



Examiners' Report Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2020

Pearson Edexcel International A level
In German (WGN03)
Understanding and Spoken Response

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Format of the Test

There are two sections.

Section A includes an optional introduction of the chosen topic lasting up to one minute followed by a debate on the chosen issue in which the interviewer and candidate maintain opposing standpoints.

Section A should last for a maximum of 5 minutes in total.

Section B is a discussion of at least two further unpredictable issues taken from the General Topic Areas (GTAs) given in the specification and should last for between 6 and 8 minutes.

The test should conclude within 11-13 minutes, but section A must finish at 5 minutes.

Assessment Principles

This unit assesses communication in spoken language and critical analysis. It also covers understanding, which is in essence, a test of listening skills.

It is marked positively out of 40, by Edexcel examiners.

Spontaneity and development is marked out of 20 and assesses performance in relation to spontaneity, discourse and development during both sections of the test.

Quality of language is assessed out of 10 marks with 5 marks available for Accuracy and 5 marks for Range of lexis. Pronunciation, intonation, the structures employed, lexis and grammatical accuracy are all taken into consideration when awarding these marks.

Reading and research accounts for up to 5 marks and assesses evidence of the candidate having read German texts and sources in preparation for the debate. Candidates should refer to at least two such sources, giving the names of the sources. These marks are awarded purely for Section A.

Critical Analysis is awarded up to 5 marks. Here, examiners assess how well the candidate is able to link ideas and whether he/she gives a full evaluation of the key issues.

Centres should be aware that Pearson Edexcel publish the guidance to examiners on the website. This explains and defines the standards for spontaneity, discourse, development and other key assessment principles.

Candidates' Performances

Section A

This part of the assessment is intended to be a debate, rather than just a discussion or presentation. The teacher/examiner must take the opposing view to that of the candidate and he/she should seek to challenge what the candidate says. This will enable the candidate to use the language of debate, as required by the specification. The purpose of Section A is not simply for the candidate to show all they know about the topic as would be the case with a presentation.

When the candidate initially outlines his/her stance there is no need for it to be more than one or two sentences and it should not extend beyond the one minute allowed. Less successful candidates still tend to deliver pre-learned material at length when outlining their stance.

A close eye needs to be kept on the timing of this section of the examination as it should not exceed five minutes, starting from when the candidate begins to outline his/her stance on the chosen issue. If Section A is longer than five minutes, it erodes the time available for the discussion of the unpredictable topics in Section B which might impact on the marks awarded.

Centres and candidates clearly put careful thought into selecting the issues and there was a much wider range of topics than has been the case in previous sessions. In general, if a candidate selects an issue which they have strong views on and perhaps feel passionate about, this leads to a better debate.

There was a further increase in the number of candidates arguing in favour of a vegan lifestyle. The range of issues selected by candidates can be seen from this:

I am against self-scanning check-outs in supermarkets.

I am against vaping.

I am in favour of home schooling.

I am against surrogate pregnancies.

I believe organ donation should be compulsory.

Public transport should be free of charge.

Centres are reminded that personal opinions and anecdotal evidence cannot be considered evidence of Reading and research.

In Section A it is essential that candidates provide evidence of having read German texts in order to prepare for the debate. They may, in addition, mention audio visual sources, or provide statistics, but the Reading and research marks refer to AO2 (Understand and respond to written language) and so there must be evidence that a candidate has done this. Candidates should mention the text/ s they have read by name.

Section B

Most centres chose suitable follow on topics for section B, which allowed for a wide range of questions, an opportunity for sophisticated development,

such as the use of abstract concepts and also a wide range of lexis and structures.

However, some centres chose topics which were more suited to AS level. When selecting the unpredictable topics for discussion in Section B centres need to ensure that the topics and questions are challenging enough for A2 level. The topics from the AS specification are, of course, suitable for use in this examination, however, there needs to be evidence of progression from AS. Reproducing AS Level work leads to a poor outcome.

A2 requires students to show an ability to handle abstract concepts. If a teacher/examiner asks questions in this examination that were asked in an AS Level examination, then the evidence of progression may well be limited. This is one reason why apparently fluent and spontaneous performances are not awarded as many marks as one might expect, as they do not satisfy the highest criteria for Spontaneity and development, nor for Critical analysis.

Personal questions should be avoided as they are not challenging enough and if a candidate attempts to draw on personal experience to illustrate a point, he/she should be steered towards talking in a more general way.

The topics chosen should be unpredictable, therefore it is not acceptable for a teacher/examiner to prepare a limited number of topics with the candidates and then rotate them across the teaching group.

When selecting the topics for Section B centres must refer to the GTAs given in the specification. The IA2 General Topic Areas are Technology in the German-speaking world, Society in the German-speaking world and Ethics in the German-speaking world. If candidates are asked questions on these IA2 specific General Topic Areas which do not place the issues in the context of the German-speaking world, these candidates will be unable to access the full range of marks for Critical Analysis. It is not sufficient for the teacher/examiner to refer to the German-speaking world in the question, if it is never mentioned again in the ensuing discussion. The candidate should make reference to the German-speaking world in his/her response.

