

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2013

GCE German (6GN03)
Paper 1A

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Unit 3: Understanding and Spoken Response in German

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 be able to demonstrate that they can understand a range of questions which vary both in length and type.

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 arguments, 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 issue is appropriate. OR3 forms should be sent well in advance to visiting examiners, who may have a diverse range of issues to prepare. The most popular issues for debate remain Abtreibung, Sterbehilfe, Atomkraft, Tierversuche and Todesstrafe probably because there are obvious pros and cons which can be researched and expanded upon.

However, there were some more unusual issues, which worked well, such as „Ich bin für die Abschaffung der britischen Monarchie“, „Mädchenschulen – Ich bin dafür“ „ich bin dafür, dass jeder zur Organspende verpflichtet werden soll,“ and many more besides.

Guidance on Choice of Issue:

Candidates do have an entirely free choice of issue, and should be encouraged to select an issue which they find personally interesting. The following should, however, be kept in mind when deciding if an issue is suitable for the exam.

- Can the issue be researched? An issue which is based purely within the personal sphere of the candidate will not be suitable. In preparation for the test, the candidate is expected to do in-depth research into the chosen issue, and demonstrate reading.
- Can both sides of the issue be sensibly argued? For example, some candidates had chosen "I am against racism" which leaves the examiner in a very difficult position, when having to argue for racism. If one side of the issue could obviously cause offence, it is not suitable for the examination. Other issues which did not allow two sensible viewpoints were "I am against murder," and "I support the view that smoking is bad for your health" – whereby the examiner was expected to present various health benefits to smoking.

In summary, the issue should not be decided on the day of the examination, but rather some time in advance, in order to enable research to take place and also to allow the examiner time to prepare. The candidate should suggest the research sources for the issue,

so that teachers can be sure that it is possible to do adequate research. Finally, the teacher examiner should be comfortable that a suitable counter argument, which remains close to the chosen issue, is possible.

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. As this issue is chosen in advance, the candidate will be expected to show an above average knowledge of the issue. This can be done by effectively using facts and statistics which substantiate the arguments. Also, a range of specialist lexis related to the topic would be expected here. As this is the specialised subject of the candidate, examiners would expect them to know genders of key nouns from within the topic area, and also any related verbs, which may or may not be irregular. Candidates should also be encouraged to research to opposite standpoint to their own, so that these are not a surprise in the examination. This is beneficial for those centres, which use a visiting examiner, as it will give the candidate more confidence. It is also beneficial for teacher examiner centres, as it allows the candidate to prepare thoroughly, without the debate becoming over-rehearsed.

To help candidates prepare effectively –

- If two candidates chose the same issue within a teaching group, encourage them to take opposing views, so that they can practise with each other.
- Allow candidates to present their chosen issue to the class, showing both points of view, to ensure that they have correctly pre-empted any typical challenges on the issue.
- If the teacher practises with the candidate, change the wording and order of the challenges, to check for a real understanding of what is being said. Try to challenge what the candidate has actually said, rather than working through a list of pre decided questions. Good generic challenges, which teacher examiners may use might include:

“But that cannot be proved”

“There is absolutely no evidence of this”

“That may be your opinion, but I’m not convinced that it is true”

“There are absolutely no alternatives to...”

“There is no way that what you suggest would work in practice”

“The alternatives have no real advantages”

These can be adapted to suit a range of issues.

The second part must cover at least two unpredictable areas. These are topics from the two year A Level course, but the candidates must not know in advance what they are going to be. In centres that use visiting examiners, it should be kept in mind, that the visiting examiner will choose topics, for which they can reasonably expect candidates to have some knowledge. It is a good idea for these centres to encourage candidates to keep abreast of current affairs and news stories around the time of the examination. Visiting examiners will also refer to common debatable topics, for which most people will be able to offer opinions and justifications, but there is no prescribed list. The only restriction is that the topics fit into the general topic areas of the specification. One good source of ideas for such issues may be to look at previous titles for discursive essays – although it should be remembered that there is no single resource which examiners rely upon, other than the list of areas in the specification.

