

German (continuers)

2014 Chief Assessor’s Report

# German (continuers)

# 2014 Chief Assessor’s Report

Overview

Chief Assessors’ reports give an overview of how students performed in their school and external assessments in relation to the learning requirements, assessment design criteria, and performance standards set out in the relevant subject outline. They provide information and advice regarding the assessment types, the application of the performance standards in school and external assessments, the quality of student performance, and any relevant statistical information.

## School Assessment

Assessment Type 1: Folio

The quality of materials submitted for moderation in 2014 had improved in comparison with previous years. This reflected teachers’ careful planning and task design, which enabled students to achieve their personal best and, in many instances, at the highest level.

Most teachers submitted 4–5 tasks for the folio component. They also attached a copy of the performance standards to each task that clearly identified the student’s achievement level. This assisted in the moderation process, which seeks to confirm teachers’ original assessment decisions. Teachers increasingly supplied moderation cover sheets for each individual student that listed assessment tasks and grades and this was also helpful.

In most instances, the specificity of context sheets had further improved. This also helped to facilitate higher achievement because it gave students a clearer understanding of requirements such as the context, audience, text type, and style of writing.

The folios submitted were of a high standard and there were a number of addendums to existing learning and assessment plans. This suggests that the majority of teachers re-evaluate their plans and task design carefully to suit the interests and needs of their changing cohorts. Feedback on school assessment and more support materials on the SACE Board website undoubtedly played a part in facilitating improved practices.

### Interaction

The most successful interactions were those that allowed students to demonstrate their ability to interact spontaneously across a range of topics and deal with topic shifts and unpredicted elements. In addition, interactions were successful when students adjusted or elaborated their ideas and opinions in response to reactions. Although effective preparation is essential, overly rehearsed interactions can potentially limit student achievement against some of the performance standards. Interactions need to be authentic, spontaneous, and allow students to maximise their achievement in the time available. Consequently, the onus is on teachers to ask open-ended questions that address a range of topics and allow students to reflect, substantiate, and argue a position. Questions that are too narrow can limit that scope; for example, ones that solely focus on the student’s personal world or discussions based around one specific topic area, such as ‘environment,’ or one particular stimulus, such as an individual film.

Interactions should consist of a dialogue between an individual student and their teacher. Almost all teachers have by now moved away from the model where interactions are preceded by presentations, because this curtails the available time and potentially limits the scope for student’s ability to maximise their achievement.

### Text Analysis

Teachers increasingly devised their own materials for the analysis of written German and the occasional visual text, but past examination texts remained the preferred option for listening tasks. Although the more recent examination papers address all relevant performance standards, it is important to recognise that some older examination listening tasks do not lend themselves to assessing the IR2 and IR3 specific features.

Materials produced by teachers were generally of a high standard, combining spoken and written texts, featuring questions that addressed the relevant interpretation and reflection performance standards, and requiring students to reflect on and interpret content and textual features. Teachers are increasingly moving away from numerical assessment and are correlating questions explicitly with the relevant performance standards. This is also deemed good practice when preparing students for this part of their school as well as external assessment. It is useful if teachers include transcripts of listening and visual texts with their moderation materials.

**Text Production**

The more successful students were able to demonstrate depth, breadth, detailed content, variety in expression, justification of opinions, and originality and creativity in their writing. Most teachers set appropriate word limits and assessment conditions that contributed to the generally high standard of the work submitted. Folios frequently included two text production tasks; this enabled students to nuance their writing and demonstrate their ability to write for different purposes, contexts, and audiences. If there is more than one text production task as part of the folio, then this differentiation is essential. Students should be issued with a context sheet that explicitly identifies the context, purpose, audience, text type, and kind of writing required. If students are asked to write the script for a speech, it is not necessary to supply the actual recording. However, if recordings are submitted for moderation, it is essential to include transcripts because the text production is a written task.

The most common mistakes that students made in their text production tasks related to subject–verb agreement, syntax, case, and adjective endings. Students should focus on these areas when proofreading their work.

Assessment Type 2: In-depth Study

It was pleasing to see a diverse range of interesting research topics and assessment tasks. A number of students excelled in one or more of the in-depth study tasks and this can be attributed to several factors:

* The student had researched a topic about which they were passionate.
* The student chose a topic that was appropriate to their linguistic proficiency.
* The topic had some level of controversy, which not only improved student motivation, but also provided the necessary scope to inform, analyse, persuade, and reflect.

