



GCSE
German

8668/SH Paper 1 Speaking Higher Tier

Report on the Examination

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Introduction

It is pleasing to report that the 2024 GCSE German Higher tier Speaking test was successful in its primary aim of allowing all students to demonstrate a level of oral proficiency commensurate with their ability. Most students had been entered for the appropriate tier. The overall impression is that student performance continues to improve, probably due to increased familiarity with the specification and improved techniques for tackling the Role-play and Photo card tasks.

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 future improvement. 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.

Quality of recordings

Nearly all tests were conducted in a suitable venue with a quality recording device. However, there were a small number of cases where external background noise and/or poor-quality recordings affected the audibility of what the students said. Centres are advised to check the quality of their sound recording devices before conducting speaking tests.

Timings

Nearly all students completed the Photo card task comfortably within the Higher tier time limit of three minutes. On the rare occasions that not all five questions were asked within the allotted time, this was due to a very slow delivery by the student and/or an overlong and repetitive type of answer to the first question eliciting a description of the photo.

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 also reminded that anything said by the student beyond the maximum time limit is disregarded for assessment.

Conducting the Role-play task

The prescribed role in the teacher's booklet was adhered to by most teachers. However, despite this issue being flagged up in previous reports, some teacher-examiners re-worded the script, thereby invalidating any subsequent response by the student.

In the case of two-part questions, often ones requiring an opinion and reason, it is good practice to elicit the two elements separately. This was not always common practice even though it is helpful to students.

Conducting the Photo card task

Most teacher-examiners asked the questions as they appeared on the card. Paraphrasing is allowed but any change of wording must maintain the exact original meaning of the question.

For example, on Photo card L Task 4, it was permissible to substitute *‘die sozialen Medien’* with *‘die Social Media’* and on Photo card O Task 3, *‘klein’* could be replaced by *‘jung’*.

Despite clear guidance in last year’s report, there were still attempts at rephrasing questions in an unacceptable way. This sometimes took the form of repeating the key interrogative at the beginning of the question. For example, on Photo card M, Task 3: *Wann ... Wann bist du das letzte Mal mit dem Bus gefahren?* On other occasions, a key element of a question was fronted and repeated, as in Photo card K: *Letztes Jahr ... Welche Geschenke hast du letztes Jahr bekommen?* On a few occasions, an additional element was added to the question, often to signal a future time frame. For example, on Photo card P: *In welcher Prüfung wirst du in der Zukunft die beste Note bekommen?* Such questioning technique provides an unfair advantage to those students; to maintain fairness any subsequent student response has to be invalidated.

Teacher-examiners are reminded that, if a student has started to give a wrong but still incomplete answer, the full question can be re-asked. However, if a complete and wrong answer has been given, any subsequent answer to a repeated question will be disregarded for assessment.

Conducting the General conversation

Most teacher-examiners asked questions that were appropriate to the ability of the student. There was still on occasion the 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 achieving a higher mark for Communication. Students were nearly always given the chance to use three-time frames and thereby gain access to higher marks for Range and accuracy.

At times, students misunderstood a question and gave an understandable but inappropriate response. When this occurs, it is important for the teacher-examiner to curtail the response by rephrasing the question or asking a subsequent question. Any irrelevant information offered by the student cannot be credited and will count against the accuracy of the performance.

It is important that teacher-examiners employ a questioning technique through which students are clearly able to demonstrate spontaneity. Some teacher-examiners listened to student responses and then gained further information or clarification through the use of simple follow-up questions such as *Wie oft? / Warum (nicht)? / Mit wem? / Und wie findest du ...?* The result was a conversation that had a pleasing feel of authenticity. Unfortunately, although questioning technique in this respect has improved during the course of this specification, too many performances are still dominated by pre-learnt responses.

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, or the student was not prompted at all to ask a question.

Some students had been trained to ask a question through adding *Und du?* to the end of a response. For example: *Ich spiele Fußball. 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 so credit cannot be given. For example: *Fußball ist toll. Und du?*

There were a few occasions when a question was asked by the student that was not relevant to either of the two General conversation themes.

Student Performance

Student performance in the Role-play task

Most students were well-trained in decoding the target language bullet points and formulated an appropriate and succinct response, including a verb. On occasions students gave far more information than was necessary to accomplish the task, which is to be discouraged.

Some students found the transactional role-plays more challenging than the informal scenarios. However, most were well-trained in recognising when a request has to be made, denoted by the words *‘für Sie.’* For example, on Role-play 11 Task 1: *‘Etwas zu essen für Sie.’* The preferred structure in the student response, *‘Ich möchte,’* had been well drilled and was mostly accurately pronounced. On some occasions it was rendered as *‘Ich mochte,’* which creates ambiguity and can only score a maximum of one mark.

On the transactional Role-play 13, there was a phrase (*‘Kein Problem.’*) to acknowledge the student response to the first task but no direct question to prompt a response to the second task. This is a legitimate way of trying to elicit a response with a verb from the student. Students should be trained to address the next task once the teacher-examiner has responded to the previous one, whether there is a direct question or not. If the teacher-examiner adds their own question, the student response is invalidated.

Examiners noted that most students had been well trained in recognising the need for a past or future time frame and responding appropriately.

Many students were able to form a question effectively from the prompt word(s) provided on the question (?) task. Examiners noted that many students had been trained to apply a *Wie findest du ...?* formulation. This worked perfectly for some prompts, such as Role-play 17: ? *Taschengeld.* There were, however, other prompts where an article was needed, such as Role-play 14: ? *Strand.* When an article was omitted, 2 marks could still be gained for Communication, with the error being considered under Knowledge and use of language. Teachers are advised to remind students to consider the need for an article with the question prompt.

Most students were able to respond appropriately to the unpredictable (!) task and had been trained to give a short but appropriate response. For example, Role-play 14 Task 4: *Was kann man in den Ferien machen, wenn das Wetter schlecht ist? Fernsehen.*

Specific Higher tier Role-play comments

The following role-play tasks generally caused the most issues for students.

Role-play 11

Task 3: Some students struggled with an accurate pronunciation of both prompt words, producing the variants *'alkoholfrie'* and *'Getranke'*. The omission of the Umlaut was considered a minor error but the mispronunciation of any *'ei/ie'* combination is a more serious error affecting the clear communication of a message.

Role-play 12

Task 4: The frequent mispronunciation of *'Feier'* caused some ambiguity of meaning.

Role-play 13

Task 2: This was found challenging due to the reason already given about no direct lead into the student response.

Role-play 14

Task 1: An accurate pronunciation of *'Ferien'* proved difficult for some students, which is surprising for such a common word at this tier.

Role-play 16

Task 1: Some students did not recognise the *'in letzter Zeit'* element in the prompt and described a school day in the present tense.

Task 3: As in the Photo card tasks, the question to a third person plural proved challenging for some students who gave a first-person response without reference to friends.

Task 5: The pronunciation of *'Schulregeln'* was not always clear.

Role-play 17

Task 1: As in Role-play 14, *'Ferien'* was sometimes mispronounced.

Task 3: The pronunciation of *'ideal'* was often anglicised. The response often revealed some confusion with the meaning of *'Uhr'* and *'Stunde.'*

Student Performance in the Photo card task

Most students prepared fully developed responses comprising at least three clauses to the three seen questions. They also knew the importance of giving and explaining opinions.

One key skill for succeeding in this part of the test is the recognition of question words and formulations. If students are not well trained in this, they are prone to misunderstanding the task and giving irrelevant information.

Another key skill which will enhance the performance of some students is the recognition of unseen questions which can be answered simply by ‘Ja/Nein’ before any development is attempted. For example, on Photo card N: *Ist es wichtig, armen Leuten zu helfen?* Or Photo card Q: *Möchtest du nächstes Jahr an dieser Schule bleiben?* Stating Yes/No means that at least one piece of information has been clearly conveyed, should the ensuing response lack clarity.