Teacher 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.

Reading and research in this section are not expected to be as in depth as in the first section, as the candidate did not know what would be asked.

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. If, as a teacher examiner, you are asking the same questions in the unit three examinations as in the unit one examinations, then this could be an indicator that the level will not show progression.

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.

Spontaneous discourse is the problematic part for many candidates. A completely unpredictable test, which shows absolutely no evidence of pre-learned material, will not necessarily attract the highest marks here, if it is not also a discussion. Many centres are conducting the examination in this way, and should take care, that conversations are allowed to grow organically, and are not in any way pre-determined by the teacher. This does not mean that every single question has to link seamlessly with the next, and the teacher examiner should think of elaborate links between topic areas. It simply means that at frequent points in the test, the teacher is reacting to what the candidate says and moving the discussion forwards based on this. An example of such discourse would be:

Examiner- What do you think about nuclear power?

Candidate – I think there are advantages and disadvantages, and sometimes it can be dangerous.

Examiner – In what way can it be dangerous?

Candidate – For example in Japan, there was an earthquake and a nuclear plant exploded.

Examiner – But you said earlier that it had advantages too.

Candidate – Yes for example.....

On the other hand, some very spontaneous performances lacked this discourse, and the conversation took the form of:

Examiner – So, on the topic of nuclear power, I have just one question for you today; what are the advantages and disadvantages?

Candidate – On the one hand.... but on the other hand.....

Examiner – Thanks and a topic which is often linked to nuclear power is renewable energy, and on this topic I have two things to ask you.....

Here, the examiner has clearly decided the course of the conversation in advance, and so no discourse can take place. Also, there is no reaction to what the candidate has given as a response. The link to the next topic is an attempt from the examiner to make the conversation flow, but is unnecessary. Once a topic area has been discussed as in the first example, it is fine for the examiner to make a clear break to the next topic.

Candidates should know phrases related to discussion and debate such as *meiner Meinung nach*, *einerseits/andererseits*, and these will be effective if used appropriately.

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.

The other consideration when deciding the mark in this section is abstract concepts and range of language. Here, markers looked for discussions which showed an ability from the candidate to communicate in a range of different ways, as explained in the oral training guide on the Edexcel website. These communication strategies are an ability to narrate, describe, explain, clarify justify hypothesise, speculate.

In the second section covering unpredictable areas, it is not appropriate to resort to personal anecdote and is far better to refer to some research on the internet, or a newspaper article.

In summary, the questions that the markers will ask themselves when giving a mark for response are:

Does the candidate cover a wide range of communicative approaches? Does the candidate show an ability to narrate, describe, explain, clarify justify hypothesise, speculate? How hesitant is the candidate – is the hesitation helping to gather thoughts and express them clearly, or is it breaking up the flow of language?

Scripted or not? Things which suggest that tests are “scripted” could include:

- Do the questions sound like the teacher is reading them out loud?
- Is the teacher language overly stilted and unnatural?
- Does the candidate seem “out of sync” with the script?

Is there a lack of “follow up” questions from the teacher examiner?

Quality of Language:

This is marked out of 7, and assesses such grammatical issues as gender, case, singular/plural, past participles and word order. A mark of 7 does not necessarily indicate a perfect performance. If mistakes are made, but there is strong evidence that a particular structure or grammar point is normally well handled, then a mark of 7 could still apply. In addition, pronunciation and intonation are assessed and so candidates should be encouraged to be confident when speaking and to try to make an effort to apply the rules of pronunciation - particularly with consonants such as “Z” “V” and “R.”

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, given 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. In general, it is expected that candidates show they read and take an interest in current affairs, and that they can take a stance on common moral and ethical issues in order to score highly here, as this is a large part of the course content. If examples were given only from personal experience, or were completely

centred on commonly received ideas which can be picked up without any reading or research, then the top band in this section could not be accessed. Many candidates did indeed show a good general knowledge.

