
GCSE

GERMAN

8668/SH: Speaking Higher
Report on the Examination

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General comments

It is pleasing to report that the 2019 GCSE German Higher tier speaking test was successful in its primary aim of allowing all students to demonstrate a level of oral proficiency that was commensurate with their ability.

The following report aims to give a comprehensive overview of the Higher tier 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 2020 and subsequent tests. The content of this report has been informed by senior examiners listening to a wide sample of student performances and is therefore representative of the entry cohort as a whole.

A copy of the Speaking Score Sheet used by examiners can be found at the back of the 2019 mark scheme.

Centres are reminded that a breakdown of marks for each section of the speaking test per student is available free of charge in ERA (Enhanced Results Analysis). ERA is accessed via eAQA.

Tier of entry

Following on from advice given to centres, it is pleasing to note that most Higher tier students performed in a way that justified their tier of entry. However, there were still a few students who would have been better suited to Foundation tier.

Audio files and quality of recordings

Most centres submitted tests on a memory stick, which is a more reliable format than CDs. Many had encrypted recordings in line with the guidance given; however, there were a number of unencrypted recordings and, in some cases, the wrong encryption code had been used. There were also cases of corrupt audio files or missing recordings.

Most tests were conducted in a suitable venue with a quality recording device. However, there were some cases where external background noise and/or poor quality recordings affected the audibility of what the students said. Teacher-examiners are reminded of the importance of ensuring a high quality recording to ensure students are not disadvantaged.

Teacher-examiner Tester Performance records (TTPRs)

The information provided on the TTPR is intended to provide teacher-examiners with feedback on the conduct of the speaking tests to inform the conduct of future tests. It is not possible to provide more detailed feedback than the information on the TTPR form. Feedback is provided on the basis of need only and not for every teacher-examiner.

Conduct of the tests

It is pleasing to report that there has been an overall improvement in the conduct of the tests compared to the first year of this specification, with most teachers 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 teacher-examiners. 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 five out of ten.

It is important that teacher-examiners follow the prescribed format, in particular the introduction to each new student must include the role play number, photo card letter and nominated General Conversation theme. Once the test has begun, the target language should be used, even when introducing the test's different sections; the *Instructions for the conduct of the examinations* provides suitable wording for this. It is particularly important to announce a change of theme during the General Conversation.

Timings

Almost all students completed the Photo card task comfortably within Higher tier time limit of three minutes.

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.

Teacher-examiners should 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 also reminded that anything said by the student beyond the maximum time limit is disregarded for assessment purposes.

Conducting the Role-play

The prescribed role in the Teacher's Booklet was adhered to by most teacher-examiners. In the minority of cases where teacher-examiners re-worded the script, any subsequent response by the student was invalidated. In the case of two-part unprepared questions, often ones requiring an opinion and reason, it is good practice to elicit the two elements separately to ensure the task is fully completed.

Conducting the Photo Card

Most teacher-examiners asked the questions as they appeared on the card. Some had identified appropriate opportunities for paraphrasing so that the questions were as accessible as possible for students. A specific example of vocabulary substitution is *in letzter Zeit* replacing *neulich* or vice versa. On Photo card M, *Turnhalle* was often and legitimately rendered as *Sporthalle*. On Photo card Q, *Wie kommst du mit deinen Nachbarn aus?* was paraphrased to *Wie verstehst du dich mit deinen Nachbarn?*

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. On Photo card J, Task 5, some teacher-examiners asked the question: *Welches Schulfach möchtest du nächstes Jahr nicht machen?* instead of *nicht mehr machen*. This is an example of how a seemingly insignificant change to the wording of a question can actually create a different meaning.

Teacher-examiners 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 purposes.

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.* In an improvement from the previous year, the vast majority of teacher-examiners only asked the five listed questions.

Conducting the General Conversation

Most teacher-examiners asked questions that were appropriate to the ability of the student. Although questioning technique has generally improved since last year, there was still on occasions a sense of a set list of questions being asked without consideration of the ability or interests of a particular student.

Questions were consistently asked that allowed all students to give and explain opinions, necessary for accessing higher marks for Communication. Most students were given regular opportunities to use three time frames and thereby access the higher marks for Range and accuracy of language which was pleasing.

At times, students misunderstood a question and gave an understandable but inappropriate response. When this occurs, it is important for the teacher-examiner to interrupt the response by rephrasing the question or asking a subsequent question as irrelevant information offered by the student cannot be credited.

In last year's report, attention was drawn to the need for teacher-examiners to employ a questioning technique through which students are clearly able to demonstrate spontaneity. There were signs of improvement here and more tests were conducted in such a way that the conversation had a pleasing feel of authenticity. However, many performances continue to be dominated by pre-learnt responses where the teacher-examiner allows long monologues before asking the next question on the list. This was particularly frustrating in the case of confident students whose language skills were such that they would have had no problem in responding to meaningful interventions and follow up questions.

