



General Certificate of Education

German 1661
Specification

GER2T Speaking

Report on the Examination
2011 examination - January series

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Unit 2

General comments

The format of the test has become very familiar to both students and teacher-examiners the majority of whom scrupulously followed the guidelines for administration and conduct. Examiners welcomed the fact that more tests than previously had been recorded on CDs or USB sticks. While cassette tapes are still acceptable it must be said that tapes which have been reused many times and are inserted into old cassette players often do not guarantee sufficiently high recording quality. However, digital recordings also require careful technical preparation and observance of guidelines. Recording levels must be set high enough and separate tracks should be labelled with candidate number and name. It is also essential to label CDs and USB sticks clearly and to wrap CDs carefully in order to prevent them from getting damaged and being unplayable.

Guidelines for the timing of the examination were observed in most centres so that relatively few tests were significantly shorter or longer than the prescribed 15 minutes. However, in a few centres the approach to accurate time-keeping was rather casual. Teachers are reminded of the detailed instructions given to centres which among other guidelines stipulate that a minimum time of 2 minutes (within 15 minutes of overall testing time) has to be given to each of the topic areas; failure to do so will result in a reduction of interaction marks. It is not advisable to reset the stopwatch after Part 1 or indeed after each topic area; not only can this cause distraction for both teacher and candidate but it may also lead to quite a significant discrepancy between what the teacher believes to be the length of the entire test and the total time shown on the examiner's stopwatch which is normally allowed to run continuously.

Most teacher-examiners discussed all four topics during the test as required. But it is worth pointing out again that during the conversation the three topic areas are equally important and should therefore be given roughly the same time. Spending 5 minutes or even longer on the nominated topic – as happened in a number of centres – reduces the time available for the remaining topics.

As in previous years it must be stressed again that all guidelines regarding the conduct of the test apply to tests with native speakers, too. In a few cases, marks had to be deducted because of the teacher-examiner's disregard of correct timings and topic coverage.

Examiners reported that most students were well-prepared for the test and that many teachers succeeded in getting the best out of their candidates through sympathetic questioning technique. Fewer teachers than in previous years stuck rigidly and exclusively to a pre-set list of questions but there is still some reluctance on the part of teacher-examiners to create regular opportunities for spontaneous reactions from the candidate. It is acknowledged that most candidates – including the most able ones – memorise phrases in order to respond to questions on predictable aspects of the topics they have all studied. But teacher-examiners who want to ensure that their candidates have access to higher marks also need to ask some unexpected follow-up questions; candidates who are encouraged to elaborate on their responses, to give further details, explanations and examples will be less likely to create the impression of a largely rehearsed performance.

More teacher-examiners than in previous years rightly used the familiar '*du*' to address their students and also adapted the wording of the stimulus questions accordingly. But examiners also listened to a number of tests where the teacher repeatedly switched between '*du*' and '*Sie*'.

Part 1: Discussion of Stimulus Card

In many tests, there was a balanced split between the time given to the response to the printed questions and the wider discussion. Most candidates now seem to be aware that in order to gain higher marks in the very first section they must do more than just give brief answers to the questions on the card. On the other hand, some candidates packed too much information into the very first response to '*Worum geht es hier?*' thereby anticipating answers to subsequent questions. The first question on the card is meant to 'set the scene' and successful candidates gave a brief but meaningful summary of the card's theme. As mentioned above, the majority of candidates extended their answers to the printed questions beyond minimal responses; however, credit can only be given to answers that are relevant to the content of the card and the questions. Candidates need to use their preparation time carefully to study the content of the stimulus card and questions and to consider relevant responses including their own opinions, suggestions etc. Verbal and numerical information as well as pictures, titles and captions are there to help with the formulation of ideas. Examiners felt that too many candidates did not make sufficient use of the material presented. On the other hand, too many candidates simply lifted phrases and sentences from the card without any attempt to adapt them or integrate them appropriately into their utterances.

The five questions on the card must be asked without adding any supplementary questions or prompts (except after the first question if necessary) and most teachers adhered to this procedure. Inserting additional questions can result in reduced time for the wider discussion and teachers are reminded that responses to any such questions cannot attract any credit.

