

Examiners' Report /
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2012

GCSE German (5GN04) Paper 01

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Examiner Report

Administration

On the whole centre administration was clear and complete, although some centres did not use the new front sheet which is available in the ICE document on the Edexcel website.

Some elements of administration can hold up the marking procedure. Centres are requested to take note of the following:

- Both the teacher and the candidate must sign the front sheet to authenticate the work; without the two signatures the marking process cannot be completed.
- Examiners sent a heart-felt plea for work not to be submitted in plastic wallets; it is much better to secure each candidate's submission with a staple or a paper-clip. On no account should the work from a centre be sent without each candidate's work being secured separately.
- The submission for the whole centre must be sent in candidate number order rather than in teaching group.
- The two tasks submitted should be presented in the same order as they appear on the front sheet.
- It helps greatly if a word count for each unit is included, although this is not mandatory.
- Where all candidates have been given the same stimulus task, it is necessary to include this only once.
- To access the full mark range it is necessary for candidates to write two essays of about 200 words each. An essay of 180 words is marked as normal; essays of between 100 and 180 words are capped at 12 for Communication and Content; those of fewer than 100 words are capped at 6 for Communication and Content.
- Teachers should not mark the work in any way.

CA4 prompt sheet

This is generally well used. It can include up to 30 words of German (or English) and up to five pictures. Most candidates clearly think carefully about what to include here, usually difficult spellings or more adventurous and unusual items of vocabulary. It is best to avoid full sentences. Codes such as highlighting nouns in different colours to denote gender or writing the first letter of every word in a sentence are not allowed.

Topic areas and stimulus tasks

The most common topic areas are:

- School or work experience
- Holidays or school trips
- Local area and the environment
- Media and new technology
- Film and book reviews
- Lifestyle, diet, sport and exercise

It is vital that the stimulus task is suitable for the level of the candidate. For example an over-prescriptive task can handicap the best candidates since it may prevent them from manipulating the language they have learned and writing original work. Conversely, some less able candidates will benefit from a more structured task which directs them towards what they know.

Most importantly, it is essential that the task does not simply direct candidates to write out what they have learned, but gives them the opportunity to use learned language to suit their purpose. The following two tasks illustrate the difference:

Task 1

Write an essay about holidays. You must include the following:

- Where you normally go on holiday
- Where you went last year
- What it was like
- Your plans for next year

This task is basically a writing frame which if followed to the letter is likely to produce a formulaic account. The use of "must" in the rubric means that candidates who fail to address all the points will be penalised.

Task 2

Write a letter to your German penfriend about holidays. You may include any of the following details:

- Why your local area is good for tourists
- Your best or holiday ever
- Your ideal holiday destination
- Your plans for next year
- Why holidays are important
- Why you would like to visit Germany

This task gives candidates a freer rein to choose what they wish to write about and although they may still follow the bullet points as a guide it is more likely that each submission from the centre will not follow the same pattern.

Communication and Content

When an examiner reads the essay for the first time it is assessed for the overall quality of what is written. If the essay communicates clearly throughout, uses at least two time frames and has evidence of opinion, then the mark is likely to start at 10 for this mark category. However, ambiguity may cause even the best essay to be placed in the 7-9 box for Communication and Content, but this will depend on the extent of the ambiguity.

It was noted again this year, that many candidates' work within a centre is very similar, occasionally virtually identical. Often, the essay is simply a rewriting of what has been encountered in a text book. This means that the work is not wholly original and that it can rarely be awarded more than 12 for this category. Other barriers to work not being placed in the top mark band are:

- Lack of variety of sentence structure and vocabulary
- Only one tense or time frame used
- Lack of coherence, most commonly because there are no adjectival phrases linking ideas
- Disjointed work such as an interview or a diary (only the very best of this type of essay will fulfil the requirements of the top mark band)
- Misuse of dictionary
- Subordinate clauses used inappropriately, e.g. *Ich mag Deutsch, obwohl es Spaß macht* – possible but unlikely!

A piece of work which is coherent and pleasant to read and leaves the reader with a high feel-good factor will access the top mark band and may even score full marks if it is clear that it is truly original work.

Examiners commented this year again that for many candidates this tends to be an exercise in memory. Where memory fails, words are omitted, split up wrongly or presented in the wrong order. However, many candidates produce excellent and coherent accounts.

Knowledge and application of language

Marks are awarded here irrespective of accuracy. The most common structures attempted are:

- Varied verb forms and tenses including modal verbs in the present and past tense. Few examples of the pluperfect are encountered.
- Varied syntax including coordination, subordination, subordinate clause first, inversion, time manner place.
- Subordination usually with *weil* and *obwohl* but also with e.g. *als*, *wenn*, *damit*, *wo*, *sobald*.
- Infinitive clauses usually with *um/zu* but also after verbs such as *beschließen*, *vorhaben*, *hoffen*.

It should be noted however that an essay which is simply a string of sentences with endless subordinate clauses is not necessarily the best. Variety is the key to success.

Accuracy

The mark bands here are narrow and apply to the range of ability. A mark of 1 is rare and reserved for very short pieces of work or work which shows little more than an ability to write some isolated words in German. Similarly a mark of 5 is reserved for virtually perfect work which includes a wide range of structures. It must be noted that work which does not include more ambitious structures cannot be awarded 4 or 5.

Grade Boundaries

Much work has taken place on the comparability of the writing units for French, German and Spanish. The senior examiners have worked closely together to ensure their application of the common 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 writing controlled assessment.

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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