



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
June 2011**

German

GER4T/V

(Specification 2660)

Unit 4: Speaking Test

Report on the Examination

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Unit 4

General Comments

Once again, visiting examiners were made welcome and well looked after by staff at centres; they expressed satisfaction with the efficient organisation at most centres regarding accommodation, and the provision of invigilators and chaperones. The majority of centres ensured that completed STMS forms, students' prompt cards and session timetables reached the visiting examiner in good time. Most but not all centres who conducted their own tests also took great care to carry out the necessary administration. Examiners welcomed the fact that this year a much higher proportion of centre-conducted tests were recorded on digital media. Poor quality or inaudible recordings were therefore much rarer than in the past although in some cases volume levels on digital recordings were too low. It is very important that individual tracks on CDs and USB sticks are clearly identified and labelled with centre and student details (as described in the Instructions for the Conduct of the Examinations). Centres must also make sure that CDs are packed carefully in order to prevent damage in the post.

As in previous years, visiting examiners were pleased to observe that students appeared on the whole well-prepared for the speaking test and showed genuine enthusiasm for the language and their learning experience. There may be some anxiety among students that being tested by an external examiner will put them under extra stress as they expect to be faced with unpredicted questions. But since visiting examiners have to operate within the same range of topics and issues as teacher-examiners students of all levels of ability found that they were able to make use of material they had prepared while also demonstrating their ability to interact with spontaneity. Examiners who marked centre-conducted tests complimented many teachers on their examining technique which enabled students to produce their best. Teachers who regularly followed up students' responses and asked for examples, clarification and justification provided their students with a wider scope and an enhanced opportunity to access higher marks for interaction. There were unfortunately still some teacher-examiners who allowed even their more able students to deliver great chunks of clearly rehearsed material and who predominantly asked questions from a 'safe' list. It is incumbent on the teacher-examiner to introduce some unpredictability into the exchange so that the marker can make a fair assessment of the student's ability to react spontaneously.

More often than in previous years, concern was voiced by 2T/4T examiners about the unsatisfactory conduct of tests involving native speaker students. Frequently the timing of such tests was erratic and some teacher-examiners partly or entirely ignored requirements for the coverage of topics (discussion of topics outside the prescribed list for Unit 2; absence of one or both Cultural Topics). It must be stressed that native speakers are assessed according to the same principles and criteria as other students and that examiners are instructed to apply if necessary 'penalties' in the interaction and grammar categories (see Instructions for the Conduct of the Examinations). Regrettably, some native speakers failed to access a considerable number of marks as a result of bad conduct.

Part 1: Discussion of Stimulus Card

Visiting examiners participated in many interesting discussions and were often impressed by the tenacity of students and their confidence to stick up for their chosen argument. Most teachers conducting their own tests gave their students ample opportunities to complete the task to the best of their abilities. The timing of the two distinct sections was often a problem, mainly because students' initial presentations exceeded the allocated time of one minute considerably so that insufficient time was available for the discussion. In some cases the whole task over-ran to such a degree that it had an adverse effect on the timing of the conversation.

It is critically important that the student's brief talk at the outset relates closely to the statement in one of the speech bubbles. Students should introduce **and** develop a few succinct and relevant points in support of the chosen viewpoint. Unfortunately, many students used their preparation time to write out a piece about the wider topic area rather than 'fleshing out' the printed *Meinung*. There was a general reluctance to explore in detail the wording in the chosen statement in order to prepare suitable arguments and appropriate examples to use in both the presentation and the discussion. Many students started their presentation with a general but unnecessary introduction into the topic (including reading out the statement in the bubble) before addressing the actual issue to be discussed. This often wasted valuable time and denied students higher marks for this first section of the test.

The majority of students were very willing to debate their views with vigour so that marks below the middle band were rarely awarded. Some students who had not thought sufficiently about additional arguments during their preparation time ran out of 'ammunition' and ended up re-stating earlier arguments repeatedly. Other, less confident students needed to resort to pre-learnt ideas and phrases about the general topic which often made logical development of the debate difficult. The success of the discussion lies to a considerable extent in the way the tester leads the student through a variety of points to consider and justify. Markers of centre-conducted tests complimented the great majority of teachers on the amount of preparation they had done and on the sympathetic but efficient way in which they conducted the discussion. A few teachers failed to challenge the students' views sufficiently and entered instead into a friendly discourse about the issue on the card or the entire sub-topic. Examiners also observed that some teachers relied too extensively on the notes in the examiner's booklet which are merely intended for general guidance and not to be used verbatim.

