

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2015

Pearson Edexcel GCSE
in German(5GN04/01)
Paper 4: Writing in German

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GCSE German

Unit 4 Writing in German

Examiners' Report

Once again examiners reported on the high standard of administration by centres. Candidate work was generally presented for marking in the correct order of candidate number as stated on the OPTEMs (rather than in teaching group order) with one copy of the stimulus material on the top of the pile of scripts. Sometimes the task is printed on the answer sheet which is useful. CM4 front sheets had been completed accurately and there were very few occasions when teacher or candidate signatures were missing.

There is an annual plea from examiners for centres to refrain from using plastic poly pockets or bulky cardboard files to secure candidates' work. This holds up the marking process considerably. It is much better simply to staple each submission in the top left corner.

Choice of tasks

The majority of centres stick to some familiar topic areas for writing controlled assessment, most notably Holidays, Work Experience, School, Local Area, Health and Fitness, a Film Review and Technology. While these topics generally allow candidates of all abilities to produce a good range of topic-specific vocabulary, they do not always allow writing to be creative and imaginative for the most able candidates. In addition, weaker candidates generally benefit from more structured bullet points whilst stronger candidates can be given more freedom to write original material which can allow them to access the top mark bands, particularly for Communication and Content.

A few centres make use of the tasks set by Pearson Edexcel which are available on the website, sometimes adapting the task to suit their own candidates. Centres are reminded that they can use the *Ask The Expert* service to have their tasks checked by a senior examiner before using them.

As always centres are advised to tailor the task to suit their candidates' ability, perhaps even setting a variety of the same task within the centre. Some topics need careful handling. The topic of Media and Technology may well be appealing for most of the younger generation, but it can be limiting for weaker candidates who tend to rely on brand names and try to write German beyond their capabilities. Film or book reviews should be used sparingly: too often they lead to material taken directly from websites and often candidates are unable to manipulate this more sophisticated language. On the other hand, examiners commented that the topics of Environment and Health often lead to a good use of more adventurous vocabulary.

Presentation of work

It may be a sign of the times that many candidates find it difficult to present work in neat handwriting. Although very few scripts are completely illegible, examiners have to work hard to decipher much of what is written

in some scripts. Because many candidates have memorised their essay before the final one hour assessment, confusion often arises from words separated in the wrong way (e.g. *furch terregend* or *Halbsch wester*) or from sentences with the words memorised in the wrong order (e.g. *Letztes Jahr ich nach bin Frankreich gefahren*).

This year many examiners commented on poor punctuation which made essays difficult to read. Sometimes there was no punctuation at all; sometimes full stops and commas seemed to have been scattered randomly throughout the work.

Although there is no requirement to do so, it would help greatly if a word count was included at the end of each essay.

Communication and Content

Most essays, even those from weaker candidates, were of the correct length. To gain access to the top mark bands, candidates should write about 200 words per unit. There is no merit in going beyond this word count. Some candidates had been encouraged to produce excessively long essays, occasionally in excess of 400 words. These can become self penalising and repetitive. It is much better to produce a carefully crafted 200 word essay than a rambling account. Templates and writing frames are clearly popular, but they tend to limit better candidates from accessing the top mark band for Communication and Content.

Candidates should be encouraged to plan their work carefully. There is no requirement to write in paragraphs, but this often helps to give the essay a coherent structure. Careful planning often helps focus on clear linking which is one of the main elements examiners look for in this mark category. Adverbs and adverbial phrases help the ideas in the essay to flow. Used sensibly they can give the account greater fluency. Good adverbs and adverbial phrases included: *außerdem, meiner Meinung nach, in jeder Hinsicht, im Allgemeinen, am Ende des Urlaubs, während der Fahrt* and *das nächste Mal*.

Almost all candidates manage to give some opinions in their work. This may be limited to a sentence such as *Es war gut* or an opinion about a school subject such as *Ich hasse Physik, weil es langweilig ist*. However, some more adventurous structures were used to introduce opinions. These included:

- *Der größte Vorteil von meinem Wohnort ist, dass ...*
- *Was mich am meisten an dem Film beeindruckt hat, war ...*
- *Einerseits ... und andererseits ...*
- *Meines Erachtens ...*
- *Was mich betrifft, ...*
- *Man kann nicht leugnen, dass ...*

Knowledge and Application of Language

To achieve a top mark for Knowledge and Application of Language candidates must show evidence of a wide range of structures. This year

again, it was evident that all centres understand this requirement. Candidates' work often includes examples of a range of tenses, varied syntax, modal verbs, infinitive clauses and excellent vocabulary. Subordination tends to be limited to clauses with *weil* and *obwohl*, but better candidates make fluent use of other subordinating conjunctions such as *als*, *wenn*, *damit*, *sobald* and even *falls*. *Da* is often used as an alternative to *weil*, and some candidates manage to use *denn* correctly, showing strong evidence of the difference between coordination and subordination. Relative pronouns are rare, but are effective when used sparingly and accurately.

Candidates must use at least two tenses or time frames in each essay. Most commonly these are the present and the perfect. The conditional is also used in many essays, usually with *wenn*. In some topic areas, for example when writing about school life, there can be a tendency to rely only on the present tense which will limit the mark in this category. The pluperfect tense is rarely seen, but can be effective when used with *nachdem*.

By using the CA4 notes sheet effectively, candidates can ensure that they introduce plenty of interesting vocabulary. Examiners reported an increase in more interesting adjectives this year such as *einzigartig*, *atemberaubend*, *gewalttätig* and *unverschämt*. It is also possible to ensure a variety of verbs by listing some more interesting examples on the CA4 sheet. This can reduce the incidence of *war*, *ist* and *hat* or the most common verbs *fahren*, *gehen*, *essen*, *trinken* and *spielen*. More interesting verbs noted this year include *anbieten*, *losfahren*, *erwähnen* and *sich amüsieren*.

Other structures which were noted as more prevalent this year were "verb comma verb" and *je/desto* which is good way of introducing the comparative.

Just as important as evidence of a range of structures is their application. Too often, potentially good essays become no more than a long string of endless sentences with subordinate clauses piled on top of each other without any thought for the natural flow of the script. Short main clause sentences or the occasional question can often help to break up the monotony of such longer passages.

Accuracy

Marks of 4 or 5 in this category can be achieved only if enough complex language structures have been used. The mark of three is awarded to scripts of quite wide-ranging accuracy since most candidates can manage to write accurately when using simple sentences.

The most common errors are:

- Lack of auxiliary verb.
- The wrong auxiliary verb in the perfect tense, especially with *gehen*, *fahren* and *fliegen*.
- Nouns used as verbs (e.g. *ich unterkunft Frankreich; er aufenthalt für immer*).

- Errors in the conditional tense with *wäre* often accompanied by *sein* and *würde* confused with *wurde* or *werde*.
- Missing prepositions (e.g. *du kannst Restaurant gehen*).
- Confusion of *ob/wenn*, *man/Mann*, *weil/viel*, *also/auch* and *Stunde/Uhr*.

However, it is clear that many candidates are successful in checking their work to ensure that there are as few grammatical errors as possible. Some pieces of work are 100% perfect.

Use of dictionaries

It is hoped that the use of the dictionary will be kept to a minimum. Weaker candidates are often unable to identify the correct word and as always examiners noted misuse. Examples this year included:

nicht alle Leute nein = not all people know
ich säge = I saw
ein Fußballstreichholz = a football match

and as a final sign of the times:

ein Badezimmer mit Handtuch und Selfie!

Grade Boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:

<http://www.edexcel.com/iwantto/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx>