

Examiners' Report/  
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2014

Pearson Edexcel GCSE  
in German (5GN04/01)  
Paper 1: Writing in German

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**GCSE German**  
**Unit 4 Writing in German**  
**Examiner Report**

**Controlled conditions**

During the final one-hour session for writing up each unit, candidates should have access to the task, a dictionary and the CA4 note sheet. These sheets which are intended as an aide-memoire are not universally used, but when they are they can eliminate spelling errors in difficult words and ensure that interesting vocabulary is used throughout the essay. It should be noted that only 30 words may be listed and that conjugated verbs and short phrases are allowed. There should be no use of codes.

**Task setting**

Most centres are now aware that the rubric for a task is best worded as "You could mention..." rather than "You must mention ..." since the latter can prevent candidates accessing the whole mark range if a point is omitted.

It is crucial that the tasks set reflect the ability of candidates within a centre. Some complex tasks such as a film review are often not best suited to less able candidates, whilst some straightforward tasks such as a description of school life or a description of family and friends can hold back better candidates from showing off their best German. In such cases, work tends to be pedestrian and repetitive.

The most common tasks this year were based on the following topic areas:

- School and/or Work Experience
- Holidays
- My Home Area
- Healthy Lifestyle
- Media and Technology

More interesting tasks which allowed candidates a free rein included:

- An alternative guide to being healthy
- A visit to the Olympic Games
- A critical reflection on a foreign country
- Sind Sprachen nützlich?*

Where such tasks were set for able candidates, the resulting work included more individual opinion and thought and led to some creative and original work which was a real pleasure to read.

When tasks are a title in English or German this should not be merely the topic or sub-topic area. For example, a suitable title for the topic area

Travel and Tourism might be "My best holiday ever". Most centres follow the pattern set out in the Edexcel set tasks available on the website which include general instructions for the task and a set of bullet points. These points should be carefully selected. Sometimes, unrelated bullet points can lead to disjointed work.

Tasks which are less suitable are those which simply prompt candidates to write up material learned in lessons without giving them an opportunity to explore the language and manipulate what has been learned. These include tasks which, for example, ask them to describe a holiday this year, last year and in the future. This can be little more than a grammatical exercise, more suitable to the preparation process rather than the final result.

### **Candidate work**

Most candidates submitted two essays of around 200 words each. Very few weaker candidates were given the opportunity of making up a task with two shorter tasks of about 50 words each although this might well have helped them to achieve a better mark. Excessively long work tended to be self-penalising and the work became repetitive in content as well as structure. Length does not directly correlate to higher marks: the carefully crafted essay of around 200 words normally scores higher overall.

Candidates should be reminded that the essay must be relevant to the task. A small proportion of candidates started their essay with an often irrelevant personal introduction irrespective of the precise nature of the task.

### **Communication and Content**

The best work was the candidate's own attempt to produce an original account. In some centres candidates produced very similar work, often with the use of a writing frame. The lack of originality meant that such candidates rarely accessed the top 13-15 band for Communication and Content. There was much evidence to suggest that candidates had learned whole pieces or long paragraphs off by heart, often with disastrous results. Such essays frequently started out confidently, but degenerated into muddling and confusing language towards the end with important words or whole sections of sentences omitted. Occasionally, candidates misread their own handwriting on the CA4 sheet. This impacted on the overall mark in this category.

Essays which are linked clearly with plenty of adverbial expression and a clear flow score highest for Communication and Content. Good linking words and expressions include: *außerdem, in dieser Hinsicht, manchmal, einerseits/andererseits, trotzdem*, as well as many adverbial expressions of time. Many candidates are also well trained in the use of sentence stems such as *Ein großer Vorteil davon ist, dass ...*, *Wenn ich älter bin, ...* and *Ich bin der Ansicht, dass, ...*.

Examiners noted this year that opinion and justification were usually expressed well and that even the weakest candidates managed to write

something along the lines of *Es war gut*. The use of *meiner Meinung nach* is widespread but only occasionally used correctly. Candidates should be warned about giving confusing messages in their writing. In the sentence *Ich liebe Deutsch, obwohl der Lehrer nett und freundlich ist*, the meaning is not clear although the sentence is grammatically accurate.

