

Examiners' Report/  
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2014

Pearson Edexcel GCE  
in German (6GN03/01) Paper 3

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## **6GN03/01 GCE German– Examiner’s report – June 2014**

The following points were noted by examiners:

### **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, which in this instance, is German.

Teachers should verify in advance that the issue is appropriate, and take action in cases, where they feel the issue may not be suitable. 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. This year, there was an increase in the popularity of Europe based issues. Immigration, the Euro, EU Expansion, EU trade rules and also the UK as a member state. This is no doubt a result of the EU Elections which took place at a similar time to the oral examination window.

There were also a good number of debates on the topics of “gleichgeschlechtliche Paare” and many more this year on equal rights issues, particularly equality of the sexes.

However, there were some more unusual issues, which worked well and a number of issues, which appeared to be unsuitable, but did develop into successful debates. In these cases, the issues worked because the teacher examiner had prepared well. Thorough preparation on the part of the examiner is essential to make any issue work, and is particularly crucial if a candidate does choose an issue outside of the common topics.

Examiners did note frequent occasions when candidates were not challenged sufficiently, or debates ended early, simply due to lack of preparation on the part of the teacher examiner. This is unfortunate, as the candidate's marks will be adversely affected by this.

### **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. If there is no evidence of this, the marks in the "reading and research" section of the mark scheme will be limited.
- Can both sides of the issue be sensibly argued? There are many issues, about which two opposing views could be taken, but are the views realistic? For example, "I am against racism" or "I am against domestic violence." This means that the teacher will have to argue for these issues. Whilst this could be technically possible, the law and our social norms make this unreasonable, and teacher examiners should "veto" such topics.

The following bullet points outline good practice in guiding candidates to choose a suitable issue:

- When candidates chose the issue, ask them to propose sources of research which will enable them to prepare effectively. If they cannot do this, the teacher should advise against the issue.
- Many schools examine external, non-taught candidates. These candidates should not expect to perform highly, if the same care and guidance in choice of issue is not provided. If a candidate declares the chosen issue on the day of the exam, it is very unlikely to result in a high grade, as the teacher / examiner will not be able to prepare. Schools who examine non-taught candidates should keep this in mind, and only examine them if they can offer the correct level of support and guidance. To do otherwise is unfair on the candidate.
- Is it possible to argue both sides of the issue, comfortably? There is a certain degree of role-play involved in this debate, and examiners often will have to argue for a point of view which is alien to them. However, there are some issues about which the arguments would be highly inappropriate, and likely to offend, and these issues should be avoided.

As this issue is chosen in advance, candidates must be able to convince the Edexcel examiner, that they are specialists in their chosen area. They should seek to substantiate all arguments with evidence and examples if they wish to score highly. 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 they can pre-empt the challenges. This is particularly important for centres which have visiting examiners. 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”  
“There are no examples of cases where what you propose has been effective.”  
“That may be your opinion, but you but it does not mean that it is true”  
“There are absolutely no alternatives to...”  
“There is no way that what you suggest would work in practice”  
“The alternatives you propose have no real advantages”
- To maintain spontaneity, and prevent the issue of over rehearsing the debate, train students to challenge each other, and debate with each other. This has countless benefits for candidates, not only in order to score more highly, but also in the development of the students as linguists outside of the examination situation.

Some strategies employed by teacher examiners made it difficult for candidates to score the highest marks. These included:

- General questions on the topic.
- Questions which ask candidate to explain other points of view (this is a very good strategy in section B, but not appropriate in section A)
- Questions which elicited personal anecdotes, as talking about personal experiences is a GCSE task, and therefore not appropriate at this level.

## **SECTION B**

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 chose 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 can be sensibly placed 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. “Morals and beliefs” is an extremely wide area, and the examples of topics used in the Edexcel endorsed text book for this section are not exhaustive.

