

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2012

GCE German (6GN03) Paper 1A

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Assessment Principles

This unit assesses communication in spoken language. It also covers understanding, which is in essence, a test of listening skills. It is marked out of 50, by Edexcel examiners, although the examination itself may be conducted by a visiting examiner, or by a teacher examiner.

Centres should be aware that short tests are limited on the marks which can be awarded, and that long tests are disregarded after 13 minutes. The fact that listening as well as speaking is being assessed does have implications for the conduct of the test. The candidate must have something to listen to, so slightly longer utterances by the examiner should be expected.

Candidates' Responses

The first part of the test is a discussion of a controversial issue, which has been prepared in advance. Candidates have up to one minute to present their argument, outlining whether they are for or against. The examiner takes the opposing view and a debate ensues. The total length for this part of the test is 5 minutes. Candidates should ensure that the issue chosen is one for which there are two possible sides to the argument. The oral form (OR3) reminds candidates that they must state which viewpoint they are taking, and also that the statement must be in the target language.

Teachers should verify in advance that the topic is appropriate. OR3 forms should be sent well in advance to visiting examiners, who may have a diverse range of topics to prepare.

The most popular issues for debate remain Abtreibung, Sterbehilfe, Atomkraft, probably because there are obvious pros and cons which can be researched and expanded upon. However, there were some more unusual topics such as "die Olympischen Spiele sind ein Segen" and "gegen IVF für ältere Frauen".

The initial part of the test is to give the candidates confidence by speaking about an issue which they have had time to research and contemplate. They should have relevant lexis to enable them to engage in an in-depth discussion. However, this section of the test should not be pre-learned and regurgitated. There is a difference between preparation and recitation, usually detectable by the intonation, revealing in some cases that the candidate does not fully understand what they are saying. Examiners should debate and argue, affording the opportunity for the candidate to defend their point of view. Evidence of research can be displayed in this part of the test by the presentation of facts and statistics.

The second part must cover at least two unpredictable areas. These are likely to be topics from the two year A Level course, but the candidates must not know in advance what they are going to be.

Examiners should prepare a wide selection of topics, so that each candidate discusses something different, as far as possible. If there are only around 3 topics, rotated amongst all the candidates, it inevitably raises the suspicion that these have been prepared in advance, and are far from being unpredictable.

A large number of topics, for example 6 in as many minutes, does not

enable the candidate to develop a line of argument in any depth. Some centres are inclined to focus on AS topic areas, with many questions on Lifestyle, Health and Fitness, and The World Around Us. Although this is acceptable, it is important for candidates to show progression from AS in the A2 year if they choose to discuss these topic areas. It is to the candidates' advantage to display an ability to cover new topic areas.

Response

This area is marked out of 20, amounting to 40% of the total marks. It should be noted that this covers not only spontaneous discourse, but also a range of lexis and structures, and the use of abstract language.

One of the key phrases here is spontaneous discourse: in other words, the candidate must not know in advance what is going to come up, and also that there is genuine discourse, a discussion. Examiners are discouraged from merely asking knowledge questions, or "Und was meinst du?" which can in some cases lead to an outburst of prepared material. The type of topics must be challenging, not Urlaub, or zukünftige Pläne.

Candidates should know phrases related to discussion and debate such as meiner Meinung nach, einerseits/andererseits, but over-preparation is to be avoided.

Some candidates appear to have anticipated every possible question and line of thought, and are able to respond promptly and coherently to every question.

Candidates should expect to be interrupted from time to time, and examiners should in fact interrupt if they feel that the candidate is reciting prepared material. Candidates can be rewarded for an ability to think on their feet. A natural, spontaneous conversation will have minor hesitations allowing time to reflect, and then continue and elaborate.

Abstract language was at times a difficult area. It depended to a certain extent on what the topic was. But many candidates were able to discuss and analyse, for example, prejudice, poverty, the Euro crisis, and related issues.

It should be borne in mind that range of lexis and structures are also evaluated in this section. Candidates should be able to show progress from AS level, being more confident with for instance, the passive, indirect speech, and the conditional.

In the second section covering unpredictable areas, it is not appropriate to resort to personal anecdote. A suggestion would be to limit the number of topics to two, or maybe three, to permit the candidate to elaborate in greater depth, possibly referring to some research on the internet, or a newspaper article. Further recommendations include choosing unrelated topics, such as "erneubare Energiequellen" and "die Monarchie", in that if they are Sterbehilfe, Abtreibung und die Todesstrafe, a large amount of similar lexis and constructions are covered.