The biggest barrier to a good mark for this criteria was ambiguity. This may have been as simple as a wrong word such as *bekommen* rather than *werden*, or a transliteration from English such as *Wenn es regnet, meine Eltern tropfen mich in die Schule* (sic.), or a confusion of adverbial expression and tense such as *Letzte Woche werde ich nach London fahren*. When the lack of clarity moved from being a lapse to a genuine confusion of meaning the mark for Communication and Content suffered and was more appropriately placed in the 7-9 band even although the majority of the essay was generally comprehensible.

### **Knowledge and Application of Language**

Centres are clearly aware of the need to encourage candidates to attempt a rich variety of structures in their writing. A range of tenses most commonly included past, present and future and there was also much evidence of conditional with *wenn*. The pluperfect tense was rarely seen. Examiners noted a rise in the number of passive constructions such as *Unsere Schule wurde 1850 gegründet*. However, it was not uncommon for this to be the only correctly reproduced structure in the essay, suggesting that the sentence was pre-learned rather than a genuine manipulation of language. Modal verbs were reasonably well used in some centres but noticeably absent from others.

When subordinate clauses are attempted, they should be used with care. A whole essay following the sentence pattern main clause / subordinate clause becomes pedestrian at best even if the language is good. Short sentences and the inversion of main and subordinate clause can lift these essays to a higher level. Variety of structure is the key to success.

Other structures which were noted as being successfully used were infinitive clauses, prepositions with the genitive and less usual subordinating conjunctions such as *da*, *damit*, *sobald* and *falls*. These made a pleasing change from the ubiquitous and often over-used *weil* clauses. Some candidates even managed to use *sowohl / als auch*, *weder / noch*, *nicht nur / sondern auch* and *entweder / oder*. There were also some attempts at *je / desto*, and the comparative and superlative tended to be used well.

Whilst spelling tended to be more accurate than inaccurate in most candidates' work, only the best included good vocabulary which went beyond the pedestrian. In particular adjectives added variety to the better scripts with examples seen of *beeindruckend*, *atemberaubend*, *entsetzlich*, *einmalig* and *erstaunlich*, to name but a few.

## **Accuracy**

It would not be true to say that accuracy increases in relation to the range of structures used. Sometimes candidates have over-stretched themselves in an attempt to include every possible structure but without being able to remain accurate. Often a mark of 7 or more for Knowledge and Application of Language is matched by no more than 3 for Accuracy.

Common errors include:

- verb agreement incorrect - considerably more common this year than in previous years
- wrong auxiliary verb
- the past participle used without an auxiliary verb
- subordinate clauses without any verb at all
- frequent confusion of *hatte/hätte* and *wurde/würde*
- *der ist* rather than *es gibt*

Nevertheless, many scripts displayed a high level of accuracy, often being awarded a mark of 4 or 5 when there were enough complex structures in evidence. When this was not the case, the mark for Accuracy had to be capped at 3.

## **Administration**

In general, centres followed the administrative instructions closely. Candidates' work was presented in candidate order as it appeared on the OPTEMS and each candidate's submission was firmly secured. Ideally, this is done with a staple or a treasury tag, rather than having the work in a plastic folder.

Centres should note that it is necessary to send only one copy of each task set within the centre and these should be placed on top of the whole batch of work from the centre. Some centres prepare answer sheets with the task at the beginning. This is also popular with examiners.

Care should be taken in the collation of each candidate's work. The two pieces of writing should be presented in the same order as they are listed on the mark sheet. Authentication signatures by teacher and student are required for each candidate. Although there is no requirement to do so, it would help greatly if candidates indicated a word count for each unit at the end of the essay.

## **Conclusion**

It seems that most centres put a great deal of time and effort into the written component of the examination. The team of examiners remarked this year on the consistently high standards reached by some candidates, in some cases even exceeding what is required at GCSE level.

## **Grade Boundaries**

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>

