
GCSE

GERMAN

8668/SF Speaking Foundation tier
Report on the Examination

8668
June 2018

Version: 1.0

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General Comments

Any new qualification is always viewed with some apprehension by teachers. It is therefore pleasing to report that the format of the new GCSE German speaking test appeared to work well and allowed all students to demonstrate a level of oral proficiency that was commensurate with their ability.

Without doubt, the new-style test encouraged a more authentic approach to speaking compared with the scripted learning and regurgitation that characterised the era of controlled assessment.

The following report aims to give a comprehensive overview of the 2018 GCSE German speaking test, both in terms of teacher conduct and student performance. It will highlight best practice as well as signposting areas for improvement for the 2019 and subsequent tests. The content of this report has been informed by senior examiners listening to a wide sample of student performance and is therefore representative of the entry cohort as a whole.

Tier of Entry

The vast majority of Foundation tier students were appropriately entered at the correct tier. Centres are advised to make judicious entry decisions that will allow students to perform to their potential.

Quality of Recording

For such a test, it is imperative that centres provide a suitable venue and use a quality recording device. Whereas this was usually the case, there were some cases where external background noise and/or poor quality recordings affected the audibility of what the students said. In a minority of cases, centres were requested to send replacement recordings for corrupt audio files.

Teacher Conduct

Test Routine Procedures

It is pleasing to note that most teachers conducted the tests in a highly professional way, adhering closely to the guidelines laid out in the Instructions for the Conduct of Examinations. This allowed the smooth running of tests, something which puts the student at ease and helps the marker at a later stage.

The prescribed combination of Role-play, Photo card and General Conversation in the sequencing chart was adhered to by the vast majority of teachers. Unfortunately, there were a small number of instances when the wrong combination was used, resulting in the theme of the Photo card being duplicated in the General Conversation. In such cases, the maximum mark for Communication that can be awarded is 5 out of a possible 10.

Unfortunately, a significant number of teachers did not follow the speaking test procedures as stipulated in the *Instructions for the conduct of the examinations*. Above all, the introduction to each new candidate must include the role-play number, photo card letter and nominated General Conversation theme.

Once the test has begun, procedural matters should be announced succinctly in the target language. For example, *Und jetzt das Rollenspiel Nummer (3)*. Following requests from centres, a standardised approach to this will be included in the 2019 *Instructions for the conduct of the examinations*.

It is particularly important to announce a change of theme during the General Conversation.

Timings

Most students completed the Photo card task comfortably within the time limit at both tiers. At Foundation tier, where the time limit is two minutes, there were some cases where not all five questions were asked within the time allowed. This was occasionally due to a very slow delivery by the student but more often the result of an overlong and repetitive type of answer to the first question eliciting a description of the photo.

At both tiers, most General Conversations adhered to the minimum and maximum timings. Very few failed to reach the minimum time; however, there were some occasions when coverage of the second theme did not meet the minimum time requirement. This impacted on the mark awarded for Communication. Centres are advised to note that the timing of the second General Conversation theme starts immediately the first question on that theme is asked. All time used up to this point is allocated to coverage of the first theme. Centres are reminded that anything said by the student beyond the maximum time limit is disregarded for assessment.

Conducting the Role-play Task

In the role-play, the prescribed role in the Teacher's booklet was adhered to by most teachers. In the minority of cases where teachers re-worded the script, any subsequent response by the candidate was invalidated. Centres are reminded that the target language phrases provided can only be changed if a student's response makes them inappropriate.

In the case of two-part questions, often ones requiring an opinion and reason, it is good practice to elicit the two elements separately, and for the unprepared task in particular, to ensure the task is fully completed. This was not done enough by teachers across the tiers.

Conducting the Photo Card Task

Most teachers had reviewed the questions before testing and had identified appropriate opportunities for paraphrasing so that the questions were as accessible as possible for students. Specific examples of vocabulary substitutions were 'Urlaub' to 'Ferien' in Card D and 'in letzter Zeit' to 'neulich' on a number of cards.

On some occasions, an entire question was paraphrased in a permissible way. Alongside this, there were some instances when attempts at paraphrasing did not maintain the exact original meaning of the question and therefore invalidated any subsequent response by the student.

Centres are reminded that repetition of a question is allowed, and that the original question can be rephrased in the second asking; however, a full question must still be asked that maintains its original meaning. Moreover, a question should not be repeated if a complete response has been

given by the student. In such cases, the student response to the repeated question is disregarded for assessment.

As in the role-play, it is good practice to ask the elements of a two-part question separately for the unseen questions.