The imminent Olympic Games produced some well-informed discussions, as did the current Euro crisis. It is encouraging to note that many candidates are taking a serious and well-informed interest in national and international events, and are able to express their views quite forcibly.

Quality of Language

This is marked out of 7, and assesses such grammatical issues as gender, case, singular/plural, past participles and word order. Some candidates are still not confident with adjectival agreements or the use of relative pronouns. A sound knowledge of grammar remains the foundation of fluent communication.

In addition, pronunciation and intonation are assessed to a certain extent. Certain areas which used to be assessed as Quality of Language, have been integrated into the response grid, so it would be incorrect to assume that Quality of Language plays an insignificant role. Candidates who have been well taught, probably visited a German-speaking country, had the opportunity to practise with a German assistant and have prepared well, are of course able to achieve 7/7 here.

Reading and Research

7 marks are allocated for evidence of Reading and Research. This applies to both the chosen issue and to the unpredictable areas. Candidates are more able to show their knowledge in the prepared part of the test, and indeed, many had researched their topic in detail, providing statistics, examples, and referring to websites and TV programmes. It is of course more difficult to draw on prior knowledge in the unpredictable areas, in that the candidate must not know what is going to be discussed.

However, since many topics will have been covered in the GCE curriculum, candidates were still able to cite examples to illustrate a point which they wished to make: for example, many had excellent information about the ongoing Euro crisis, in particular the role of Germany. Other topics such as adoption, the war in Afghanistan, unemployment among graduates, showed that students are eager to remain "auf dem laufenden".

Comprehension and Development

This area, marked out of 16, is aimed at assessing understanding and the ability to deal with questioning. In order to respond, one has to have understood the question: in other words, listening skills are tested. This does have implications for the way in which questions are formulated and asked, in that there should be a wide variety of complex and challenging questions in order to provide evidence of the candidate's ability. Many candidates were able to cope with every form of questioning, including in some cases analysing an imaginary scenario of "Was hätten Sie gemacht/gesagt, wenn Sie.....gesehen/gemacht hätten?"

Development pre-supposes that the candidate has fully understood the question, and is then able to produce a detailed response, giving not a single-sentence reply, but several sentences, developing a line of debate. The examiner should not encourage a question/answer/question/answer type of conversation, but should try to facilitate a genuine discussion. Monologues should of course be interrupted and deflected.

The reference in the mark grid to a wider variety of question forms means not only linguistically more complex, but also conceptually. This is the point where listening skills, the ability to analyse what has been heard, and to develop an appropriate response, are being tested.

Advice and Guidance

1. Issue: candidates must choose a genuinely controversial issue, and argue consistently for or against it. The teacher examiner should take and maintain the opposing view, but aim to end on a conciliatory note.

2. Timing: the presentation may take a maximum time of 1 minute. Anything longer should be interrupted. Overall the presentation and discussion of the chosen issue should last 5 minutes. If it is longer, this erodes the time available for the unpredictable areas, namely 6-8 minutes, for a total time of 11-13 minutes. Please note that the timing of the test begins **when the candidate begins to speak**, not from the initial introduction of name, candidate number etc.

3. Conduct: teacher examiners should look closely at the mark grid to see what is being assessed, as this has implications for the conduct, not least on the style of questioning, which can no longer be minimal, otherwise there is no evidence of the candidate's comprehension abilities. Teacher examiners may like to consider preparing a hierarchy of questions, ranging from the very simple, to the more challenging. A range is essential.

4. Oral chosen issue form (OR3): this should be filled in correctly, in German, with the stance clearly stated. This is particularly important for candidates with a visiting examiner, who has to prepare the opposing viewpoint.

5. Recording: Good sound quality is essential. The microphone should be nearer to the candidate than the examiner. Mobile phones should not be brought into the room and there should be no background noise or interruptions. AS and A2 oral tests must be recorded separately. If cassettes are used, please check that the tape is long enough: one candidate on each side of a C60, two on a C90. Please also check that every candidate has been recorded, that it is audible and at the correct speed. It is helpful to label the cassette as well as the box. Please ensure that every cassette is rewound to the beginning before posting them off. Note that cassettes are being phased out. Please check the Edexcel website for details. Please ensure that CD recordings can be read on any machine and are not merely computer-compatible.

A label with the candidates' names and numbers should be included with the CD. With a large number of candidates, centres may find that a USB stick is the best option. This is returned to the centre in the same way that cassettes and CDs are returned.

Grade Boundaries

Much work has taken place on the comparability of the oral units for French, German and Spanish. The senior examiners have worked closely together to ensure their application of the common oral marking criteria is consistently applied across these three languages. This has been in response to queries from centres about the results at unit level on the oral examinations.

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>

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