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GCSE

**GERMAN**

8668/SH Speaking Higher tier  
Report on the Examination

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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**

There were some weaker students at Higher tier who were unable to cope with elements of this test and, in particular, were not able to access the General Conversation mark scheme. 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 that can be awarded for Communication in the General Conversation is five.

Unfortunately, a significant number of teachers did not follow the speaking test procedures. 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 next year's *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 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.

At Higher tier, there were a number of performances that exceeded the seven minute maximum time limit. 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 O, 'Beziehung' to 'Verhältnis' in Card J, 'Mit wem' to 'Mit welcher Person' in Cards J/M and 'in letzter Zeit' to 'neulich' on a number of cards.

On some occasions, an entire question was paraphrased in a permissible way. In Card O, 'Hast du schon gearbeitet?' was sometimes a preferred alternative to the more challenging formulation 'Hast du schon Arbeitserfahrung?' In Card J, 'Wie bist du in letzter Zeit mit deiner Familie ausgekommen?' was sometimes rendered as 'Wie hast du dich in letzter Zeit mit deiner Familie verstanden?'

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. One example of this was Photo card L, when the fifth question ‘*Was wirst du nach den Prüfungen machen?*’ was rephrased to ‘*Was wirst du im Sommer machen?*’ A particular concern was the way in which only a key element of a question was asked when repetition was required. For example, in Card J, ‘*Mit wem hast du im Moment eine gute Beziehung?*’ was sometimes repeated as simply ‘*Mit wem?*’ when the student started to give a wrong response.

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, not all teachers asked 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 Higher tier, questioning technique was generally very good, allowing students to give developed and complex responses and to use different time frames.

At both tiers, questions were consistently asked that allowed students to give and explain opinions.

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 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 questioning techniques are employed. Evidence of spontaneity should not be considered as something beyond the capability of the student. It is accepted that 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 of 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.

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 14, students were already in Germany but some still wanted to book an excursion to Germany! Teachers are advised to ensure students realise the importance of carefully reading the role-play scenario at the start of their preparation time.

In general, students found the formal role-plays more challenging than the informal scenarios. A common error was a lack of recognition when a request for something had to be made, as in Role-play 14 (*Ein Ausflug 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.

Though particularly the case 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 Higher Tier Role-play Issues

The following role-play tasks generally caused the most problems for students:

#### Role-play 10

*'Erfahrung'* was not commonly known and some students formulated a response about a past school trip.

#### Role-play 11

Both the meaning and pronunciation of *'Ermäßigung'* meant that relatively few students scored two marks.

**Role-play 12**

In the first task (*'Gesundheit der Leute heutzutage'*), many students made a statement about their own personal state of health, which did not accomplish the task at all. In the second task, *'Ernährung'* was not widely known. In the ? task (*'Gesünder leben'*), most students formulated a question about living 'healthily' as opposed to 'more healthily'.

**Role-play 13**

In the ! task, *'Familienmitglied'* was often not known or interpreted as the family unit instead of one person.

**Role-play 14**

In the first task (*'Ein Ausflug für Sie – wann.'*), students often referred to a previous flight. In the second task, the question prompt *'Wohin'* was not widely recognised. In the ? task, many students struggled to formulate an effective question around the prompt word *'Zurückkommen'*.

**Role-play 15**

Students often responded to the ! question (*'Wenn Sie den Job bekommen, wo werden Sie wohnen?'*) with a present tense statement of current abode. In the ? task, *'Lohn'* was not widely known.

**Role-play 16**

In the second task, *'Umziehen'* was unfamiliar to many students. In the ? task, *'Die Miete'* was not widely known and often mispronounced as *'Meite'*. The question was often formulated as *'Was ist die Miete?'* In the ! task, *'Wie verdienen Sie Ihr Geld hier in Österreich?'* elicited a number of responses by students saying how much money they had.

**Role-play 17**

The ! task (*'Wie viel Fernsehen ist gut für Kinder?'*) rarely elicited a response that included a specific amount of time, as was necessary to score 2 marks.

**Role-play 18**

In the second task, *'Schulzeugnis'* was unfamiliar to many and often interpreted as a school trip. In the ? task, the notion of *'Sitzen bleiben'* in the school context did not seem to be known by many students.