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. It is not appropriate to ask multiple candidates the same combination of topics and questions, and this will affect the mark for response. In centres with large numbers of candidates, it is acceptable to use topics for more than one candidate, but examiners will listen to how the discourse develops. Examiners expect two different candidates, who are having a natural, unscripted discussion on any given topic to sound different. If it is apparent that there was a pre-prepared list of questions used for more than one candidate, then the response and compression marks will be limited. There were, unfortunately, many examples of centres, in which the entire cohort were asked had chosen issues, and 2 predictable areas all taken from just 3 or 4 topic areas overall. In many cases, there was also evidence that both questions and answers were scripted.

Reading and research in this section are not expected to be as in depth as in the first section, as the candidate should not know what would be asked. It should be noted, that the general awareness shown by the candidate is just as important as the ability to give memorised facts and figures. The level of discussion contributes to the reading and research marks. If the candidate can partake in a high level discussion on the unpredictable areas, examiners will draw the conclusion that wide reading and research has taken place.

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.

It should also be noted, that the Edexcel examiner often marks both the unit one and the unit three examinations. There were occasions, when section B of unit 3 contained the same questions and answers as section B of unit one. This raised questions as to the predictability of section B, and so the spontaneity. Marks were therefore given accordingly.

## 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, nor that 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.

There were frequent cases, in which candidates with flawless German scored very low marks for response. The Edexcel consider the following points when marking response:

- Is the performance spontaneous?
- If so, is it a discussion, as opposed to a "one question per issue" approach?
- If these criteria are fulfilled, is there also a great range of structures and lexis, as opposed to an over reliance on certain terms?
- Finally, is there evidence of abstract language?

Only when all of these bullet points are fulfilled, do examiners consider a mark in the top band.

Candidates should know phrases related to discussion and debate such as *meiner Meinung nach*, *einerseits/andererseits*, and these will be effective if used appropriately. Some candidates use these well, but some others rely too much on these phrases, and produce little content other than these. Such an example would be:

“That is a very controversial topic, and quite a double edged sword, so in my opinion it is important to consider both sides of the issue, as it is a very difficult question”

Clearly in this answer offers little in the way of topic specific vocabulary, and abstract issues.

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.

Many centres are still running the risk of scripting entire tests. In such cases, the Edexcel examiner will make a judgement as to whether to apply a penalty mark or not.

Things which **suggest** that tests are “scripted” could include:

- Do the questions sound like the teacher is reading them out loud?
- Did the same questions appear in unit one as in unit three, especially when candidates are re-sitting.
- Is the teacher’s language overly stilted and unnatural?
- Does the candidate seem “out of sync” with the script?
- Are intonation and pronunciation impaired?
- Can papers be heard rustling, particularly when a candidate hesitates, or freezes?
- Is there a lack of “follow up” questions from the teacher examiner, due to a “one question per issue” approach?
- Does the teacher prompt the candidate in an unnatural way, with the exact words which the candidate has forgotten?

The examiners will apply penalties if there is a strong suggestion of a scripted performance. If teacher examiners want to guard against this, they should not employ the strategies above, or consider using a visiting 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. Native speaker candidates are often above what is expected for a mark of 7. 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."

Examiners noted that quality of language was generally very good this session, and instances where communication completely broke down due to a lack of accuracy were few and far between.

### **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.)

Many think that the longer the question, the more complex it becomes, but this is not necessarily the case. Teacher examiners should be aware that they will disadvantage candidates, if it is the case that they talk for more of the 11-13 minutes than the candidate.

The actual number of questions is also important. Some excellent linguists were disadvantaged, as the entire section B consisted of only 3 or 4 questions. This approach should be avoided.

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.

The overall principal to be remembered is that examiners in this unit are actually setting and conducting the listening examination, as well as the speaking examination. Therefore, careful consideration must be given as to how comprehension will be tested. Also, a scripted test cannot test comprehension skills, if the questions were not new to the candidate. One would not expect an A Level listening comprehension test to consist of only a three or four questions, which the candidate had seen in advance.

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

- How many questions have been asked?
- Did the candidate seem to know what question was coming next?
- Is there a range of question?
- Does the candidate actually answer the question?
- Can the candidate develop an answer to look more than one point of view?
- Is development logical, rather than just deviation?

Only if all of these points were satisfied could the candidate be awarded a mark in the top band.

## **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.

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