Teacher advice is critical in guiding students to make choices that allow them to maximise their own personal achievement. Students should be encouraged to consult a range of sources and research widely in German.

Historical topics — particularly those relating to World War II and German reunification — remained popular, but a number of students investigated current topics, such as the environmental impact of winter sports in Garmisch. Others researched influential Germans/German speakers from different walks of life, such as Dietrich Bonnhoefer, Friedensreich Hundertwasser, and Wolf Biermann, or contemporary authors such as Cornelia Funke. Various art movements such as German Expressionism and the Blaue Reiter also featured among the interesting and suitable topics that gave students the opportunity to successfully differentiate their
in-depth study tasks and demonstrate learning against all relevant performance standards.

Topics must have an explicit connection to Germany, so the topics/sub-topics identified within the prescribed themes of the ‘The German-speaking Communities’ and the ‘The Changing World’ provide a good starting point for topic selection. Teachers are strongly encouraged to refer to the revised list of suitable in-depth study topics that can be found in the support materials section of the SACE Board website.

It is essential that teachers clarify with their students, at the earliest opportunity, the focus of each in-depth study task and the differences in purpose, context, audience, and content in order to avoid doubling up. Using a context sheet that describes the respective task explicitly and specifies its purpose, context, audience, text type, and kinds of writing can ensure this. Teachers should explicitly teach the textual features and linguistic structures that align with different text types as early as possible. It is important that students include a bibliography for the in-depth study which should contain a range of sources in German. It may also be of benefit to the students if they can draw on a number of authentic texts to facilitate their own text production.

### Oral presentation in German

Most students opted for a persuasive speech to be able to present their content in an enthusiastic and often impassioned manner. The more successful students used a range of linguistic and rhetorical devices effectively in order to create interest, engage their audience, and achieve the desired impact.

### Written Response in German

Most students were able to present their information effectively and demonstrate the ability to use a range of linguistic, rhetorical, and textual devices when writing for different purposes. The more successful students had clearly given a lot of thought and time to preparing, completing, and editing their work.

### Reflection

A proportion of the reflections were of a slightly higher standard than in previous years. It is important that teachers discuss with students explicitly the purpose and level of breath and depth required in order to meet the requirements of the task. Students should select an in-depth study topic that allows for reflection on cultures, values, beliefs, practices, and ideas represented in texts and also personal reflection on their own values, beliefs, practices, and ideas. A number of English reflections included quotes in German; students need to be reminded that quotes should be either translated or paraphrased. Annotated examples of reflection can be found on the SACE Board website and should be used by teachers and students to ensure that the requirements of this task are fully understood.

## Operational Advice

* Teachers are asked to check the sound quality of the interaction and in-depth study oral presentation before submitting them on CD, DVD, or USB.
* Teachers must not submit materials in folders. Actual copies of source material for the in-depth study are not required to be submitted at moderation.
* If combining with other schools for moderation, it useful to have regular discussions regarding task design and assessment in order to ensure a common understanding of how to apply the performance standards.
* Teachers are encouraged to attend professional development opportunities, such as clarifying forums, in order to ask questions, gain useful information, and engage in professional dialogue.

## External Assessment

Assessment Type 3: Examination

104 students completed the examination. The majority of students were very
well prepared; they generally coped well with conversational German and could express themselves adequately in the oral section of the examination. Presenting ideas, opinions, and concepts in German, however, is much more challenging. Students are advised to practise the more complex kinds of writing (e.g. persuasive) as well as text types such as speeches, articles, and formal letters to the editor. Vocabulary and expressions regarding *Meinungsäuβerung* should be acquired and practised in the normal course of the Year 11 and Year 12 program. In preparation for the oral exam, students need frequent opportunities to practise giving reasons, comparisons, and opinions as well as elaborating and expanding on initial statements including everyday topics.

## Oral examination

### Section 1: Conversation

Most students were adequately prepared and able to speak well and engage with interest about topics such as family, hobbies, school life, future plans, and exchange experiences. The relevance, depth of treatment of information, opinions, and comments depended largely on the student’s level of proficiency in German. The more successful and better prepared students were able to respond in depth and give opinions, thoughtful and detailed answers, and take the initiative in the conversation. It was pleasing to see a large group of students excel at this section of the oral examination.

Less successful students answered superficially and could rarely take the initiative to give more detail or expand on what was initially said. Most students were familiar with, and prepared for, questions from the well-known list of topics and sample questions. The answers were mostly relevant but many students relied on simple answers and had to be encouraged to respond in more detail and depth. The importance of preparing students to elaborate where possible must be emphasised. When students give information they need to be able to provide detail, back up their statements, and explain their opinions.