**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?*

Responses were enhanced when students used 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'*.

At Higher tier, some more able students went to great lengths to exploit the photo content, often incorporating conjecture within their response. This often related to the possible location of the setting, the type of weather, and the mood of the people in the photo. It was pleasing to hear the accurate use of complex phrases such as *Ich denke, dass ...*, *Es scheint mir, dass ...* and even on a few occasions *Es könnte sein, dass ...*

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. For example, in Card N one student said: *‘Ich mag das Wohnzimmer, weil es groß und modern ist.’* However, it is not acceptable to say: *‘Ich mag das Foto, weil es schön ist.’*

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 both tiers, a good number of students invented a present continuous form to describe activities in the picture. For example, in Card Q: *‘Das Mädchen ist spielen Gitarre.’*

Understandably, responses to the three prepared questions were usually more developed than those to the two unseen questions. Higher tier students manipulated language more confidently in developed responses to the unseen 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 Higher tier, students were generally more confident in manipulating different tenses.

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 Higher tier Photo Card Issues**

Students generally found most photo stimuli and sets of questions to be equally accessible. As at Foundation tier, it was Photo card P with questions on environmental protection that students found overall most challenging.

Common issues were:

#### **Photo Card J**

The fourth (unseen) question (*‘Wie bist du in letzter Zeit mit deiner Familie ausgekommen?’*) often provoked responses about previous family outings.

#### **Photo card L**

The final (unseen) question (*‘Was wirst du nach den Prüfungen machen?’*) was often interpreted as a question about examinations.

#### **Photo card O**

Although to a lesser extent than at Foundation tier, students did still struggle to pronounce key words like *Küche / Koch / Köchin / kochen* when describing the picture. The third question (*‘Was ist bei einem Job das Wichtigste?’*) was often misinterpreted as asking about why a particular job is important. The fourth (unseen) question (*‘Hast du schon Arbeitserfahrung?’*) sometimes encouraged a response about travel.



**Photo card P**

Of particular difficulty was the third question: *‘Was hast du in letzter Zeit gemacht, um Energie zu sparen?’*

**Photo card Q**

Many students did not seem to understand the use of *‘ausgeben für’* in the fourth (unseen) question. Attempts at an answer tended to state how much music costs rather than how much money the student spends on it.

**Photo card R**

Very few students recognised that the fifth (unseen) question (*‘Wie wird dein letzter Schultag sein?’*) was a reference to the future. Almost all students gave a response about a last school day using the past tense.

**The Higher Tier General Conversation**

Most students were able to sustain a conversation in which they showed a clear ability to develop responses. Although questions from the nominated theme tended to be more extended, coverage of the second theme was usually at least satisfactory compared to Foundation tier. Nearly all students showed a consistent ability to give and explain opinions.

Unfortunately, there were a number of lower ability students who were not able to convey enough understandable information to access even the bottom band for Communication and, consequently, scored a mark of zero across all categories.

Most students attempted a wider variety of language structures and vocabulary. Whereas Foundation tier students tended to overuse the *weil* clause, at Higher tier a greater range of subordinating conjunctions and relative clauses were successfully employed. Students were generally able to form tenses accurately, including the conditional, and subjunctive forms (such as *hätte / wäre*) were sometimes used to good effect.

The standard of pronunciation was rarely consistently good and, in too many cases, was not commensurate with the overall linguistic ability of the student. As at Foundation tier, too many students anglicised basic German sounds and did not pay enough attention to the accurate pronunciation of cognates. Even more able students were often unable to pronounce the ‘z’ sound accurately. Moreover, some performances were delivered with very little effective intonation.

Many performances were fluent, but not necessarily in an authentic way, as pre-learnt material was often simply delivered at a sustained pace. Although there were some excellent examples of spontaneous interaction, most students lacked the confidence to react naturally to follow-up questions. In some extreme cases, only around ten questions were answered by the student in a set of mini-monologues. As a consequence, the mark awarded for Spontaneity and fluency was often relatively low compared to the other categories.

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## 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 unpredictable 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 three-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 2'30", there is a deduction of two marks for Communication.
- The maximum length of the general conversation is seven 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.