The issues presented on the stimulus cards were wide-ranging and often complex. Whether some cards are perceived as more difficult than others depends much more on the nature of the topic as a whole than on the content of the card itself. It was not surprising that Card F which dealt with space technology was chosen by the fewest students since many regard scientific matters as especially demanding subjects to talk about. Cards B, D and E were the most popular ones but the affinity many students clearly feel towards environmental themes and issues around immigration did not necessarily guarantee greater success.

Card A – *Was hilft der Umwelt mehr?*

Students who chose this card mostly supported *Meinung 1* but they often failed to focus their attention on the precise issue i.e. the best methods by which environmental pressure groups can achieve results. Many presentations contained a general lowdown on the necessity to protect the environment and to change behaviour while few students gave relevant examples of direct actions whether successful or not. Some teacher-examiners 'rescued' the situation through appropriate questions and challenges but frequently the opposing viewpoints remained rather fuzzy.

Card B – *Miteinander oder nebeneinander?*

Here too, students tended to talk in general terms about the advantages or disadvantages of immigration rather than addressing the issue of adaptation to the host country's society. Apart from the need to learn the language many students had not given much thought to other aspects that are important for successful integration or what 'giving up your own culture' could mean. For many students multiculturalism seems to manifest itself simply by the availability and appreciation of Indian or Chinese cuisine. But many examiners succeeded in making students consider and discuss other relevant points (clothing, religious attitudes etc.) thus guiding them through a more balanced and wide-ranging discussion.

Card C – Finanzielle Hilfe für Entwicklungsländer?

It was certainly not an easy task to discuss such a controversial and fairly intangible problem within five minutes but many students proved to be quite emotionally involved in the question of giving aid to developing countries. Sadly, many presentations did not focus on the problems connected with 'bad' government and it was often difficult or impossible for examiners to steer the discussion towards the link between charity and politics. Consequently, many exchanges revolved around the best way to give aid and the consequences of not doing so.

Card D – Energie der Zukunft

This was a popular card on which most students had a lot to contribute. Many presentations started with general declarations about the environment before turning to renewable energies. Virtues and drawbacks of wind and solar power formed the main part of many interesting discussions but there was a tendency among examiners and students to digress for too long into the subject of nuclear power. Following recent events in Japan this was certainly a burning issue around the time the tests were taken but it should not have dominated the discussion.

Card E – Tolerieren oder deportieren?

This card introduced yet another complex subject and students needed a certain depth of knowledge and awareness for the successful completion of the task. Unfortunately, many students could not make a clear distinction between legal and illegal immigrants, asylum seekers, economic refugees etc. As a result the term 'illegal' as well as the issue of immediate deportation was widely ignored. General sympathy was expressed for people in need of a 'better life' and the advantages of immigration were usually listed but examiners often had a difficult job to make students focus on relevant issues linked to illegal immigration such as exploitation, unacceptable accommodation, extremely low wages etc.; the problem of organised gangs smuggling people into many European countries was also very rarely understood by students.

Card F – Wem nützt die Weltraumforschung?

It was a pity that this card was chosen so rarely. Students who opted to discuss it were usually successful in holding a confident discussion which did not require a great deal of technical knowledge or special vocabulary. Examiners also enjoyed arguing for or against space technology and often elicited quite surprising responses from students.

Part 2: Conversation

Visiting examiners were generally impressed by students' thorough knowledge of their Cultural Topics and by their eagerness to express opinions, both positive and negative, about them. It is essential that all students, including less able ones, are given regular opportunities to go beyond relating factual information and to express **and** defend opinions on the subjects of their studies. Examiners marking 4T tests listened to many well-conducted conversations where students were asked a variety of questions eliciting both facts and opinions. On the other hand, too many teacher-examiners still concentrated almost exclusively on factual information and the narration of events or plots. In such cases students are not able to access high marks for interaction and teachers are advised to look critically at the range and type of questions they ask their students. Inviting and challenging opinions on historical and geographical topics may be more difficult than on books, plays or films but by including questions that require explanation, evaluation or even speculation examiners can provide opportunities for students to show more than factual knowledge.

In preparation for the test, students are often tempted to memorise lengthy passages about their topics. Examiners need to interrupt such monologues at an appropriate time so that points can be developed and discussed in detail. The higher mark bands for interaction call for spontaneous development of ideas and teacher-examiners who allowed the students to give overlong, pre-learned answers before going on to an entirely different aspect of the topic did their students a disservice. This also applies to teachers who asked virtually identical questions of each student.