Although students in general communicated quite well, overall attention to detail and grammatical correctness could be improved; in particular, the use of impersonal pronouns and the perfect tense. At Year 12 level students are expected to be familiar with basic German grammar and able to converse in correct German.

Students and teachers are reminded that conventions demand that students should use the polite form when addressing the examiners.

### Section 2: Discussion

A great number of students were able to discuss the main points of their in-depth study at length and with good command of the relevant vocabulary. However, some students had not researched their topic in depth and were able to handle the discussion only on a superficial level, and without enough relevant vocabulary to express their ideas effectively.

The choice of topic is vitaland the teacher must offer guidance and direction when selecting the topic, the texts, and the assessment tasks. Teachers should encourage a broader approach to research and topics as well as depth of study and understanding. However, the danger is that some topics can be too broad which results in only superficial treatment of the subject, such as ‘tourist attractions in Germany’. It was very pleasing to see that many students were well prepared and could talk about their topic passionately, at length, and in depth. These students demonstrated an obvious interest in their topic and were able to comment independently or with opinion and reflection. The students who did not have a personal interest in their topic were not as well prepared and sometimes lacked their own opinions or ideas on the topic. This could limit their ability to achieve at the highest level. This highlights the importance of students and teachers working together to choose an appropriate in-depth study topic.

With any chosen topic, it is very important for students to make connections with their own lives, culture, values, and events today.

Many students had chosen a single person as their topic — such as an author — but had neglected to research the broader historical context or connected their works to other issues of the time. This did not allow them to demonstrate sufficient depth and breadth in the treatment of the topic.

Overall, most students were reasonably well prepared; however, some students appeared ‘over prepared’ with set answers but could not always cope with more probing questions. Other students showed evidence of hurried preparation only and could not discuss the main points covered in detail. Some students only provided the examiners with one or two sub-topics which made the discussion rather difficult, particularly if students didn’t have much detailed content to offer.

**Assessment Type 3: Written Examination**

### Section 1: Listening and Responding

Question 1

1. Even though students generally understood this text, many did not clearly identify the purpose of the text. They responded with ‘giving information about an event’ rather than stating that this text is an advertisement, and the purpose is to advertise and to attract the attention of the listener.
2. This part was well answered; only a few students confused Psychology with Biology or Zoology.

Question 2

1. A majority of students clearly identified who this text would appeal to.
2. Students recognised the text type and showed knowledge of linguistic features such as rhetorical questions, descriptive language, and direct speech. Some, however, did not give enough detail.
3. This question asked for detailed understanding of where the event was happening and what was on offer. Students identified mostly what was on offer but only a few students understood that events were held in 20 different places in Germany.

Question 3

This was the longest text of this section but a large number of students understood the content quite well. However, the answers required students to give a lot of detail.

1. Many students identified the stereotypical qualities represented in the text. Some students missed *zuverlässig* as a quality and misunderstood that *Mach schnell* did not indicate that Germans like to drive fast cars.
2. Many students recognised the characteristics but did not provide evidence from the text with examples to support their statements.
3. Some students did not understand the difference between characteristics and emotions and described Georgia as a patient person and quite calm. In fact, Georgia is very frustrated and gets progressively more so until she is angry and disgusted with Stefan.

Question 4

This question was overall the best-answered question of the Listening and Responding section.

1. and (b) Most students could identify the advantages and disadvantages of repeating a school year in a German school. Again, detail in the answer was required for students to achieve full marks.

### Section 2: Reading and Responding

### Part A

This section of the exam proved to be the most challenging and only very few students managed to get full marks. The answers for the section are in English so, when giving examples from the text, any quotes must be either translated into English or paraphrased in English. Quotes in German with no English explanation cannot be used as evidence or justification of a response. The same applies for the Listening and Responding section of the exam.