The wider discussion must arise from the content of the stimulus card and stay within the confines of the sub-topic stated on the card. Most teachers strictly adhered to the latter rule. But examiners felt that very often the card and its 'story' could have been exploited in more detail during the discussion. Many teachers 'played safe' and immediately proceeded to discuss general and predictable aspects of the sub-topic which had no or very little connection with the content of the stimulus.

Karte A: Strenge Eltern: gute Eltern?

This was a popular choice and partly due to the fact that there were many centres with only one or two candidates. All candidates who chose this card had valuable things to say and could of course draw from their own experience. Nevertheless, examiners commented that phrases such as *schwierige Aufgabe*, *klare Grenzen*, *Verbote*, *Strafen*, *Verständnis* etc. which could have served as helpful hints for developing ideas were largely ignored and remained unexplored. Some candidates described the two photographs without any further explanation as to what they meant to illustrate. Surprisingly many candidates confused *Freiheit* with *Freizeit* which led to some rather ambiguous contributions.

Karte B: Agent 007 – immer wieder ein Kinohit

Fewer candidates chose this card but in most cases it was dealt with successfully. Question 2 was sometimes misunderstood and elicited answers appropriate to Question 3. Some candidates lifted words and phrases from the card without adding their own ideas. Question 4 produced responses of differing quality with some candidates mentioning sexism, violence etc. while others found it difficult to describe any negative aspects of the genre.

Karte C: Leben ohne Handy – unmöglich!

This was a very popular choice and it was no surprise to examiners that the vast majority of candidates declared themselves to be unable to live without their mobile phone. While candidates could easily list the various benefits of mobile phones responses about disadvantages and possible dangers could often have been more differentiated. Again, a number of candidates used text from the card verbatim without any real thought (e.g. '*Der*

Nachteil ist schädlich für die Gesundheit). Many teacher-examiners went on to explore in greater detail issues regarding the popularity and apparent indispensability of mobile phones; but very often the discussion immediately turned to aspects of computer use, internet etc.

Karte D: Urlaub! Aber mit wem?

This was a fairly popular card and generally done well. The questions did not pose any problems but many candidates did not make full use of the material presented. The statistical information was seldom referred to, neither were *Urlaubsziel* and *Unterkunft* in answers to Question 3. However, candidates were able to voice opinions on positive and negative aspects of going on holiday with either parents or friends and freely talked about their favourite holiday destinations. In the discussion, most teachers introduced more general aspects of holidays and tourism rather than leaving the exchange on a merely personal level.

Karte E: Schönheit mit Risiko

This card was the least popular one, perhaps an indication of the fact that the dangers of overexposure to UV radiation is still not taken very seriously by young people. *Solarium*, *UV* and *gebräunt* were often pronounced wrongly and Question 3 produced many unsatisfactory or irrelevant answers as many candidates suggested measures to be taken in Britain rather than explaining what is being done in Germany. However, most candidates were able to talk about problems in connection with other fashion trends like body piercings, super-thin models etc. Although the content of this card potentially overlapped with the sub-topic area of 'Health and well-being' most teachers avoided focussing extensively on health considerations during the discussion.

Karte F: Generation XXL

A fairly frequent choice, this card was generally handled successfully. A number of valid reasons for obesity as well as suggestions to reduce the problem were offered, but many candidates failed to realise that Question 3 hinted at possible consequences for the future rather than dealing (again) with the causes of high obesity rates among young people. The difference between *Übergewicht* and *übergewichtig* is still not understood by many candidates (*'Zu viele Kinder sind Übergewicht'*) and examiners pointed out how frequently *Fettleibigkeit* was mispronounced as *Fettlebigkeit*. Many discussions further explored aspects of healthy eating and addressed issues such as meals in schools, vegetarianism or a possible ban on adverts for junk food.

Part 2: Conversation

In most centres, teachers followed the correct practice and treated the nominated topic as a 'normal' topic for discussion; but a few teacher-examiners still invited their candidates to give a mini-presentation at the outset or allowed them to give an uninterrupted talk on each of the bullet points on the prompt card. The aim of letting the candidate choose the initial topic is to instil some confidence by making the early part of the test slightly more predictable but this must not turn the conversation into a series of rehearsed monologues.