In Section B two, or possibly three, topics covered in depth leads to the best outcome.

Spontaneity and development

Spontaneity

The vast majority of performances were clearly spontaneous however, a few were not. A question and answer approach does not work well here. Instead, teacher/examiners should respond to what the candidate says, thus providing candidates with an opportunity to move away from prepared material. To access a mark of 11 or above candidates must demonstrate many examples of spontaneous responses to questions. 'Many' implies that spontaneity is a clear characteristic of the test.

Discourse

Discourse is also assessed as part of Spontaneity and development. Examiners seek evidence that both the candidate and examiner are interacting with each other, beyond a simple “one question per issue” format. When this approach was taken, it was difficult to find evidence that the discourse element of the grid had been addressed, and so marks were unlikely to be in the highest band.

Fluent discourse refers to a natural conversation within the context of an assessment. Discourse describes the exchange of opinion and information on an issue between the candidate and teacher/examiner. This means that each participant addresses the points made by the other. The teacher/examiner might, for example ask, “Why do you say that?”, “What evidence is there to support that?”, “I agree with you to some extent, but...”.

Development

Development pre-supposes that the candidate has fully understood the Question, and is then able to produce a detailed response, giving more than a single sentence reply, expanding on an idea and point of view. The ability to present two opposing points of view and the reasons for these, along with an evaluation would demonstrate excellent development.

Quality of Language (Range of lexis)

Examiners look for evidence of topic specific lexis as well as comparing what they hear to the specified list of grammatical structures. Progression from GCSE and AS level is required here; therefore, the most successful performances would feature active use of a wide range of these elements.

Quality of Language (Accuracy)

This accounts for 5 of the 40 possible marks. A mark of 5 does not constitute faultless language. Native speakers will often, but not necessarily, score 5 marks here. Non-native speakers must have access to the full marks available here, and the examiners are standardised with this fundamental principal in mind. It should be noted, that 5 out of 40 marks is a relatively small proportion. This will explain why many grammatically perfect performances do not achieve full marks overall, as they must also satisfy the criteria in other mark grids.

Reading and Research

5 marks are allocated for evidence of Reading and Research. This applies purely to Section A where candidates must cite written German sources as evidence of their reading and research.

Critical Analysis

Evidence of an ability to respond using beliefs, morals and political views beyond the realm of the more concrete topics which form the basis of AS and GCSE work is required at this level. Candidates should attempt to link ideas and to show an ability to evaluate, rather than simply providing facts.

They should, where possible, provide evidence for their views and demonstrate an ability to see both sides of an argument. The most successful candidates provided frequent examples of the ability to do this.

Advice for Future Examination Sessions

Spontaneity should be a clear characteristic of the test.

For Section A candidates must select an issue which can be debated, and not only discussed. The candidate should take a definite stance and the teacher/examiner the opposing one. Issues which cannot be debated will have an adverse effect on the marks awarded for Spontaneity and development and Critical analysis. Centres are reminded that this is a debate not a presentation.

For Section A candidates must provide evidence of having read written German source materials. They should mention target language newspaper/magazine articles and/or other written materials preferably by name. They should refer to a minimum of two such sources.

Section A should not exceed 5 minutes.

In Section B the issues discussed should only come from the list of General Topic Areas. There should be a discussion of at least two topics, but two topics is quite sufficient, as this will probably lead to greater depth. The topics selected should be appropriate to A2 level and therefore challenging in their content.

If the issue being discussed in Section B is part of the GTA Society in the German-speaking world, for example 'equality', there must be reference to a country where German is spoken.

If the issue being discussed in Section B is part of the GTA Technology in the German-speaking world, for example 'technological innovations', there must be reference to a country where German is spoken.

If the issue being discussed in Section B is part of the GTA Ethics in the German-speaking world, for example 'genetic modification', there must be reference to a country where German is spoken.

The timing for the assessment overall is 11-13 minutes. It is perfectly acceptable for the assessment to be closer to 11 minutes than 13. There is no merit in assessments exceeding 13 minutes, as the examiner stops listening at the 13-minute point.

Summary

Comments on each individual candidate's performance are available on the OR3 mark sheet which is returned to centres and centres are advised to pay close attention to these.

The examiners marking on the unit would like to thank centres for the effort they put in to ensure the assessments run smoothly for their candidates and to allow them to reach their full potential. The hard work that goes into preparing candidates for examinations is also appreciated and we seek to reward this whenever possible.

Grade Boundaries

Much work has taken place on the comparability of the speaking units for French, German and Spanish. The senior examiners continue to work closely together to ensure their application of the common marking guidelines is consistently applied across the three languages.