



**General Certificate of Secondary Education  
June 2012**

**German**

**46654**

**(Specification 4665)**

**Unit 4: Writing**

***Report on the Examination***

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## General Comments

Most students were clearly well prepared for the Controlled Assessment Writing and produced a very high standard of work in general. The quality of work was, if anything, slightly better than in 2011. Marking outcomes were concentrated in the higher categories of the assessment criteria. A relatively small proportion of students scored at the lower end of the assessment criteria. Roughly 10% of students scored full marks by all criteria.

## Task design

Task design was generally clearer this year and the majority of schools/colleges seem now to recognize that it is the response to the title which is assessed. Task formulation and design settled mainly on familiar areas: holidays, lifestyle, health and fitness, school, work and work experience, future plans, local area, environment and tourism, free time and hobbies. This represents a good range of topics and is fully to be supported but it is perhaps worth reminding teachers that the topic/title can be anything they choose and outside the specification Contexts. Titles work better if they are not over-complicated. If there are two or more dimensions to a title, then each one should be addressed with more or less equal balance. For example, if the title is *Your part-time job, your recent work experience and your future plans* and the response includes only one sentence on 'future plans,' then that will affect the overall judgement about relevance. A similar problem occurs, if there is insufficient attention to the focus of the title. If, for example, the title is *My favourite holiday*, but there is only occasional or passing reference to the **favourite** holiday, that too will affect the overall judgement about relevance.

An extremely vague, all encompassing title such as *All about me* may seem to be the obvious solution. This kind of title did actually work quite well for some less able students but it is insufficiently challenging for more able students who did not really profit from the low challenge. It is worth pointing out here that it is possible to differentiate by task and there is pleasing evidence that some schools/colleges are in fact doing just that. Bullet points have the status of guidance and can be ignored by students if they wish. In some cases, bullet points steered students **away from** the focus of the title. Examiners were instructed to take a generous view of this as far as possible since this was not the fault of the students; nevertheless, it remains a serious issue and, in this area, schools/colleges may need to look critically at their task design. Controlled Assessment Advisers can of course be consulted on proposed tasks. A further problem occurs when students enumerate their paragraphs according to the bullet points, so that the response becomes a collection of 'mini' responses. Students should be advised against this, since it affects judgement as to whether the piece is a well organised, coherent whole.

## The Plan

On the whole, plans remain a disappointing feature and, in general, there was still no discernible disadvantage when a plan was *not* used. The following should be noted:-

- The plan is optional. Students do not have to produce a plan. There is some anecdotal evidence that some teachers are avoiding using a plan altogether because it may create more problems than it solves. This is an acceptable approach.
- For the first time, pictures/visuals were not allowed on the plan (unless the work presented was done in Year 9.) This message seems to have got across because it was only very rarely a problem. If it was a problem, schools/colleges will have been notified.
- Pictorial codes were consequently not a problem this year. However, there were problems with students who turned the plan into a gap filling exercise with whole sentences represented by a mixture of words and lines to indicate the missing words. (This happened last year too.) This is not acceptable and is treated as a kind of code.

- Conjugated verbs on the plan were again a much bigger and frequent problem. If conjugated verbs appeared on the plan, the clause or clauses where they appeared were disregarded for assessment purposes. In the worst cases (*war, ist, hatte, hat, werde*, for example) this could mean that a significant proportion of the assignment had to be disregarded. In most cases, an isolated error made little or no difference to the assessment outcome.
- If conjugated verbs appear on the plan, the student should be instructed to obliterate the offending items. It is not acceptable for the teacher to correct the items in red ink or pencil – a frequent occurrence – because the student was still able to read the unacceptable item! Similarly, just adding ‘n’ to items such as *sollte, würde* just doesn’t work.
- Students can re-write TPFs if they prefer a neat version to refer to.
- The above points may seem to be something unduly fussy, especially bearing in mind daily teaching pressures. That is truly well understood, but these basic rules about what is acceptable on the plan have been a **consistent** part of the exposition of the new specification in the last five years.
- This does not constitute advice not to do a plan. On the contrary, 40 well chosen words (excluding conjugated verbs) represent a very good opportunity to provide critically useful markers for the production of the work at Stage 3, especially if they follow the sequence of the work to be written.

## Dictionaries

Dictionaries must be made available to students at Stage 3. However, given the proliferation of dictionary errors, students would be well advised to turn to the dictionary as a last rather than a first resort. Ideally, students should be taught how to use a bi-lingual dictionary correctly and alerted to the pitfalls of incorrect usage.

