

Examiners' Report/ Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2016

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE
in German (4GN0/03)
Pearson Edexcel Certificate
in German (KSP0/03)

Paper 3: Speaking

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International GCSE/ Edexcel Certificate German

Paper 3 Speaking

Examiners' Report

General Comments

The number of candidates entering for this qualification remains healthy, which is very pleasing considering the continuing unfortunate decline in the teaching of German over the last few years, especially in the United Kingdom.

Although the vast majority of centres used the correct mark sheets to accompany the oral tests, a few were still using the old form which has long since been withdrawn. The contents of the exam have changed significantly and this old form is not fit for purpose. All mark sheets need to be signed by the candidate and the teacher. Occasionally this did not happen and a signature had to be requested by the Pearson Edexcel examiner; this can lead to a delay in the marking of the tests.

Candidates are expected to participate in three conversations on three different topic areas, one for Section A and two for Section B. These three topic areas should be chosen from the five areas detailed in the specification and each topic area may only be covered once. If a topic area is repeated, the second one will receive no marks.

All tests were submitted either on a CD or USB memory stick. No cassettes were received this year. In most cases there were no problems, although a number of the recordings were rather faint or had quite a lot of noise in the background. It is accepted that some of this is unavoidable, such as traffic noise, but it would certainly be helpful if the microphone were to be placed closer to the candidate than the examiner. In a few cases markers discovered that the CD/USB stick was blank or that some of the recordings would not play. It would be useful if centres could check the recordings before sending them away as this can cause a significant delay in the marking process.

Most CDs and memory sticks were correctly labelled with permanent marker, but some still arrived with no markings and no protective case.

Just as in a written examination, the timing of the test is very important. The specification states the following:

The presentation should be up to one minute.

The discussion on the picture should be up to three minutes.

Each of the conversations should be up to three minutes.

In a written examination, candidates would not be given a few extra minutes beyond the set time. This applies in just the same way with an oral examination. For that reason, markers will stop listening and marking after the 1 minute / 3 minutes have elapsed.

Of course tests which are too short are unlikely to contain the full range of structures, vocabulary and ideas expected. Examiners should try to ensure that the discussion and the conversations are all between 2 minutes 40 seconds and 3 minutes in length.

It is not appropriate to time the two conversations together. The two conversations should be of similar length, not one of about 4 minutes and one of 2. This would result in one containing 1 minute of material which would not count in the assessment, and the second would not contain enough material.

Most examiners did time the tests correctly. However, discussions on the picture of less than 1 minute were noticed, and one candidate was grilled in one of the conversations for just under 12 minutes! This is of course very unfair on the candidate.

Please note that the timing of each section begins when the candidate begins to speak.

Examiners should not use the suggested questions as a prescribed list. These questions are there to give the examiner some ideas. Questions should follow on from what the candidate has previously said to produce an actual conversation. Sometimes markers have the impression that examiners are not listening to the candidate's answers.

Candidates should never have prior knowledge of any of the questions in the test and should not know which of the two topics will be tested in Section B. One centre with a large number of candidates did not vary the topics in Section B, avoiding Topic D totally, and the questions asked to all candidates were practically the same. Answers often seemed to have been pre learned. This does not enter into the spirit of this examination.

Although the vast majority of examiners had clearly prepared carefully, some examiners again this year gave the impression of not being well prepared for the tests. This applies often in centres where German is not taught and someone has been brought in to conduct tests, often for native speakers. A lot of the issues already highlighted in the report applied, and there were often some difficult silences whilst the examiner tried to think of another question. In a number of cases the examiner appeared not to know the candidate and also to have seen the picture for the first time as the examination began; this is very unfair on the candidates being assessed.

Examiners should avoid closed questions which elicit one word answers from candidates and they should also refrain from asking several questions at once, i.e. can you tell me about your town, what you like to do there and what you did last weekend? This confuses candidates. Examiners should also refrain from providing vocabulary for candidates, correcting them or answering for them.

On some occasions, the examiner was not familiar with the format of the examination and conducted the test incorrectly. Good examiners

sympathetically re-phrased questions for candidates and varied the type of question that they were asking. They also interrupted if a candidate started to recite a pre-learned monologue. It is important for candidates to use a range of tenses and good examiners elicited past, present and future tenses in both sections of the exam.

Section A

In the first part of the examination the candidates choose a single picture which they then introduce as a presentation, without interruption from the examiner. This is followed by a discussion based on the picture lasting up to 3 minutes. The picture chosen must be linked to one of the 5 topic areas in the specification, and this topic area may not be chosen again in Section B.

The first important choice the candidate makes is to select a picture. It is very important that the picture is quite busy and offers plenty of scope for discussion. Good examples would be a busy street scene or a beach for Topic Area A, or a busy school playground for Topic Area B.

Less appropriate might be a picture of a brother or sister on a plain background for Topic Area C, or a picture of a mobile phone for Topic Area D.

Some centres were far better than others at suggesting the type of picture that would be appropriate for the exam. A scene of a snowy landscape with nothing but distant trees and mountains is very limiting. In general though, the pictures were quite well chosen and offered enough for the examiner to talk about for 3 minutes.

There were fewer examples of the same topic area being used for more than one section of the examination, although there were some incidences where irrelevant questions were asked. Topic area D was the least popular and topic area A remained a popular choice for section A.

Candidates chose a range of interesting pictures. The best pictures had enough of interest to talk about, whilst pictures of empty fields or photos of a friend were very difficult to exploit. The best candidates had clearly used a dictionary to look up the appropriate German words and they had clearly given thought to what the people in their picture were doing and how they were feeling.

Section A resulted in some extremely imaginative and creative responses. Centres must make sure that the picture is fully relevant to the chosen topic area. Some images could potentially fit into several topic areas and it is important to focus the conversation and material on one topic area only. Indeed, marks were often lost because the questions asked were from a different topic area. As an example, it is not appropriate to ask about brothers and sisters and other members of the family in detail if the picture is of a family holiday.

Examiners have the responsibility of assuring that the correct technique is applied to the conduct of the examination. The candidate must not be allowed to speak for longer than 1 minute for the presentation. This may be shorter, but not significantly so. The candidate is allowed to learn the presentation but it should be the candidate's own work and not corrected in advance by a teacher.

The discussion must be organised into a three stage development of questioning as follows:

- a) Questions based directly on the picture.
- b) Questions based indirectly on the picture.
- c) Questions about the general Topic Area.

Many examiners do not ask questions directly or even indirectly on the picture and simply move on to the general topic area. This is not acceptable examining technique.

Let us imagine a picture of a town. Questions may be something like the following:

Was siehst du auf diesem Bild?

Beschreibe die Frau rechts vor der Bäckerei!! Was siehst du hier links?

b) Was wird wohl dieser Mann nach dem Einkaufen machen?

Was hat das Mädchen hier heute gemacht, bevor sie in die Stadt gekommen ist?

Wohin geht vielleicht diese Familie rechts?

c) Was machst du gern in der Stadt?

Wie könnte man deine Stadt verbessern?

Was für Einrichtungen braucht eine erfolgreiche Stadt?

A small number of candidates did no presentation, and a number were asked no questions at all after the presentation. This resulted in a much reduced mark.

All five Topic Areas were well represented in the pictures, although the impression is that Topic Area A was probably the most popular. Topic D was significantly more popular this year.

Centres are reminded that the candidates' pictures should be sent to the marker along with the oral mark sheets and the recordings. Where this is not possible a note describing the picture must be included. Examiners require an understanding of what the candidate and the examiner can see.

Section B

In this section the candidates are required to take part in two conversations of equal length on two further Topic Areas from the specification chosen by the examiner. They must be different from the Topic Area chosen in Section A and must never be known by the candidate in advance.

The examiner should announce the start of the Topic Area and again before the second conversation.

A small number of examiners were very inflexible with the questions they asked and more or less asked every candidate exactly the same questions regardless of their responses. There was no reaction to language the candidates had produced and no use of follow-up questions. A small number of examiners used almost entirely present tense which meant that the candidates relied on their own initiative to mention the past and future. If no tenses are used, even if the candidate is very capable, the mark for range of language will be reduced. Another examiner regularly waited until the very end before using the future which meant that a number of the candidates had gone over the cut-off point of 3 minutes before the future was used.