Some students gave over-long responses where a lack of clarity had an impact on the mark awarded. All teachers are advised to read the published mark scheme very carefully and familiarise themselves with how the Photo card is marked and how much clear development is needed to access the top band.

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. Some students used facial expression to speculate on a person’s mood or characteristic. For example, in Photo card M, ‘*Ich denke, dass der Junge glücklich ist, weil er lächelt.*’

As is to be expected at this tier, most students began their response with ‘*Es gibt*’ as opposed to ‘*Der ist.*’ However, an invented present continuous form to describe activities was still quite prevalent. For example, in Photo card J: ‘*Die Leute sind Fußball sehen.*’ Or in Photo card Q, ‘*Die Kinder sind lernen.*’ Such usage is always given some credit for communication but also classed as a more serious lapse in clarity.

Students generally recognised the questions eliciting a response in a past or future time frame. On occasion, a present tense was used with a past time marker, or the auxiliary verb was omitted in a perfect tense structure.

Specific Higher tier Photo card comments

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

Photo card J

Task 4: Students who began their response about the negative aspects of watching television with ‘*Die negativen Aspekte ...*’ often struggled to formulate a clear message. The task was more easily achieved by a simple statement like ‘*Es ist langweilig.*’ However, a surprising number of students thought that ‘*addictiv*’ is a German word.

Photo card K

Task 3: As in Role-play 12, an accurate pronunciation of ‘*feiern*’ proved challenging for some students.
Task 4: The past participle ‘*bekommen*’ was often understood as a present tense, probably due to it also being an infinitive form.

Photo card L

Task 2: The past participle ‘*benutzt*’ was often understood as a present tense, probably due to the lack of a *ge-* prefix.
Task 5: Students often struggled to express a view about children having a Smartphone using the conditional form ‘*sollten*’.

Photo card M

Task 3: Some students did not recognise the use of the key question word ‘*Wann*’, giving a short answer about travel by bus without reference to a time.

Photo card N

Task 5: Many students misunderstood ‘*gespendet*’ and talked about things they had bought.

Photo card O

Tasks 1 and 2: As in Role-plays 14 and 17, a surprising number of students could not accurately pronounce ‘*Ferien*’, meaning that their response lacked clarity.

Task 3: Most students recognised the meaning of the question, but many then started a response with ‘*Wann ich war klein ...*’ followed by a present tense.

Photo card Q

Task 1: The pronunciation of ‘*Theater*’ was sometimes anglicised, although not to the extent of Foundation tier students attempting to talk about drama.

Photo card R

Task 2: As in Photo card J, students who began their response about working in a kindergarten with ‘*Die positive/negativen Aspekte ...*’ often struggled to formulate a clear message.

The Higher tier 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.

It is worth stressing that, in order to score the highest marks, responses must be **clearly** developed. If there are frequent lapses in clarity, this will have an impact on the mark awarded for Communication. Sometimes the clarity of message suffers because students are trying to regurgitate over-long responses. Centres are advised that a three-clause response is considered to be extended for marking purposes.

Most students attempted a wider variety of language structures and vocabulary than students at Foundation tier. 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.

Students were generally able to form tenses accurately, including the conditional, and subjunctive forms (such as *hätte / wäre*) were used to good effect when accurately pronounced. On occasions, when forming the perfect tense, an auxiliary verb was 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.*

The standard of pronunciation was best characterised as inconsistent. This was mainly due to unsounded umlauts or the anglicised rendering of cognates. Some students delivered pre-learnt responses and lacked authentic intonation, which also precluded a higher mark in this category.

Many performances were fluent, but not necessarily in an authentic way, as pre-learnt material was often delivered at a reasonable pace. The best performances, where the full 5 marks for Spontaneity and fluency could be awarded, were those where the student combined an ability to extend responses with shorter, very natural answers to follow-up questions.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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