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.

Good questioning would use a full range of question phrases, (for example: wie / warum inwiefern / wozu / woher / worauf ist es zurückzuführen.) Another good strategy is to present scenarios, statistics, ideas or opinions and to seek a response to them.

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 ability to present two opposing points of view and the reasons for these, along with an evaluation would demonstrate excellent development.

An example of this could be:

Examiner – Is the death penalty appropriate in all cases, is it a suitable punishment in your opinion?

Candidate – Perhaps. I believe in "an eye for an eye." For example, if you were the family member of someone who was killed, you may want it, but on the other hand, if you killed in self-defence, but were convicted as a murderer, you would disagree.

(The above example shows a way to present different points of view; it is in no way intended as an indicator of expected language level or complexity.)

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.

In summary, when deciding a mark in this section, markers asked themselves:

Does the candidate actually answer the question?

Can the candidate develop an answer to look at broader implications?

Is development logical, rather than just deviation?

Does the question actually challenge the candidates in terms of listening comprehension?

Is there a range of question types?

Can the candidate consider other points of view and wider implications?

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. It should also be signed and dated by both the candidate and examiner.

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. Please also check that every candidate has been recorded, that it is audible and at the correct speed. Please check the Edexcel website for details of acceptable formats as cassettes will no longer be accepted. 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 and can be reused.

Centres are reminded of the Edexcel Notice to Centres on the website to inform them that **audio cassettes will no longer be accepted for assessment after September 2014.**

Unit 3: Understanding and Spoken Response

Marking guidance for oral examiners

Tests that are too short

A test is too short if it is less than 10 minutes 30 seconds. Candidates are allowed a 30 second tolerance.

The timing of the test begins the moment the candidate starts the presentation.

Drop down one mark band to the corresponding mark across the following assessment grids:

- 'Response'
- 'Comprehension and Development'

e.g.

5-8	Limited incidence of spontaneous discourse; limited range of lexis and structures; very little evidence of abstract language.
9-12	Satisfactory incidence of spontaneous discourse; range of lexis and structures adequate with some ability to handle language of abstract concepts.
13-16	Frequent examples of spontaneous discourse; good range of lexis and structures; good use of abstract concepts.

If a candidate would have scored 12, they should be given 8, if they would have scored 9, they should be given 5. This adjustment should not be applied to 'Quality of language' or 'Reading and research'.

Tests that are too long

Once the 13 minute mark has passed, the examiner stops listening at the end of the next sentence.

Tests that do not have a debatable or defensible issue

e.g. where the candidate does not present or defend a definite stance, or the teacher-examiner fails to give the candidate an opportunity to justify their opinions.

- Candidates will be limited to scoring a maximum of 4 for 'Reading and Research'.
- This may affect the marks given for 'Comprehension and Development'.

Tests that do not move away from initial issue/topic

e.g. further unpredictable areas of discussion are not covered and/or a monologue.

- Candidates are limited in the amount of marks they can score. Please see the grids.

Response	
Only one unpredictable area discussed	No more than 12 marks
No unpredictable areas discussed	No more than 8 marks

Reading and research	
Only one unpredictable area discussed	No more than 4 marks
No unpredictable areas discussed	No more than 3 marks

Comprehension and development	
Only one unpredictable area discussed	No more than 10 marks
No unpredictable areas discussed	No more than 7 marks

Tests that are pre-learnt

Pre-learnt is defined as a performance which is largely recited and may demonstrate very little spontaneity and impaired intonation. Candidates are limited in the amount of marks they can score. Please see 'Response' grid.

- 'Response' - cannot score more than 8, irrespective of use of lexis/structure/abstract language.

Pre-learnt tests may also affect the mark given for 'Comprehension and Development' if it does not permit a natural and logical interaction.

Grade Boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:
<http://www.edexcel.com/iwant to/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx>

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