As mentioned before, examiners commented positively about many conversations during which candidates participated in a meaningful way and were keen to extend their answers without much prompting and where teacher-examiners created regular opportunities for spontaneous responses. It was also pleasing to see that many more teachers than in previous examination series did not try to cover all available subtopics within each topic area but instead devoted sufficient time to fewer aspects of one or two subtopics so that the exchange could develop more naturally.

Fluency was on the whole good or acceptable. Candidates who expressed themselves with a degree of spontaneity and therefore needed time to work out their thoughts were still able to score high marks; less able candidates who relied to a large part on pre-learnt material tended to speak at a more erratic pace depending on how quickly they were able to recall memorised responses.

Marks below 3 for pronunciation were awarded very rarely. Many students had succeeded in acquiring a more genuine German accent, including a natural and spontaneous intonation. But many others had not shed bad habits regarding the pronunciation of *ch*, *v* and *z*; poor pronunciation of *Umlaute* in words like *hören* and *können* was also quite common. Among the most frequently mispronounced words were *kömisch*, *Älten* for *Eltern*, *Famili*, *Jungenliche* and *Fuschball*; there was a slight improvement in the pronunciation of *DVD* although entirely English versions or a mixture of German and English (*Dewede*) were still widespread.

Knowledge of Grammar and Vocabulary

Most candidates' performances attracted marks in the second or third highest band. Incidents where immediate communication was made difficult because of grammatical shortcomings and insufficient vocabulary were rare. On the other hand, examiners felt that a relatively small proportion of candidates clearly deserved marks in the top band. Grammatical perfection and the use of very sophisticated, idiomatic vocabulary are of course not expected at AS level but candidates aiming for the highest marks need to demonstrate awareness of German syntax and the ability to handle basic structures, tenses and verbs with fairly consistent accuracy.

The majority of candidates had a satisfactory or good range of vocabulary at their disposal and used essential words like *Vor-/Nachteil*, *schädlich*, *Bewegung*, *Ernährung*, *Eigenschaften*, *vertrauen*, *beeinflussen* etc. with ease. Apart from the already mentioned uncertainty about *Übergewicht* versus *übergewichtig* examiners also observed widespread confusion between *spenden*, *ausgeben* and *verbringen*, between *zu Hause* and *nach Hause* (sometimes even distorted into *in die Haus*) as well as the new verb creation *kontakten*.

Almost all candidates used *weil*-, *dass*- and *wenn*- clauses, often with accurate word order; success with infinitive clauses was more sporadic. Examiners noted how many candidates were apparently very unsure about basic principles of word order resulting in common errors like the failure to invert subject and verb, infinitives being placed immediately after a modal verb or the verb standing at the end of *und/oder/aber*-phrases. Concern was expressed about many candidates' careless approach to accurate verb endings. The appropriate and correct use of modal verbs also continues to cause problems as demonstrated by the frequent confusion of singular and plural forms (*kann/können*, *muss/müssen*) and the insertion of *zu* before the infinitive (*sie wollen zu sehen*); furthermore, a number of candidates assumed that *dürfen* equals *erlauben* (*Eltern darf ihre Kinder schlechtes Essen zu essen*). Attempts to talk about past experiences were often hampered by patchy knowledge of past participles (*wir haben spielen*, *ich bin gefährt*) and uncertainty about the auxiliary verb. There seemed to be widespread ignorance of even the most basic forms of accusative and dative cases as well as adjectival endings (*die Leute lieben er, mit sie, ein groß Problem*).

Despite the above criticisms about the overall level of grammatical proficiency, examiners generally praised of candidates' willingness, indeed eagerness to communicate their ideas and of teachers' thorough and conscientious approach towards the demanding task of conducting these tests.

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 2011 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 Events pages of the AQA website (www.aqa.org.uk) in due course.

Web pages

Centres are reminded that a wealth of support documents can be found on our web pages 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 GER2 the TRB includes advice to teachers conducting your own tests and the materials from the most recent set of Teacher Support Meetings for the Conduct of the Speaking Tests; this is an invaluable resource for preparing candidates for future examinations.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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