Most teacher-examiners were aware of the requirement for the student to ask a question during the General Conversation. Some students asked the question at a moment of their choice while others waited for the teacher to elicit it at the end of the test. Unfortunately, some questions were elicited and asked beyond the maximum time limit and a one mark deduction was applied to the mark for Communication. It is advisable to try and get the student to ask a question during the first theme. In this way, if the question makes no coherent sense, the teacher-examiner can prompt another question later in the conversation.

Some students had been trained to ask a question through adding *Und du?* to the end of a response. For example: *Ich wohne in einer Stadt? Und du?* This is a legitimate technique as long as the question tag corresponds to the preceding response. On occasions, this was not the case and one mark was deducted. For example: *Die Stadt ist sehr laut. Und du?*

Some teacher-examiners conducted a conversation that ran unnecessarily for the maximum amount of time. It is important to note that the conversation does not have to last the full seven

minutes in order to achieve the best possible mark. The maximum time should be utilised if the student's delivery is so slow that there is a risk of not globally conveying enough information. Time may also be needed so that the student is able to demonstrate a specific skill missing up to that point, such as a reference to a particular time frame. In the case of many very good performances, it can be in the interests of a student who is performing well to stop the conversation at around six minutes.

Student Performance in the Role-play

Most students were well-trained in coping with the target language bullet points and formulated an appropriate and succinct response including a verb. In formal role plays, most students recognised that the *für Sie* element of a bullet point task indicates the need to make a request. For example, Role play 17 Task 1 *Fahrrad für Sie – wann* often prompted a two mark response like *'Ich möchte ein Fahrrad für Samstag.*

On a few occasions, students gave far more information than was necessary to accomplish the task, which is to be discouraged.

The teacher-examiner script in Role-play tasks is carefully constructed to encourage the use of a verb whilst at the same time avoiding the supply of too much key vocabulary. Students need to be aware that the teacher-examiner prompt may not always take the form of a direct question. It is essential that students prepare a response to the written bullet point prompt and deliver this at the appropriate moment, irrespective of whether it is directly elicited by the teacher-examiner.

Most students were able to form a question effectively from the prompt word(s) provided on the question task. Examiners noted that an increasing number of students had been trained to apply a *Wie findest du ...?* formulation, which often worked but was sometimes inappropriate to the nature of the prompt words provided.

Most students were able to respond appropriately to the unpredictable task, showing the necessary sound knowledge of question words and an ability to respond spontaneously. It is worth noting that, on some role plays, students will be required to answer two very simple unpredictable questions as opposed to one more challenging one. This is only the case at Higher tier.

Specific Role-play comments

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

Role-play 10

Task 4: The plural form *Busse* was not recognised by some students whereas others struggled to give a simple detail about what busses are like.

Task 5 (?): *Sportmöglichkeiten* was not well known and sometimes led to the formulation of an irrelevant question about sport rather than sporting facilities.

Role-play 11

Task 1: *Unterricht* was not known by a significant number of students, leading to irrelevant answers about school in general.

Task 2: The superlative form *schwierigste* was not always recognised as such.

Task 4 (!): Some students had difficulty in formulating another person's opinion.

Role-play 12

Task 1: The *wann* element of the bullet point prompt was sometimes not addressed in a request, meaning that the message was only partially conveyed.

Task 2 (!): The verb *feiern* was not known by some students.

Task 4: Students made a first person request for drinks rather than explicitly stating what the guests wanted.

Role-play 13

Task 1: Some students failed to understand the *seit wann* prompt and simply said *when* they worked. There was a general inability to use *seit* accurately with a present tense.

Task 3: Most students recognised the past time frame but a failure to read the complete bullet point carefully enough led some to state a non-work related activity.

Task 5: Many students were unable to formulate an accurate question using *verdienen*. Many produced the ambiguous version of *Hast du Geld verdienen?*

Role-play 14

Task 1: A request for a laptop generally made but sometimes no additional detail added.

Task 2: A surprising number of students anglicised the pronunciation of *Euro*.

Task 3: *Sonderangebot* was unfamiliar to many and its pronunciation was often incorrect.

Role-play 15

Task 1/2: *Freiwillig* often pronounced as *friewillig*.

Role-play 16

Task 1: *Gebäude* not well known and often pronounced without an umlaut.

Task 3: *Kantine* often anglicised despite the fact that it was spoken by the teacher-examiner in the prompting question.

Task 5: *nach der Schule* was often interpreted as *in der Schule*, often leading to a perfectly formulated but irrelevant question.

Role-play 17

Task 2: Some students requested a bicycle but did not say when it was needed.

Task 2 (!): Some students were unable to answer the second question as they did not recognise the meaning of *Farbe*.

Task 5: Very few students were familiar with *zurück* and were therefore unable to form any kind of relevant question.