However, Section B was generally successful and there were some outstanding examples of spontaneous and fluent German. The rapport between student and examiner was very important in this section of the examination and less able candidates who were examined by their class teacher tended to perform better than pupils of similar ability who were examined by an examiner who did not know them (often a native speaker invited specially to conduct the orals).

Asking open questions of the appropriate level, following up candidates' answers and re-phrasing sympathetically were examples of good practice. A number of examiners appeared to time Section B as a whole and this led to a number of B2 conversations being too short. Both conversations should be of a similar length.

Failure to use a range of tenses and insufficient length of either conversation were the main causes of lost marks for the most able candidates.

All the Topic Areas were covered by most but not all centres as long as there were enough candidates, although Topic Area D was rarely used by a couple of centres. Most examiners and candidates seemed to have prepared the areas well and the questions may have been rehearsed but none of the conversations appeared over-practised or scripted. There was the inevitable situation where a candidate had obviously prepared a long spiel to a predictable question. Where this seemed to go on too long most examiners were aware of the problem and diplomatically interrupted with a supplementary or a reaction to what was being said, so stopping the flow. This year there were occasions where some examiners noticeably strayed a little far in some questions from the selected topic area – e.g.

discussing the pros and cons of their home town in Topic Area C and asked too much about food and drink in Topic Area E when talking about Health– but mostly they reverted to the original area.

In the Education and Employment Topic B the questions were often fairly simple and more able candidates could have been stretched further. A lot of the questions required fairly basic responses and led to fairly able students listing subjects or giving simple opinions.

Insufficient time was sometimes spent on a conversation area. Sometimes the stop watch was started before the teacher had asked the question which put timings out by up to 10 seconds. Often if a conversation went on for longer than necessary, examiners compensated in the second conversation. Another problem with longer conversations was that the more stretching questions tended to come towards the end, and therefore often after the three minutes. For the most able students some of the straightforward questions could be missed out in favour of the more advanced questions.

The accuracy of these exams was generally impressive. There were some common errors (Ich habe gegangen, or sending a verb to the end and then forgetting about it), mostly to be expected at GCSE level, but the level of spoken German was generally very high.

Some examiners asked two or three questions at once, which confused candidates, while other examiners talked too much about themselves. In some cases, this part of the test sounded more like an interrogation, with questions not related to each other and no rephrasing of the question, if candidates didn't understand.

One examiner repeatedly prevented the candidates from continuing if they had made a mistake, which caused a total collapse in their performance. Incorrect vocabulary was regularly challenged and if the candidate could not self-correct, the examiner would show surprise and say "du weißt nicht"!

Particularly common was "gegangen" rather than "gefahren". The response from the examiner was: "du bist nach Spanien gegangen, bist du dann zu Fuß gegangen?" A number of the candidates were clearly close to tears and completely thrown by this. The same examiner regularly prevented students from using their own language to expand by interrupting and throwing in additional unnecessary and really challenging questions.

It should be remembered that the candidate is under a lot of pressure and should always be treated with cotton wool. Clearly most examiners understand this, but those who have an unsympathetic examiner are disadvantaged, often considerably. Candidates are also often thrown by an examiner who doesn't appear to be listening and does not develop the conversation.

Another examiner was so hesitant with the questions that it regularly took 15-20 seconds to deliver each question, and the candidates had little

opportunity to produce a wide range of language in their 3 minutes. Weak candidates suffered as the examiner didn't rephrase or simplify questions if the students couldn't answer.

Some examiners seemed to think that they needed to cover every sub-topic, which meant that candidate replies weren't followed up and remained superficial.

As was the case last year very few recordings in Section B were too long, but a significant number were too short, in some cases shorter than two minutes, which meant that candidates could not score highly. Even if a candidate is extremely good and speaks quickly, the section should not be shortened.

The vast majority of examiners and candidates performed very well and overall the examination this year has once again been very successful.

All markers would like to express their thanks for the hard work undertaken by both candidates and examiners.

Grade Boundaries

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