In the Teacher's Booklet, it states: *No supplementary questions must be asked*. Despite this clear instruction, there were a surprising number of additional questions asked at both tiers. All student responses to such questions were not considered for assessment and simply served to reduce the amount of time available for the student to answer the prescribed questions as fully as possible.

Conducting the General Conversation

At Foundation tier, the style of questioning for less-able students did not always allow them to perform to their potential. There was often a sense of a set list of questions being asked without consideration of the ability of a particular student. For example, some teachers were insistent on asking the least able students questions requiring a range of tenses, which is not necessary to achieve a mid-range mark on the Foundation mark scheme.

At both tiers, questions were consistently asked that allowed all students to give and explain opinions, necessary for accessing the Foundation tier top band for Communication. At Foundation tier, most able students were given the chance to use three time frames and thereby access the 9-10 band for Range and Accuracy.

Probably the greatest challenge of the new-style speaking test for teachers is the need to employ a questioning technique through which students are clearly able to demonstrate spontaneity. Some tests were conducted in such a way that allowed this to happen and the result was a conversation that had a pleasing feel of authenticity and totally reflected the spirit of the new examination. There were even moments of target language humour shared spontaneously between the interlocutors.

Unfortunately, too many tests were guided by a set running list of questions to which students gave lengthy pre-learnt responses. At Higher tier in particular, this resulted in many more able students being awarded a comparatively low mark for Spontaneity and fluency.

It is necessary for many teachers to consider their practice in this regard and to realise that top marks can be achieved by students across all areas if appropriate techniques are employed. Evidence of spontaneity should not be considered as something beyond the capability of the student. It is accepted and indeed reflected in the assessment criteria that all students will offer some pre-learnt material, but this must be punctuated by simple interjections that allow for follow-up information and clarification to be given by the student. Question forms such as *'Wie findest du ...?'* / *'Warum?'* / *'Mit wem?'* are essential tools for teachers to use to facilitate successful spontaneity.

Another new aspect of the General Conversation is the need for the student to ask a question. Most students either asked the question at a moment of their choice or it was elicited by the teacher at the end of the test. Unfortunately, and particularly at Higher tier, this led to some questions not being asked within the maximum time limit and a consequent one-mark penalty being applied to the mark for Communication as outlined in the mark scheme. Teachers are advised to encourage students to accomplish this routine task early on in the conversation to ensure it does not fall outside the time allowed.

Student Performance

Student Performance in the Role-play Task

It is pleasing to note that most students were able to access the target language bullet-points and were able to formulate an appropriate and succinct response. Students of all abilities seemed well trained in the recognition of bullet-points that elicited an opinion with the standard formulation used widely in the specimen assessment material: *Deine Meinung über ...*

On occasions, and at both tiers, students gave far more information than was necessary to accomplish the task, which is to be discouraged.

A significant number of students at both tiers did not establish clearly in their mind from the scene-setting statement where the role-play was taking place, i.e. Germany, Austria or Switzerland. For example, in role-play 1, a desired taxi destination was sometimes a British city. Teachers are advised to ensure students realise the importance of carefully reading the role-play scenario at the start of their preparation time.

At Foundation tier, the least able students did sometimes repeat the pronoun in the bullet-point in their own response. For example, in role-play 6, *Deine Schuluniform ist eine schwarze Hose*. This kind of mistake was always awarded a mark of zero.

In general, students found the formal role-plays more challenging than the informal scenarios. A common failing was a lack of recognition when a request for something had to be made, as in Role-play 9 (*Ein Handy für Sie*). It is recommended that teachers train their students to recognise the significance of the 'für Sie' prompt words.

At both tiers, most students were able to form a question effectively from the prompt word(s) provided on the question (?) task.

At both tiers, some students were not able to respond appropriately to the unpredictable (!) task, which revealed a lack of ability to deal with language in a spontaneous way.

Particularly at Foundation level, poor pronunciation often created ambiguity within role-play utterances. In formal role-plays, it is disappointing to note the widespread anglicised or mangled mispronunciation of the key transactional phrase '*Ich möchte*'. The key word '*für*' was often rendered as '*vor*'.

Specific Foundation Tier Role-play Issues

At Foundation tier, the following role-play tasks generally caused the most problems for students:

Role-play 1

Many students were unable to respond to the ! task: *Wo sind Sie im Moment?*

Role-plays 2 + 5

Many students were unfamiliar with the meaning of '*seit*'.

Role-play 4

Many students were unfamiliar with the meaning of *'Speisekarte'* and *'Rechnung'*.