## Assessment

### Content

As last year, a significant majority (close to 2/3) of work attracted marks in the Good or Very Good categories. Very many students produced full, detailed and relevant responses and there was clear evidence of very effective teaching leading to positive outcomes. Approximately 10% of students scored full marks for Content. This is a quite significant achievement since, in order to score 15, just about all information has to be conveyed clearly and there is little margin for error. In terms of clarity of expression, it should be noted that, for 13-15 marks, almost all information should be conveyed clearly and, for 10-12 marks, a lot of information should be conveyed clearly. If a lot of information is **not** conveyed clearly, that will effectively exclude consideration of the top 2 bands. To varying degrees this issue adversely affected some good students who chose to learn by heart what had obviously been good or very good drafted pieces of work but intermittently failed properly to remember whole clauses or sentences such that what was written in the clause or sentence made no sense at all. In such cases, one sometimes wondered if these students actually understood what they were writing. It was characteristic of the best work that students were able to manipulate the language independently under test conditions without resorting to word by word rote learning. Clarity of expression is also affected by accuracy. Serious errors or omissions can render a whole sentence partly or wholly unintelligible. Students should be advised to leave themselves sufficient time to check their work, rather than (in some cases) writing as much as possible and often far more than is required. For a mark above 9 for Content, there must be at least 2 instances of opinions/points of view explained or justified. In doubtful cases, examiners will try hard to find the evidence; however, for some students, the evidence is simply not there and some good students are thereby disadvantaged. It should be noted that it is opinions (not facts or actions) which should be explained. Compare,

for example: *ich esse Obst, weil ich fit bleiben will* with *ich esse gern Obst, weil ich fit bleiben will*. Only the second example gives an explanation for an opinion/point of view. Turning to the lower end of the mark range, only a small percentage of students scored marks in the Limited or Poor category. Often this was because the material written did not convey much intelligible information, although almost all students could express simple opinions of some description.

### **Range of Language**

Observations to be made here are, with one or two additions, just as applicable for this year as for last year.

A quarter of students wrote responses which merited marks in the 9-10 band and more than a half scored between 7 and 10 for Range of Language. This clearly represents a very good performance overall. Students had been clearly encouraged to use a good variety of vocabulary and to develop complex sentences with a good variety of structure, some of which went well beyond the requirements of the specification. The best students were able to use a wide variety of tenses. Many included the conditional and imperfect and pluperfect subjunctive, as well as correct use of the passive voice. A significant number demonstrated the ability to use different connectives, including subordinating conjunctions and adverbial conjunctions. Good infinitive constructions were often in evidence: with modal verbs, with *um...zu*, with *vorhaben + zu + infinitive*, for example. Correct word order in main and in subordinate clauses was always a feature of the best work and such work showed an ability to use a significant array of subordinating conjunctions often developed in the same sentence. Many students had been very well prepared for the range of language demands of controlled assessment writing. There was widespread evidence of the ability to use different connectives correctly: *weil, dass, denn, wenn, als, während, da, obwohl, damit, so dass* were all used quite frequently as well as *trotzdem, deswegen, jedoch*.

Typically, marks in the 5-6 band were awarded to work which rather depended for complexity on repeated use of simple connectives – *und, aber*, for example, but also repeated use of *weil* with no attempt to go beyond that.

Only a very small percentage of work scored in the 1-2 band – inappropriate vocabulary with little understanding of language structure. It was mostly difficult to conclude that there was no appropriate vocabulary and there wasn't some understanding of language structure even with weak work; so marks tended to creep into the 3-4 band.

### **Accuracy**

Over half of all students scored 4 or 5 for Accuracy and almost a quarter scored full marks. This impressive performance is consistent with the performance in other categories. With only 5 marks available for Accuracy, it should be noted that each mark covers more than one grade. It should also be noted that perfection is not a hallmark for 5 marks. In most cases there will still be minor errors. As last year, approximately 1/3 of students scored 3 marks – intended meaning clear despite inaccuracies. Only 10% of students scored 1 or 2 marks.

In general, the accuracy of a piece of work became worse towards the end of the piece often in a quite striking way with evidence of a very good opening paragraph, but a very poor closing paragraph. In such cases, examiners were instructed to re-read the whole piece so that a rounded judgement could be formed. (In all cases, no assessments can be made without reading a piece two, three or more times.) On the positive side many students were able to use different tenses correctly with reflexive verbs, separable and inseparable verbs and get the correct word order. On the negative side, big problems tended to occur through poor use of the dictionary, through incorrect use of prepositions and in particular the complete omission of prepositions or the omission of other key words in a clause or sentence. Such instances often prevented the communication of the required or intended message and affected the assessment for Content – (see above on clarity of expression.) It is worth repeating: students should allow themselves time to re-read and check their work.

Finally, handwriting is a real problem for some students. Although students will never be penalised for work which is difficult to read, there were cases where it was impossible to clearly identify some of the words set down on paper.

### **Administration**

Schools/colleges should observe the following:

- Keep each student's work together along with the admin form/plan.
- Use treasury tags to keep portfolios together. (Many thanks to all schools/colleges which did this.) Paper clips and plastic wallets cause significant handling problems.
- Some schools/colleges made no effort at all to attach students' work together and simply sent a pile of paper. **This is not acceptable.**
- Do not send more than 2 pieces of work for each student.
- Make sure the examiner receives the full Controlled Assessment Task relevant to the student or group. Marking cannot begin until the examiner knows what task s/he is marking.
- Students should write in black ink, as for other external examinations.
- Task Planning Forms should be checked carefully to ensure that Specification requirements have been met – with regard to conjugated verbs and the number of words. Students themselves should obliterate offending items and can re-write their plan if they wish. The plan should not extend to a second page. Failure to follow this routine can seriously disadvantage students.
- The school/college's work should be assembled in entry order with the mark list and an indication of absentees, then despatched to reach the examiner by 7<sup>th</sup> May. Many schools/colleges failed to adhere to this deadline.

### **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](http://www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion)