

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2012

GCE German (6GN01) Paper 1A

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Assessment Principles

This paper carries 50 marks. It consists of a conversation between the visiting or teacher examiner on an AS topic area chosen by the student. The general topic areas (available) are:

- Youth Culture and Concerns
- Lifestyle: Health and Fitness
- The World Around Us
- Education and Employment.

Stimulus cards are provided for each area. Before starting the examination, the candidate has 15 minutes to prepare him/herself for the examination with the stimulus card provided. He or she may make notes of up to one side of A4 in this time, and he or she may refer to these notes during the examination.

The conversation lasts between 8 and 10 minutes and is made up of two parts. In Part A, the candidate is asked 4 questions relating to the stimulus card which are set by Edexcel. These questions are mandatory and may be repeated, but not re-phrased in any way, although the examiner may change them to use 'Du' rather than 'Sie'. This is the only change that can be made. They must be asked in the order provided and at the outset of the examination. The first two questions relate specifically to information in the stimulus material, the second two to the wider issues developing from the stimulus material. It is expected that the candidate will give answers which are as full and detailed as possible. The candidate's understanding of this stimulus-specific topic area is marked out of 4.

In Part B, the examiner should move away from the specific topic on the stimulus card and develop a wider conversation about the general topic area. The candidate's understanding of the general topic area is marked out of a total of 10.

The marks of 8 for Quality of Language (Accuracy), 8 for Quality of Language (Lexis) and 20 for response apply to the test as a whole.

Candidates' Responses

Examiners reported that they had assessed the full range of performance by candidates, although those who performed well or very well outnumbered those who showed little or no progress from GCSE. This could be down to a number of Year 13 candidates retaking this unit, along with the good proportion of native or near-native speakers.

As in recent years, 'Lifestyle, Health and Fitness' remained the most popular topic choice, followed closely by 'Youth Culture and Concerns'. 'The World Around Us' is still relatively unpopular, and there were few candidates who tackled 'Education and Employment'. Candidates who chose the more unpopular topics often performed well, perhaps because they have a

genuine interest in these topics, perhaps because there is a clearer idea of progression from GCSE. Examiners again remarked that 'The World Around Us' often allowed candidates to demonstrate good understanding of the general topic area combined with a detailed knowledge of subject-specific lexis. Candidates and teachers should bear in mind that this examination requires the candidate to demonstrate the ability to express and justify opinions and conclusions, based on good understanding and knowledge of the topic area. Candidates need therefore to research and prepare the sub-topics carefully. Native speakers, especially those from international centres, should bear in mind that it is not enough simply to have a conversation in fluent German: what they say should be relevant and knowledgeable about the topic area chosen.

Examiners reported that the stimulus texts were well-selected and appropriate. Teacher-examiners must remember that asking supplementary questions in Section A is not permitted: questions may be repeated, 'Sie' may be changed to 'du', but these are the only changes to the questions allowed. That said, the vast majority of teacher-examiners clearly have developed a good understanding of the requirements and conduct of the examination.

Most teachers have realised that the timing as envisaged in the specification (half on the stimulus material and half on the Section B discussion) is impractical and moved onto the section B discussion reasonably quickly, the average being about 2 – 2 and a half minutes. That said, whereas answers to questions 1 and 2 may be very short, centres should be reminded that they do need to train candidates to understand that questions 3 and 4 on the stimulus cards are designed to invite expansive and detailed answers. They can only score 4 marks out of 4 for 'full and detailed answers to prescribed questions'. Again, most centres seemed to have acted upon this advice.

Comments on stimulus cards:

YCC1: most answered 1 and 2 accurately and were able to develop appropriate responses to 3 and 4. Some candidates spoke about the dangers in Q3 and then repeated themselves in Q4.

YCC2: Q1 generally answered well. Some candidates had difficulty with Q2. Most could develop appropriate responses to 3 and 4.

LHF1: most could answer Q1 and 2 correctly. Most could develop appropriate responses to Q3 but Q4 was a challenge for a good many candidates.

LHF2: again, most coped with all 4 questions well.

WAU1: Q1 usually answered correctly. A few candidates had difficulty with Q2, but most had good ideas to develop 3 and 4.

WAU2: Most managed Q1 and 2 and but quality of responses varied in Q3 and 4

EE1 and 2: very few candidates apart from native speakers chose this option. There was sometimes difficulty with Q2 in EE1, and in developing an appropriate response in EE2.

Quality of Language

The marks are allocated for accuracy, and for range of lexis and structures. As in the past, weaker candidates often had difficulties with tenses, agreement with subject and verb, gender, adjectival endings and word order, and the range of lexis and structures used was limited.

The more able candidates were able to use a wider variety of structure and expressions, some being excellent. The better the candidate has prepared him/herself for the linguistic and thematic demands of this examination, the greater the range of lexis and structures he/ she should be able to employ.

Thorough preparation does not mean, however, pre-learning and reciting: some candidates had pre-learnt whole swathes of text, which they then reproduced in the examination. Teacher-examiners need to interrupt long recitations of pre-learnt material to ensure that the candidate can display genuine communication skills. Elements of such pre-learning were apparent in the answers to Part A questions, where candidates gave answers which were pre-learnt, or, where the candidate had already prepared a model answer to the same (or a very similar) question, which s/he then recited. Pre-learning will always affect the response mark adversely.

Although the questions in Section B are to an extent predictable, the fact remains that a candidate who has rehearsed endlessly will not produce a spontaneous or genuine performance. A few teacher-examiners persist in asking the same questions, in exactly the same order, of candidates choosing the same topic in a centre. This does not tend to produce a genuine conversation. Teacher-examiners should aim to develop a wide variety of questions on the topic, and ensure that they react to what each individual candidate says.

It is also important that the questions asked allow the candidate to show progression from GCSE. Personal questions such as 'Treibst du persönlich viel Sport?' are often not very productive, producing long lists of sports or even days of the week. An alternative would be 'Treibt man genug Sport in der Schule?' which would allow the candidate to formulate an opinion. In addition, there are some teacher-examiners who ask some intrusive and personal questions, for example, 'warum trinkst du am Wochenende?'; 'kennst du persönlich Drogenabhängige?'. Such questions may intimidate or disconcert the candidate and are best avoided.

Response

Candidates' responses varied considerably, and often depended on the way the examination was conducted. Teacher-examiners should bear in mind the need to enable the candidate to demonstrate his or her own fluency in spoken German.

As mentioned above, examiners should **not** permit the recital of long passages of pre-learnt material – it is the best policy to interrupt the candidate and ask a follow-up question. Candidates should not be encouraged to respond to a pre-arranged series of prompts.

Teacher-examiners should bear in mind that the Response mark includes the spontaneity of the candidate and that the mark will be depressed where there is evidence of recitation.

Understanding

As mentioned above, there was some variety of performance in Section A (SSU) and the full range of marks were awarded. The majority of candidates understood that a fuller response was required in Q3 and 4, although a number lacked the ideas/language to respond in a detailed way.

Good, well-prepared candidates who did not perform particularly well in the unpredictable Part A were able to gain good marks for understanding in Part B, the General Topic Area. As mentioned above, candidates do best when they have thoroughly prepared and researched all the sub-topics mentioned in the specification. Examiners should be aware of the need to cover a variety of sub-topics in Part B so that candidates can show the range of their understanding and knowledge. This includes moving away from the merely anecdotal (for example, how often they do sport) to analysis of aspects of the topic area (for example, why exercise is important). Section B **must** move away from the specific topic of the stimulus card and explore the other subtopics. Tests which fail to do so are subject to prescribed penalties.

Conduct of the Examination

The majority of Teacher Examiners conducted the examination well. There were, however, a number issues which arose:

- Timing was accurate overall, with most tests between 8 and 10 minutes. Most examiners realised that hanging out section A for 4 minutes was unrealistic: many candidates gave full and accurate answers in about 2 minutes. This is not a problem, as section B is the more taxing part anyway, and is a better discriminator.

Please note that very short tests are subject to severe penalties.

- Recording quality: CDs are increasing popular, as digital recording facilities are now widely available. Some centres continue to submit

recorded cassette tapes, and a few submit memory sticks. All are acceptable, although it is envisaged that cassettes will no longer be allowed at some point in the future. Whatever mode of recording is chosen, it is vital that the recordings are clear, with both teacher-examiner and candidate audible.

- Oral forms: centre's must ensure that candidates complete the OR1 form, which has to be submitted with the recordings. Please note that from this series there is a new version of OR1 which requires the signature of both the candidate and the teacher-examiner.
- Very few examiners tried to rephrase the questions in section A, or asked supplementary questions in this section, which is not permissible. As stated above, the questions may only be changed by the use of 'Du' and must otherwise be asked in the format and order on the examiner version of the stimulus card.
- Teacher-examiners must ensure they move away from the stimulus-specific sub-topic in Section B. They should also note that questions which are irrelevant to the topic will be disregarded (for example, 'haben Sie einen Nebenjob?' to a candidate who had chosen 'The World Around Us').

Advice and Guidance

- **Topic:** Candidates should choose a General Topic Area which interests them. Further guidance can be found on the Edexcel website. Candidates need to have the opportunity to think in depth about the topic area chosen, and the many related sub-topics. Success comes from good preparation, detailed knowledge and the ability to express and justify opinions. It is not on the whole good practice to require the whole cohort of candidates from one centre to choose the same topic.
- **Conduct:** Examiners should pay careful attention to the guidelines as given in the Specifications, especially for random sequence of stimulus cards, and for overall timing. The Unit 1 lasts 8-10 minutes. Short tests cannot access the highest marks, and long tests are not listened to after 10 minutes. Any pre-learned material must be interrupted.
- **Oral Form:** Please note that there is a form to be filled in for each candidate, and should be submitted with the recording. Centres are advised to take note of any comments made on the Oral Form, as in many cases, this is the only feedback. Please note there is a new version of the OR1 form from Jan 2012.
- **Recording:** Good sound quality is essential. If using cassettes, please use new cassettes. It is also important to have the right balance between the candidates' and examiners' voices. Neck microphones are ideal, but free-standing microphones should be angled towards the candidate, whose voice is normally quieter than the examiner's. Recordings must **never** be paused or

stopped, except in an emergency, which must be fully explained in writing to Edexcel. All mobile phones must be switched off (not just on silent, as there is otherwise electronic interference) and there should be no background noise. Centres should check that every candidate has actually been recorded, that it is audible and at the correct speed

- **Handbook of Instructions to Centres:** Teacher Examiners should be thoroughly acquainted with this publication, as observing correct procedures are vital. It is recommended that teacher examiners attend training sessions at Edexcel if at all possible. An Oral Training Guide is also available from Edexcel to help teachers to prepare for this examination. It is unfortunate that candidates are sometimes deprived of marks because the test has been incorrectly conducted. Teacher examiners have the responsibility to prepare adequately, in order to bring out the best from their candidates. All information relating to the oral tests is available on www.edexcel.com.
- **Administration:** Centres should take care to enclose the correct paperwork with the recordings: i.e. the oral forms, the attendance register and a note of any unusual circumstances e.g. fire alarm, candidate illness. Care should be taken with packaging: unfortunately quite a few CDs/cassettes arrive in a damaged state.

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