Role-play 5

A lack of attention to detail and question words meant that the first task (*Dein Haus – wo.*) often prompted a description of the student's house.

Role-play 6

Many students failed to recognise the plural form within the prompt words *'Deine Meinung über die Lehrer.'* and responded accordingly in the singular form.

Role-play 7

Many students failed to understand the ! task *'Was machen Sie, was ungesund ist?'* and mentioned an activity relating to a healthy lifestyle.

Role-play 8

'Beruf' was not widely known.

Role-play 9

Some students were unable to respond to the ? task: *Welche Farbe?* In the fifth task, many students either did not know the meaning of *'Nachteil'* or confused it with *'Vorteil'* and gave an advantage of mobile phones.

Student Performance in the Photo Card Task

Generally, students seemed well prepared for this part of the test. Most students were able to give a reasonably well developed response to the first prepared question *Was gibt es auf dem Foto?* In the case of less able students, this tended to take the form of descriptions of people in the photo.

Responses were enhanced when students had set phrases that can be applied to describing any situation. Examples of these included *Im Hintergrund sieht man ...* and *Im Vordergrund gibt es ...* On occasions, the effect of these structures was undermined by the anglicised version *'Hinter/Vorgrund'*.

Although development of response is to be welcomed, students need to ensure that what they say does still address the question of what can be seen in the photo. It is perfectly acceptable to give a personal opinion about an aspect of the picture.

There were a small number of cases where students spoke only briefly about the content of the photo before giving a personalised response that became irrelevant to the question.

At Foundation tier, although not widespread, there were still some responses to the first question that lacked clarity due to the use of *'der ist'*. At both tiers, a good number of students invented a present continuous form to describe activities in the picture. For example, in Card H: *'Das Mädchen ist spielen Gitarre.'*

Understandably, responses to the three prepared questions were usually more developed than those to the two unseen questions. At Foundation tier, only some students tried to give developed responses to all five questions.

At both tiers, most students were able to give and explain opinions. There were still, however, a few students who were restricted to the 1-3 band through the failure to offer an opinion, or could not access the 10-12 band because no opinion was explained.

At Foundation tier, there was a rather mixed picture in terms of students' ability to recognise and respond appropriately to the question eliciting a response in a past or future time frame.

One striking aspect of performances at both tiers was the generally poor standard of pronunciation. This was often the reason why responses were classed as 'understandable' rather than 'clear', a characteristic that caps a performance in the 7-9 band.

Specific Foundation Tier Photo Card Issues

Students generally found most photo stimuli and sets of questions to be equally accessible. The Photo card that students found most challenging was Photo card G on the sub-theme of global issues. Particularly at Foundation tier, such a task does present some linguistic and conceptual challenges. However, teachers need to be aware that the environment is a key area of learning in this specification and students need to be prepared to encounter it in the speaking test.

Aside from this, common issues were:

Photo Card A

The word '*Ort*' was sometimes unknown.

Photo Card E

The second question (*'Was für Technologien benutzt deine Familie?'*) was often met with a first person response.

Photo Card F

The scenario targeting a combination of culinary vocabulary (*Koch / Köchin / kochen / Kuchen*) proved linguistically confusing for many students.

Photo Card H

Students found it difficult to say what music they had bought recently and a favourite singer was often simply named rather than described.

Photo Card I

Many students found it difficult to respond to the third question in the past tense (*'Was hast du dieses Schuljahr in der Pause gemacht?'*) and the final (unseen) question: *'Was darf man in deiner Schule nicht machen?'*

Student Performance in the General Conversation

At both tiers, most students were able to use the target language to ask for repetition and say they didn't understand. At Foundation tier, the lower ability students tended to resort to English if they needed a question repeating.

The Foundation Tier General Conversation

Generally, students managed to sustain a conversation for the minimum amount of time across two themes. Most students made an effort to develop responses, particularly to prepared questions from the nominated theme. Students often gave and sometimes explained opinions in addition to basic factual information.

On occasions, there was a large discrepancy between the amount conveyed on the nominated theme and the prescribed one. When this occurred, it inevitably impacted on the overall mark for Communication.

Most students relied on simple structures and vocabulary, which was sometimes repetitive, to convey basic messages. These students often struggled to make successful statements using past and future time frames.

Some students did show an ability to incorporate a greater range of structure, including modal verbs and common subordinating conjunctions. However, in some cases, the potential mark for both Communication and Range and accuracy of language was lowered significantly by the frequency of serious errors that impeded intended meanings.

Pronunciation was often weak and also affected the degree of effective communication. The key 'ch' sound was nearly always rendered as 'ick' and vowels with umlauts were rarely enunciated. Cognates such as *Musik* / *Familie* / *Uniform* / *Englisch* were also consistently anglicised. There was little intonation employed to support meaning and performances were often quite monotone as pre-learnt responses were regurgitated.

Some students were able to deliver a reasonably fluent performance using rehearsed responses. However, balanced against this, was the lack of ability to interact spontaneously, meaning that the top mark of 5 in the category of Spontaneity and fluency could not be awarded to this level of performance.

Advice to teachers

General

- Do a short test recording before the first student's test to check recording levels and clarity.
- Position the microphone or digital recorder so that it picks up both voices clearly.
- Make sure that your own and the students' mobile phones are switched off (not just on silent) before the recording begins. Students should not have access to their mobile during the preparation time or during the exam, in accordance with examination regulations.
- The Instructions for the conduct of examinations document is in the Secure Key Materials (SKM) area of e-AQA, available via the AQA website. If you do not have access to SKM, ask your examinations officer to download the document for you. It is *essential* that you follow the instructions in that document.
- In the Instructions document, you are told how to introduce each student in English. This is what you should say at the start of the recording for every candidate:
GCSE German examination, June (*year of exam*). Centre number ____, candidate number ____, candidate name ____. Role-play number ____, photo card letter ____, general conversation theme chosen by candidate Theme (1, 2 or 3).

- Use German throughout the exam once you have introduced the student and his/her role-play and photo card combinations and the nominated theme for the general conversation in English.
- Respond positively to what students say, even if it is not very good. It will encourage them for the rest of the test.
- Practise pronunciation as often as possible. It can be a good use of the Foreign Language Assistant's time, if you have one.

Role-play

- Keep to your script as laid out in the Teacher's Role. Not to do so will mean that the student's response will receive a mark of 0 for Communication in that task.
- If you see that a student is starting to give the wrong answer to your question, stop him/her and repeat the question. Once the student completes an incorrect answer, a mark of 0 for Communication is given for that task, even if you repeat the question and a correct answer is given subsequently.
- If a student asks for repetition of your question or if there is no answer, you may repeat the question.
- If there is a two-part question in an unprepared task, ask the first question, wait for an answer, and then ask the second question. Failure to do so in the unprepared task almost invariably leads to the student having to ask for repetition.

Photo card

- You may paraphrase a question, provided the same meaning is maintained. However, be careful that that is the case or the student's reply will not be credited.
- Ask all five questions in the Teacher's Booklet, but do not ask any follow-up questions.
- Keep an eye on the timing. If a student's replies are very long and it looks as though you may not be able to ask the final question in the two-minute maximum time, you may be better to interrupt an answer and ask the next one.
- If there is a two-part question in the unseen questions, ask the first question, wait for an answer, and then ask the second question. Failure to do so in the unprepared questions almost invariably leads to the student having to ask for repetition.

General conversation

- Encourage students to vary their language structures and vocabulary as much as possible. Opinions are the most obvious area to focus on – not everything has to be described as *interessant* or *langweilig* and there are other ways to say *ich liebe*.
- Train students to give and justify opinions without necessarily being asked to do so. This can form the basis of different starter activities.
- Be sensitive to the ability of the students – someone who struggles to describe his/her town is not going to be successful discussing more challenging aspects of the topic, for example the impact of global warming.
- Try to ask students questions that reflect their interests. Don't ask all students identical questions.
- In order to achieve a greater sense of spontaneity in the conversation, follow up a student's response by asking about what they have just told you.
- Announce the change of theme in German: *Jetzt das Thema Nummer zwei*, etc.
- Keep a close eye on the time. If one of the themes lasts for less than 1'30", there is a deduction of two marks for Communication.

- The maximum length of the general conversation is five minutes. Everything after that will *not* be marked.
- Remember to prompt the student to ask you a question if they don't do it without being asked. It is better to get them to ask you the question in their nominated theme so that you don't forget to do it later on.
- If the first question the student asks you makes no sense, get them to ask you another one.

Advice to students

- Use the 12 minutes preparation time wisely. You can write down exactly what you are going to say in the role-play tasks and in response to the three questions on the photo card.
- For the photo card questions, try to prepare answers of at least three sentences, using a verb in each one.
- Listen carefully to the questions that your teacher asks you for the unprepared questions in the role-play and photo card and to all questions in the general conversation.
- You can ask for repetition of a question in any part of the test, but make sure it is in German. You can say *Wie bitte?*, for example.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.