coverage of the three remaining topics and at the same time complete the test within approximately 15 minutes. Teachers are reminded that markers do not re-set stopwatches at the end of Part 1.

### Card A: *Schön sein ist alles*

This was a popular card and generally presented few problems. In answer to Question 3, many candidates ignored one of the two statements underneath the photographs but virtually all candidates expressed their disapproval of both the teenagers' attitude. *Aussagen* was occasionally confused with *Aussehen*. Discussions usually focussed on shopping habits, the role of designer labels and peer pressure. Some examiners commented that it was heartening to observe that most candidates did not believe in the importance of outward appearance when judging a person; but there was also recognition that in certain situations it is essential to look smart.

### Card B: *Saufen bis zum Koma!*

This card was also chosen frequently and most candidates had plenty to say about the reasons for excessive drinking among young people. Unfortunately, very few picked up on *Happy Hour* and *Kampftrinken* as one of the main problems. The statistical information tempted many candidates into quoting the exact figures in a clumsy and time-consuming manner instead of trying to summarise the information and – more importantly – to convey the significance behind them. Examiners commented on the fact that very few candidates expressed their surprise or dismay about the alarming statistics for the younger age group. Many students also were

unable to think of any other consequences caused by alcohol misuse besides medical ones. Issues around alcohol, drugs and tobacco provided ample material for further discussion and there was therefore no real need for teacher-examiners to divert into diet and eating disorders.

### **Card C: *Vom Buch zum Blockbuster***

This was a popular choice, but too many candidates resorted to reading out the printed information verbatim without adding anything of their own. Others failed to see the intention behind Question 3. More candidates favoured the original book over the film version than vice versa and often gave interesting reasons for their opinion. Surprisingly many candidates were unable to distinguish between the singular and plural forms of *Buch*, referring regularly to 'ein Bücher'.

### **Card D: *Treffpunkt für die Jugend***

This was a less popular card. Many candidates had difficulties in pronouncing *Jugendherberge* ('*Jungenherberge*') and it became clear that the concept of youth hostelling was alien to many young people. Given the generous amount of information on the card, candidates could have spoken at length about the advantages and disadvantages of staying in youth hostels but few made full use of the information presented to them. Most candidates expressed a clear preference for staying in luxury hotels and viewed sun and beaches as indispensable elements of an enjoyable holiday.

### **Card E: *Hotel "Mama"***

This fairly popular card was handled with varying success. Very few candidates were aware that the verb *verlassen* needs an object and *längere Ausbildungszeiten* was not universally understood. Once again, many candidates simply repeated the written information on the card verbatim rather than trying to express in their own words and in complete sentences the reasons for young adults staying at home with their parents. Question 3 elicited some interesting explanations. On the other hand, candidates should bear in mind that expressing uncertainty to answer such an open and intriguing question can also form a valid response. Most candidates ignored the picture and the cue '*Der richtige Weg zur Selbstständigkeit?*' both of which could have provided extra opportunities to talk about parent-child relationships as teenagers grow into adulthood. While almost all students expressed the wish to leave home at the start of their university studies they often had little to say about their parents' attitude. Most discussions on the stimulus avoided further exploration of the card and instead revolved around *ideale / typische Familie, Geschwister* etc.

### **Card F: *Süchtig nach dem Maus-Klick***

This card was popular and most candidates had a lot to say about computers and the role they played in their lives. *Sucht* and *süchtig* were well-understood. This card once more demonstrated the necessity for candidates to convert 'bullet points' into full sentences and to develop full answers from brief information. Too many candidates solely read out the list of problems caused by *Computersucht* and it often remained open whether they had really understood the information. Question 3 proved to be a true discriminator as only candidates who understood *umgehen* were able to give relevant answers. Those who did not usually took their cue from *lernen* and consequently talked about the benefits of computers for schoolwork etc. In the wider discussion, most candidates were able to talk about the advantages as well as the dangers of information technology in modern life.