Student Performance in the Photo Card

Around 15% of students were able to meet the criteria for accessing the 13-15 band. Just over 40% of students achieved a mark in the 10-12 band.

Teachers are advised to read the published mark scheme very carefully and familiarise themselves with the additional exemplification provided for marking the photo card task.

Most students were able to give a simple three-clause response to the first prepared question *Was gibt es auf dem Foto?* Many made reference to the setting, number of people, description of people and the weather.

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.

It is pleasing to report a very limited use of *der ist* at this tier. However, a number of students continued to invent a present continuous form to describe activities in the picture. For example, in Card R: *Sie sind hören Musik*. This kind of response is credited as communicating a message but the inaccuracy is taken into account when assessing the level of clarity.

Understandably, responses to the three prepared questions were usually more developed than those to the two unseen questions.

Most students were able to give and explain opinions. Compared to last year, there were fewer students who could not access the 10-12 band because no opinion was explained.

Most students recognised the questions requiring a past or future time frame and responded appropriately which was pleasing.

Specific Photo Card comments

The following Photo card tasks generally caused the most challenge for students:

Photo card J

Task 3: Many students found it challenging to state *how* they had prepared for this examination.
Task 5: Some students did not hear the negative element of the question (*nicht mehr*) and stated subjects that they will learn next year.

Photo card L

Task 4: The question about living without a car was generally understood but many struggled to verbalise a coherent response.

Photo card M

Task 4: Many students recognised the need for a future time frame in this task.

Photo card N

Task 2: Some students struggled to state advantages and/or disadvantages of a skiing holiday. Most responses related to the weather.

Photo card O

Task 2: Some students gave an exclusively first person response instead of saying what food their family buys at the cinema.
Task 5: The switch of theme to television confused some students who carried on talking about the cinema.

Photo card P

Task 1/2: The pronunciation of *Geschäft* was often anglicised.

Task 3: This proved to be a very challenging question. Many students talked about future career plans at this point in time as opposed to when they were young.

Photo card Q

Task 4: *Nachbarn* was not widely known.

Photo card R

Perhaps surprisingly at this tier, there was widespread anglicised pronunciation of *Musik* and *hören* across the questions.

The General Conversation

Most students were well prepared for this part of the test and gave developed responses, particularly to prepared questions from the nominated theme. Opinions and justifications were regularly conveyed.

Most students attempted a wider variety of language structures and vocabulary. Accurately formulated *weil* clauses were commonplace but sometimes overused. Most students used some modal verb forms. The best performances included a wider range of subordinating conjunctions and relative clauses. It was pleasing to see that students were generally able to form tenses accurately, including the conditional and subjunctive forms (such as *hätte / wäre*) were sometimes used to good effect.

Many students successfully demonstrated the use of different time frames. On occasions, when forming the perfect tense, an auxiliary verb was sometimes omitted, resulting in a phrase such as *Ich Fußball gespielt*. When referring to a future time frame using *Ich werde*, some students forgot to include a second verb in its infinitive form at the end of the clause, as in *Ich werde Fußball*. Others used a past participle instead of infinitive, as in *Ich werde Fußball gespielt*.

It is pleasing to report that examiners noted some improvement this year in the standard of pronunciation. Around 38% of students demonstrated 'good pronunciation and intonation'. Around 50% of students showed some inconsistency in their pronunciation, often due to unsounded umlauts or anglicised rendering of cognates. Some students delivered pre-learnt responses in a monotone fashion and lacked intonation, which precluded a higher mark in this category.

Many performances were fluent, but not necessarily in an authentic way, as pre-learnt material was often simply delivered at a sustained pace. In some cases, only around ten questions were answered by the student in a set of mini-monologues. The best performances were ones where the student confidently developed responses but also gave shorter, very natural answers to follow-up questions. Just under 40% of students showed the ability to take part in at least a 'very good exchange'.

Advice to teacher-examiners**General**

- Do a short test recording before the first student's test to check recording levels and clarity.

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- Position the microphone or digital recorder so that it picks up both voices clearly.
 - 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 student:

GCSE German examination, June (*year of exam*). Centre number ____, candidate number ____, candidate name ____. Role play number ____, photo card letter ____, general conversation theme chosen by student Theme (1, 2 or 3).

- Everything said by the teacher-examiner-examiner must be clearly audible. Instances of whispering will be referred to AQA.
- 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 the script as laid out in the Teacher-examiner'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 often 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.

General conversation

- Encourage students to vary their language structures and vocabulary as much as possible. Opinions and adjectives are the most obvious areas to focus on.
- 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. Do not 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: *Und jetzt machen wir Thema ...*
- 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 do not do it without being asked. It is better to get them to ask you the question in their nominated theme so that you do not 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 prepared 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-examiner asks you for the unprepared questions in the role play and photo card and to all questions in the General conversation.
- Make sure you know common question words.
- You can ask for repetition of a question in any part of the test, but make sure it is in German.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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