

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2013

International GCSE German (4GN0)
Paper 3 Speaking

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General Comments

A large proportion of those students entering the International GCSE in German in 2013 entered for the extra qualification of speaking. In the vast majority of cases students were able to express themselves well in German producing some pleasing performances.

From 2014 the International GCSE and the Edexcel Certificate for state schools will include the speaking test as part of the qualification and so will no longer be a voluntary element. A new mark sheet will replace the one used this year and the mark scheme itself will also change slightly.

Students are expected to participate in 3 conversations on 3 different topic areas. These three topic areas should be chosen from the five areas detailed in the specification. The chosen topic areas, of which only that in Section A should be known by the candidate in advance, should be written on the mark sheet and also recorded at the start of each section. It is not appropriate for the teacher examiner to choose two sub topics from within the same topic area. Each conversation should be based clearly on a different topic area.

Just as in a written examination, the timing of this test should be adhered to. The specification states, for example, that the two conversations in Sections B and C should be up to 3 minutes. It is therefore not appropriate to have a conversation lasting 4 or 5 minutes. It is also not appropriate to have one conversation lasting 4 minutes and the other 2 minutes.

Teacher examiners should avoid using the suggested questions as a prescribed list. This tends to produce a rather stilted conversation. Questions should be constructed around the answers given to the previous question, developing responses or asking for further details. Under no circumstances should the candidate have prior knowledge to any of the questions throughout the whole test.

When a test is too long, the examiner will not listen beyond the required length of each part of the test. Tests which are too short will tend to be self penalising.

Section A

Presentation and discussion based on a single picture.

For this part of the examination the students 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 chosen for Sections B and C.

The first conversation was generally done well. Students appeared to be settled by the fact that the first minute of their oral could be based on familiar language which they could prepare and learn.

There were a range of pictures and the element of free choice brought an impressive level of variety and creativity that was often a pleasure to listen to. Examples of good pictures included busy street scenes, holiday pictures with interesting backgrounds and team photos after sporting successes. Less successful pictures included close up pictures of friends' faces, empty scenes with no people present and pictures of a house. Most teachers asked imaginative and open questions based on the chosen picture for part or all of conversation A.

The quality of the following conversation was often reflected very much by the choice of picture. Busier pictures generally initiated better discussion. The very best students had chosen photographs/pictures that related to their interests and answered follow-up questions confidently. Some briefly narrated amusing anecdotes about what happened at the weekend and justified their opinions in detail. They used an appropriately wide range of structures without being overly ambitious or sounding grandiloquent. Tenses were generally well-known, however, many students made mistakes with word order, particularly when using subordinate clauses.

There were a small number of examples of poor responses resulting from a picture with little to offer or inappropriate questioning. One pupil chose a picture of a cricket match and proceeded to talk about his hobbies in general. The examiner then asked what he liked to do apart from sport and did not refer to the picture at all during conversation A.

The types of questions appropriate for this part of the test can be found in the guidelines to be found on the Edexcel website.

The types of questions can be divided into three groups:

The first few questions should be linked directly to the picture, for instance discussing individual people or events, the second section of questions would move slightly away from the picture itself asking about personal experiences possibly and the third section may well develop the chosen topic further. The examiner should certainly never move straight away from the picture after the candidate's presentation and not referring to it again.

It is also important, in order to access the higher bands for range of language, to vary the questions. Sometimes students are asked to describe everyone on a picture. It is sufficient to do this once. Examiners should also attempt to increase the level of difficulty of the questions as the test develops.

Centres are reminded that some photographs on the Internet, in books or in magazines may be subject to copyright. It is therefore advised that personal photographs or pictures may well be a better choice.

Centres are also reminded that the students' pictures should be sent to the examiner along with the oral cover sheet and the recording.

The new mark sheets from 2014 are on one side, but a significant number of centres this year forgot to copy the second side of the old mark sheets. This is perhaps a good point to remind centres that the new mark sheet must be used from 2014.

For the final time in 2014 recordings may be sent on cassettes. In fact there were only a few centres this year still using cassettes. If this is the case, examiners are requested to make sure that the recordings are audible. Clearly the assessment becomes far more difficult when it is almost impossible to hear what the candidate is saying. Most centres used CDs and recordings on a memory stick are also becoming more popular. It would be appreciated if only new memory sticks are used to avoid the possibility of viruses. Markers do usually scan memory sticks and CDs, but one computer was affected this year by a virus from a memory stick.

Sections B and C

Two further conversations.

In these sections students are required to take part in two conversations with the teacher examiner on two separate topics chosen by the teacher examiner. They must be different from the topic chosen in Section A and must never be known by the candidate in advance.

The transition between the conversation topics should be made plain to help both the candidate recognise that the conversation is moving on and also the marker to identify the two topics being discussed.

Centres should avoid asking all students questions on the same two topics and also avoid asking each candidate the same questions. The suggested questions online given to help teachers are not prescriptive and should not be used as a set list.

Conversations B and C produced some very interesting and varied responses. The general standard of examining was very good and teachers were patient, supportive and encouraging. Most examiners did in fact react to their pupils rather than having a set list of questions that they worked through systematically. Some teacher examiners did, however, finish off students' sentences. For example one teacher examiner added "that was fun wasn't it?" or "you enjoyed that didn't you?". Some teacher examiners also cut in unnecessarily. For example when students were just about to justify an opinion or add more relevant details. Good examiners used open questions, reacted to their students' responses and elicited the required tenses in each conversation. Poor questions included something like "have you seen Skyfall?" to which the pupil answered "no"!

Teacher examiners need to be as well prepared for this test as the students. On a significant number of occasions tests included large silences where the examiner was searching for a question. This can be rather unnerving for the students. The best examiners, who will also get the best results from their students, will have thought of several questions on the students' pictures, and then prepared appropriate questions for the other two topics. They will also react to the students' responses and encourage students to produce their best German.

Teacher examiners should remember that all three conversations are marked individually and therefore all require a range of tenses to achieve the highest marks (and within the allowed timings).

Some centres took more time on one conversation and then much less than the three minutes on another. The timings of each conversation should be carefully adhered to.

There were some instances where able students were not stretched appropriately, for example, questions were mostly in the present tense or focused on describing things rather than asking for opinions, past or future events. Conversely in a few centres a handful of pupils had prepared overly elaborate and colourful language but their memory failed them and as such they produced a lot of inaccuracies and also lost marks in the 'spontaneity and fluency' category due to excessive hesitation. These students may have received slightly better marks if they had been a little less ambitious with their choice of language. The speaking exam is not a memory test, rather it is an opportunity to show that students can hold a reasonable conversation in German on the set topics.

The most common topics were 'Education and Employment,' 'Social Activities' and 'House, Home and Daily Routine.' Topic area D (the Modern World and the Environment) was reserved mostly for the stronger students. Health and Work Experience/Careers seemed to be the least popular.

The quality of recordings was very good and most teachers completed paperwork correctly. Edexcel would like to thank you for this.

Finally all markers would like to express their thanks for the hard work undertaken by both the students and the teacher examiners. There were very few administrative issues this year and the International GCSE speaking tests seem to have been very successful.

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>

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