

Examiners' Report /
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2012

International GCSE German (4GN0)
Paper 03

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Examiner Report

A significant proportion of candidates who entered for this specification in this summer's session took the optional speaking component. Examiners were pleased to listen to some very proficient speaking tests sympathetically conducted displaying a pleasing standard of candidate performance.

Candidates are expected to participate in 3 conversations on 3 different topic areas, i.e. on three of the topic areas from the five topic areas detailed in the specification. However, it is not appropriate for the teacher examiner conducting the test to select two different subtopics from the same topic area. Each conversation must be based on a totally different topic area.

It is important that the correct timing is adhered to in the exam and the following should be remembered:

The candidate's presentation on the photo/picture must be for a maximum of one minute. The conversation must relate to the picture but may also include some questions prompted by the picture that the candidate has chosen.

The first conversation, following on from the presentation, should last for 3 minutes maximum. For conversations 2 and 3 the maximum time is also time 3 minutes and examiners will stop assessing after this time.

Just as in a written exam these timings are a requirement. If the conversations are slightly short, this is acceptable but to go beyond the time allowed infringes the requirements.

Section A: Presentation and discussion based on a single picture.

For this part of the examination the candidates choose a single picture which they then introduce with a presentation lasting up to one minute. This is followed by a discussion based on the picture lasting up to a further three minutes. The picture chosen must be linked to one of the topics in the specification, and this topic may then not be used for the second and third conversations.

The content of the chosen picture is very important. Although the picture shouldn't be too busy, certainly a picture with quite a lot going on is preferable to one where there are maybe just a couple of figures in a snow scene (chosen to fit in with Home and Abroad).

The reason for this is that the conversation must be based on the picture, not on the topic. Therefore, taking the example of the picture above, the examiner should then not ask the candidate about his or her holidays or where they like to go on holiday. This is the wrong technique. Examiners would need to ask what these two people are doing here. Maybe there is a great deal of snow and therefore the teacher examiner could ask how the two people are feeling? What are they going to be doing later? Indeed, some inference questions should be attempted to draw out ideas from the candidates. It was quite common this year to find that examiners moved away from the picture immediately the candidate had finished the presentation with inappropriate questions simply linked to the topic area.

The quality of the ensuing conversation often reflected how appropriate the choice of picture had been. Pictures containing lots of different images stimulated better discussion. A photograph of a student and their friend in front of a wall or in a field understandably gave the examiners little to go on and, in particular, affected the performance of weaker candidates who require more prompting. Pictures are also supposed to reflect the students interests. Occasionally centres had clearly prepared the whole class on one Topic Area and all the pictures were based on this.

Students who attained high marks for Section A gave well-prepared presentations and were able to discuss/hypothesise about events which may have happened before and after the picture had been taken, as well as the thoughts and feelings of other people in the picture.

Pictures chosen may be personal photographs, even drawings, photos downloaded from the Internet or taken from magazines. Pictures from text books which are subject to copyright restrictions should be avoided.

The most common topics chosen were *Education and Employment*, *House, Home and Daily Routine* and *Home and Abroad*.

Lots of photographs were used from holidays as well as in classrooms or in town centres. The best ones had clearly been very well prepared by the candidate and were able to discuss in detail other aspects of the picture. Surprisingly a small number of candidates gave the impression that they had never seen the picture before!

Teacher examiners should ensure their candidates have the opportunity to fulfil the requirements of the assessment criteria, such as express and justify opinions, give extended responses to a wide range of question types, and use an appropriately wide variety of structures and lexis, including a full

range of tenses. Such performances would allow candidates access to the full range of marks. Often, very good candidates were not able to access the full mark range as they had not been given the opportunity to use a range of tenses.

Centres are reminded of the need to send the candidate's picture to the examiner, along with the oral cover sheet and the recording. Centres should also be sure to copy the new mark scheme which is on two pages. Many centres either used the old one or only copied the first section of the new scheme.