## Part 2: Conversation

It is helpful to candidates and to markers if teacher-examiners indicate clearly the transition between stimulus card and conversation as well the change of topics during the conversation. Although it is now generally well-understood that the nominated topic should be treated as the first part of the conversation and not a presentation there were still a few centres where candidates were invited to present pre-learned material in monologues interspersed with a few questions from the teacher. Visiting examiners do normally not attempt to cover all the points on a candidate's prompt card and neither should teacher-examiners, as this will inevitably lead to rather superficial treatment of the topic and is unlikely to leave enough room for spontaneous development.

Once again, examiners marking centre-conducted tests expressed concern about the tendency shown by some teachers to use pre-set list of questions during the conversation and about their reluctance to steer even the more able candidates away from contributing predominantly rehearsed material. While most candidates at this stage will quite rightly make use of some pre-learned phrases at appropriate times they should also be aware that the highest marks for interaction can only be awarded if some degree of spontaneity is shown. Teacher-examiners using the same questions with all candidates and/or asking a series of unrelated questions without ever following up on responses are likely to reduce candidates' chances for higher scores. It is neither necessary nor desirable to cover all sub-topics within a topic area; the most fruitful conversations usually happened where one or two sub-topics were discussed at greater depth. Examiners of centre-conducted tests commended many teachers whose flexible approach and considerate examining technique enabled their students to reach their potential.

The majority of candidates spoke with a fairly high degree of confidence and good or acceptable levels of fluency. Examiners encountered few candidates whose ability or willingness to communicate attracted marks below the 5-6 band for interaction. Quality of pronunciation varied; very low marks for poor pronunciation were quite rare and many candidates impressed with good pronunciation and intonation. Nevertheless, a rather casual approach to producing German sounds was often apparent especially with regard to ch- and z- consonants, to *Umlaute* (e.g. *ungefähr*, *regelmäßig*, *konnen* and *Bucher [sic]*) and some diphthongs (*weil* often sounded like 'waal'). Other common mispronunciation included *doof*, *DVD* and *bleiben/geblieben*.

## Knowledge of Grammar

Examiners were generally pleased with the level and range of vocabulary used by candidates. Very few words on the stimulus cards caused problems for comprehension and topic-specific vocabulary proved to be widely known including *beeinflussen*, *Folgen*, *verursachen*, *schädlich*, *Verhältnis* etc. Surprisingly many candidates used *also* for *auch* and were unable to distinguish between *helfen* and *Hilfe* (often creating the new verb '*helfen*'). Inaccurate use of *eigene*, *einige* and *einzig* was again wide-spread and examiners wondered why after having studied *Fernsehen* during their course so many candidates still used *im Fern* (or even *auf dem Fern*)

Many candidates attempted a variety of dependent clauses; a pleasing number also included relative and infinitive structures - often successfully – while even weaker candidates regularly mastered brief *wenn*- and *weil*- clauses. Nevertheless, one of the main concerns expressed by examiners remains the inability of many candidates to place the verb correctly and to do so consistently – whether through the persistent failure to apply subject/verb-inversion or through the widespread habit of transplanting English syntax word for word into German (e.g. *Wir manchmal gehen....*, *Ich nicht glaube...*). Other areas of grammatical weaknesses noted by examiners are verb-subject agreement and modal verbs (*müssen* often being used instead of *dürfen*; *wir kann/wir muss* being very frequent) as well as past participles and common plural forms. While shortcomings in grammatical knowledge rarely led to greatly diminished comprehensibility examiners reported that relatively few candidates achieved grammar marks in the highest bracket.

### **Annual Teacher Support Meetings**

Centres are reminded that language-specific Teacher Support Meetings for the Conduct of the Speaking Tests will be held in Autumn 2010 covering both Unit 2 and Unit 4. These meetings will be full day meetings and free of charge. Further details can be obtained from the AQA website ([www.aqa.org.uk](http://www.aqa.org.uk)) in due course.

### **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

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