

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2015

Pearson Edexcel GCE
in German (6GN03) Paper 1A / 1B

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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 of the rules that apply to short tests. Also material presented after 13 minutes in long tests is not assessed. 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 and provide answers which directly address these questions.

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 an argument, outlining the adopted standpoint on the issue. 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 such, that there are two possible sides to the debate. 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 were also a number of debates on topics such as religious symbols in schools, Heathrow Airport expansion, the sale of Weapons in the USA, Scottish Independence, driverless cars, gambling, world cup host nations and meat consumption. There were far fewer debates on equal rights issues, for example, same sex marriage or adoption for same sex couples were not as frequently explored this year. Immigration, the Euro, and also the UK as a member state of the EU remained relatively popular, 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.

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. The evidence of this, contributes to the marks awarded in the "reading and research" section of the mark scheme. For example, a debate with the title "German schools are better than British schools," which is based entirely on the anecdotal evidence of the candidate's experiences in both countries, is not appropriate at this level.
- 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 smoking". This means that the teacher will have to argue for this. Whilst this could be technically possible, it is likely to be difficult, 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 be examined, if the same care and guidance in choice of issue cannot be provided. If a candidate declares the chosen issue on the day of the exam, and the teacher / examiner is not able to prepare, then the debate is likely to encounter the difficulties mentioned above. 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 which would be highly inappropriate and likely to offend, and these issues should be avoided.

As this issue is chosen in advance, we expect the highest performing candidates to be able to convince the examiner, that they have undertaken specialist research in their chosen areas. They should seek to substantiate arguments with evidence and examples in order to access the highest marks. 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 the 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 –

- Closely monitor their research into the chosen topic, and give feedback as to whether the research is adequate or not.
- Practise with candidates, to help them identify the relevant parts of their research when responding to the teacher's challenges.
- 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. Remind them to tell each other, if they are not convinced that a response actually deals with the challenge posed.
- 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 what you propose being 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 did not prove particularly helpful. 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 opinions. They may also draw on the chosen topics for the debates of other candidates, if these can be reasonably linked to the broad topic areas in the specification, since it is likely that these topics will have been discussed in class. 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. For example “Customs, Traditions, beliefs and religions” and “national and international evens, past, present and future” are extremely wide areas, 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. It is not against the rules to use the same topics for more than one candidate, but examiners will listen to how the discourse develops. A natural, unscripted discussion on a given topic would develop differently, if the two participants successfully address the points each other makes.

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 there is a good level of general awareness.

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 Level. An excellent AS Level discussion will not be awarded the highest marks when assessed against the A2 unit three criteria.

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.

To reach a decision on the mark for response, examiners consider whether the performance is spontaneous, then whether a discussion is taking place. The decision is made based on the information given in the unit 3 marking guidance which is available on the website.

It should be noted, that there is a particular interpretation of the term "discussion" given in the unit 3 marking guidance, and teacher examiners must be aware of 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 is not addressing the points made by the candidate. 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.

As well as assessing spontaneity and discourse, the examiners consider the range of Lexis and whether or not there is an over reliance on a limited range. Candidates should be encouraged to learn a wide range of verbs, to avoid reliance on "haben" and "sein." and should be encouraged to avoid all-encompassing terms such as "die Leute" when possible.

The range of structures is also considered within the response grid, and examiners consider the prescribed grammar list in the specification when making their decisions.

Finally, the ability to deal with abstract concepts, for example, ethical, moral and political issues is considered, before a final mark out of 20 is reached for response.

The example below provides an illustration of this process:

Examiner – Are you healthy?

Candidate – Yes, I eat fruit, I also eat vegetables. I do not eat fast-food.

Examiner – Do you do sport?

Candidate – Yes, I play football, and I play cricket, and I play rugby.

Examiner – What do you think of smoking?

Candidate – It is unhealthy, it is expensive and it is dangerous.

Firstly the spontaneity is considered in line with the unit 3 marking guidance on the Edexcel website. The examiner is satisfied that it is spontaneous, so then considers whether it is also a discussion. At no point in the exchange has the examiner addressed the points made by the candidate, so this is not considered a discussion in line with the marking guidance. Next the range of lexis is considered, and it is noted that the lexis used do not show progression from GCSE level. There is also an over reliance on the verbs "eat," "play" and "is." The range of structures is also very limited and there is no evidence of an ability to handle abstract concepts.

The only element of the response box that is fulfilled is "spontaneous," therefore, if the performance continued in this way for the entire section, a low response mark would be awarded.

This example is purposefully quite extreme, in order to illustrate the process clearly, but such exchanges were noted by examiners and marked accordingly. Accuracy, pronunciation and intonation are credited in the quality of language grid, and even if they are faultless, they will not compensate for elements of the response grid that are not in evidence.

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.

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.

Things which **suggest** that tests are "scripted" could include:

- Do the questions sound like the teacher is reading them out loud?
- Is the teacher's language overly stilted and unnatural?
- Does the candidate seem "out of sync" with the script?
- Are intonation and pronunciation impaired?
- Does the teacher prompt the candidate in an unnatural way, with the exact words which the candidate has forgotten?

The examiners will mark such performances in line with the published marking guidance. 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. 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."

The term "variable" in the mark grid implies that the language must be accurate as well as inaccurate on significant occasions.

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. In section B, specific examples are not required. The ability to explain a view point shows the level of awareness required for the highest marks in this section. 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 avoid talking 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. One would expect a traditional A Level listening examination to have a good number and range of questions.

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.” So in my opinion if you murder somebody, then it would be the most suitable punishment. But on the other hand, if you killed in self-defence, but were convicted as a murderer, it may not be appropriate in this case.

(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.)

It is also expected, that the candidate provides and develops a relevant answer to the question, showing that they have understood the notion of what is being asked. For example:

Examiner – Are there circumstances, in which the death penalty is a suitable punishment in your opinion?

Candidate – The death penalty is an interesting issue. For example, America still uses the lethal injection, but the UK abolished hanging some time ago.

This answer is much less successful than the previous example. There is no attempt to deal with the notion of “which circumstances (if any)” and also no information pertaining to “suitability.”

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 known to the candidate in advance. 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?
- Is there a range of question type?
- 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?

If all of these points were satisfied the candidate would be awarded a mark in the top band.

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, with the stance clearly stated, in German. 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 are **no** longer 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.

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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