Examiners often asked questions which had already been answered by the presentation, or in a previous answer. Some weaker or nervous candidates were very confused by this, as they presumed that they had misunderstood the question, as they knew that they had already answered it. They then could only give a somewhat flustered response, which could impact on the spontaneity mark.

Section B: Two conversations

In this section, candidates are required to take part in conversations with the teacher examiner on two separate conversation topics chosen by the teacher examiner.

Centres are advised to read page 8 of the specification which states explicitly that the teacher examiner should choose the topics discussed in conversations 2 and 3, not the candidate. The candidates should not know in advance of the test which topics they are going to be asked questions on in conversations 2 and 3.

The transition between the conversation topics should be made plain to help both the candidate recognise that the conversation is moving on and the examiner identifies the two discrete topic areas being discussed.

In both Conversations 2 and 3, candidates often lost marks in the Knowledge and Application of Language section as their responses failed to cover a sufficiently wide enough range of tenses, more complex grammatical structures and vocabulary. Better questioning on the part of the examiner could have addressed this, particularly the elicitation of various tenses. Weaker candidates really needed more help through questioning on Topic Areas C and D. Too often student responses on these topic areas became present tense lists e.g. Topic Area C was a monologue of rooms in the house, items eaten for the three meal times whilst Area D became a list of modal verbs stating very simple things one can do to help the environment (one can recycle or go by bike etc), followed by an identical list stating how students could help the environment at school and home. Also, a similar outcome was apparent with regard to the question of why modern media is useful or not. Students were not sufficiently prepared to answer these questions on more than a superficial level and were not asked questions perhaps comparing current usage to usage when they or their parents were younger or on the changes in technology in order to demonstrate their understanding of past or future tenses. This also affected their mark for

Content. Some candidates however produced very good responses talking about current affairs/newspaper articles which they had read or had been of recent interest. Similarly, others were able to discuss the latest book they had read or film they had seen, either on the internet or at the cinema, another point which raised further comparison and discussion.

Examiners should possibly consider the ability of their students before asking questions which are too testing, or on the other hand, they should remember to stretch the better candidates as fully as possible.

In a few centres, clear distinctions between Topic Areas for the different sections/conversations were not made apparent.

Examiners should again adhere to the timings laid down in the specification, namely a maximum of 3 minutes for each conversation topic which in total makes a total of 6 minutes for this section. In general, longer conversations were self-penalising as candidates began to struggle to find things to say and incidence of error increased. Similarly, conversations which were well under 3 minutes couldn't show their full potential. There is a trend to spend too long on Section A of the test and then to cut Section C short. This needs to be avoided.

Examiners should think about the way in which questions are constructed in order to allow the candidate to show what he or she can do. The types of questions to avoid are so called closed questions or a question giving an option. Here are a couple of examples:

Verstehst du dich mit deiner Schwester?

This is a poor question because the candidate can simply respond with *ja* or *nein*. It can simply be improved by putting *wie* in front.

Wie verstehst du dich mit deiner Schwester?

Weaker candidates may simply say *nicht gut*, but they do have the opportunity to develop.

Wohnst du lieber in der Stadt oder auf dem Lande?

This is also a poor question as the candidate just merely needs to lift the answer. Better would be:

Wo wohnst du lieber?

Teacher examiners are to be commended on their sympathetic and encouraging conduct of the speaking tests. Most were clearly attempting to put candidates at their ease and trying to get them to produce their best. There were many clear examples of an obvious respectful and positive relationship between the candidate and teacher-examiner.

Centre administration for the speaking tests was generally good, although several centres forgot to enclose the whole of the mark sheet or used the one from the old specification. A few centres forgot to send the candidates' pictures to the examiner.

The quality of the recordings remains variable. In some instances candidates were virtually inaudible due to either extraneous noise or poor quality recording equipment.

Examiners are happy to accept candidates' speaking tests cassette although CDs are much more preferable.

Orals recorded in audio file or mp3 formats are also acceptable, although it would be appreciated if they were checked for viruses.

Many thanks to all centres for the work undertaken to make this year's International GCSE German speaking tests successful.

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