In most centres, both Cultural Topics were given the correct amount of time but there were a few teachers whose time-management was unsatisfactory. Occasionally examiners had to reduce the interaction mark by one band because one topic received less than 4 minutes.

As last year, historical topics were frequently combined with a relevant film (e.g. *DDR* and *Das Leben der Anderen*) and examiners were pleased to observe that teachers usually avoided duplicating questions. German post-war history, the *DDR* and *Die Wende* were popular historical topics but unfortunately not all students were given enough opportunities to describe their personal reaction to what they had learnt and to evaluate the importance of certain events and/or personalities in the period. In very wide-ranging topics such as *Deutschland 1945-1961* or the *DDR* it also proved to be a more useful strategy to focus on just one or two aspects of the period in order to ensure a more detailed discussion. Geographical topics were frequently offered by native speakers who chose their home region or city. Non-native students who discussed a German-speaking region often lacked sufficient in-depth knowledge and restricted their contributions to general statistics and basic descriptions of landscapes or tourist attractions. It is quite difficult for a young person to form personal views about a region if he/she has not visited it more than once and experienced life there beyond what one sees as a tourist. Many discussions on geographical topics were therefore limited in scope and often contained a lot of pre-learned material.

The list of the most frequently chosen literary topics and films was unchanged this year. *Der Besuch der alten Dame*, *Andorra*, the novels by Dürrenmatt and *Der Vorleser* were once more very popular texts while *Das Leben der Anderen* and *Good bye Lenin* remained favourite films. Many interesting exchanges took place on all these works and examiners formed the impression that most students had enjoyed reading or watching them. Some teacher-examiners persisted in eliciting lengthy narrations of plots thereby reducing the available time for the evaluation of main characters, motives, certain scenes, the language etc. Questions like *Wovon handelt das Stück?* or *Was passiert dann?* should be avoided as much as possible.

Fluency was generally good and quite a few students were very confident speakers of German requiring only natural pauses for thinking about their responses. The quality of pronunciation was very varied ranging from students with excellent, almost native speaker accents to some performances where basic weaknesses had not been ironed out resulting in a distinct English accent.

Knowledge of grammar and vocabulary

Examiners reported that students had by and large a sufficiently wide range of vocabulary at their disposal although the use of idioms was quite limited even among more able students. Given that most students must have been practising appropriate phrases for the stimulus card discussion it was surprising to hear so many wrong versions of *zustimmen/übereinstimmen* (e.g. *Ich stimme nicht mit das*). Confusion of *kennen/wissen* and *streng/stark* was common, as was the inappropriate use of *-ismus*-nouns (e.g. *Die DDR war Kommunismus; Hanna war Analphabetismus*). Even at this level, there was still a widespread misuse of the verb *verstehen* (*Das ist schwer zu verstanden*).

When commenting on grammatical performance examiners unanimously identified inaccurate handling of verbs as the main area of grammatical weaknesses. Wrong verb endings and inaccurate past tenses may rarely have a drastic impact on comprehensibility and communication, but the number of students who consistently violated the most basic rules governing verbs was disappointing. Errors like *er moecht*, *ich wisse*, *die Eiskappen sind schmelzen* or *es kann wieder passiert* were not isolated cases. Most students regularly used a variety of subordinate clauses and did so with varying degree of accuracy in terms of word order. Appropriate use of *wenn* and *als* was often insecure (*wenn die Mauer gefallen ist*) and a fair number of students used *wer* as a relative pronoun. But despite such negative observations on many students' grammatical proficiency examiners also commented favourably on many able students whose basic syntax and complex structures were consistently accurate and who expressed themselves with confidence and eloquence.

Teacher-examiners should once again be thanked for undertaking the demanding task of conducting the speaking tests while thanks are also due to all teachers for preparing students so thoroughly for the examination. The majority of students had clearly found their studies of language and culture interesting and rewarding and as in previous years visiting examiners overwhelmingly described meeting the students as a stimulating and enjoyable experience.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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

Convert raw or scaled marks into marks on the Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) by using the link below.

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

Web pages

Centres are reminded that a wealth of support documents can be found on our web site at (http://web.aqa.org.uk/qual/gce/languages/german_materials.php?id=09&prev=09).

These include the latest version of the specification, past papers, reports on the examination and the Teacher Resource Bank (TRB). For GERM1 the TRB includes for the Writing Section additional specimen questions (to supplement past papers from previous series) and student exemplar work; this is an invaluable resource for preparing students for future examinations.