Question 5

1. Most students identified child labour as a driving force. Fewer commented about its illegality and that those children were being exploited in cacao plantations. There was a frequent misunderstanding of the number of children working there: ‘*1,8 Millionen Kinder auf Kakaoplantagen, ein Viertel davon…*’, with many students just using 1.8 billion.
2. A few students were not able to comment on the actions taken by the students and others thought that the students held a chocolate fair rather than formed an action group, misunderstanding the name *‘Schokofair-AG’*. Nearly every student mentioned the film and the competition that the students won. There was confusion, however, about the students’ attempt to interview big chocolate companies. Some students didn’t mention the interview at all, and others wrote that the companies had interviewed the students. Only a very small number of students actually understood that it was the students who were trying to interview the companies.
3. Most students recognised some evidence of the students’ success. They identified the winning of the Global Citizen Award but some thought the win was solely due to the film rather than for the variety of activities the students had undertaken. Some students were able to recognise that two students had been made ambassadors for UNICEF. There was some confusion with numbers and some students thought that supermarkets stocked fair trade chocolate for the first time after the students’ actions, rather than four times more chocolate than they had before.
4. Many students identified that the reader was addressed explicitly. However, very few students recognised that the text highlighted the achievements of those students and showed how they developed from a small interest group at school to one that gained international recognition. Hardly any student picked up that the text is showing a great example of what students (young people) can do to fight injustice and raise awareness and, as such, is appealing to young people. A few students wrote that in the text those children have no human rights and that in turn emotionally engages (in this case shocks) the audience. Some answers contrasted the plight of those African children with children in Germany who could eat chocolate without a care in the world. Other answers said that the text presents a credible argument because it uses facts and statistics.

Question 6

This question presented the most difficulties for students and was the least
well-answered question of the whole exam.

1. A number of students did not identify that the text was a response (a letter to the editor) to a previous article on professional success of women and that it expressed a particular point of view, pointing out that the focus of the article was wrong. The fact that the author of the article did a disservice to women in general is quite clear in the text, but very few students picked this up. This letter aims to convince the reader that gender pay gaps and gender inequalities still exist, despite some women having high-powered jobs.
2. The word ‘how’ in the question seemed to prompt a number of students to write about techniques rather than answer the question as to how the letter writer feels about the issue. Of the three questions for this text, students had most success with their responses to this question.
3. Nearly all students were able to identify rhetorical questions. Other examples of the author’s techniques were that she used a lot of facts and presented reasonable arguments that women still do not experience equality in the workplace.
4. Having written about techniques in Question 6b, some students then repeated that information in Question 6c.

### Part B

This is always a challenging section of the exam and it is always surprising how sensible and perceptive students’ observations are and how well students even with quite limited German can express often quite complex ideas. There were a number of students who wrote excellent essays: their ideas were interesting and original, they gave excellent examples, and their arguments were well organised and persuasive. However, there were many students who struggled to express their ideas in German. Overall this section was the least well-handled text production task in this exam.

This section can ask students to respond in a variety of ways to a text: to give their opinion about an issue, to debate a topic, or to argue a point of view. It is very important that students have had practice in developing and using these skills. They need to know how to discuss a topic and present an argument in German and they need the vocabulary, phrases, and idioms to do so. The text type, a blog, gave students considerable freedom in choosing language, tone, and form of address. Some students went to considerable lengths to enter into the conventions of the text type, adding email addresses and user names. Others wrote informally and used no form of address and this was acceptable here. To start a blog with *Sehr geehrter Damen und Herren* is not usual. Those who simply wrote a formal essay did not fulfil the requirements of the text type.

Some students did not know what the words *Planking* or *Neknominate* meant and some students took ‘Big Brother’ to mean the TV show.

The range in tone of the replies to the blog was interesting. Some offered reasonable arguments either in favour or against the statements or, even better, argued both sides of the question. Some drew some interesting parallels between past and present, using examples from history or literature to show that private correspondence becoming public has always had the potential for dire consequences. Many responses were more or less defensive. Some said they knew about the dangers of the internet and had had lessons at school about it; others appeared to be puzzled by the statements — for them there was no problem, but they took exception to the comments about young people. Others again were abusive and belittled the writer:

 *du bist dumm und paranoid ...*

 *du bist zu alt und du bist eifersüchtig von uns ...Wir wissen viel mehr wie du...*

 *wir sind die Zukunft, wir versteht Technologie ...Du bist alt.*

 der Autor ist altmodi*sch und nicht aufgeschlossen ...*

 *Sie sind Verruckt?*

A large number of students asked, quite patronisingly, in effect ‘are you not aware that you can protect your material, making it available only to those you wish?’. One student spoke about the access that the federal police and other government agencies have to all personal files, even to files that have been deleted and mentioned the privacy issue this fact raises. None mentioned the discussions in parliament and in the media about the recent changes to the *Privacy Act*.

While it could be argued that those who were abusive or patronising were entering into the tone and spirit of the text type, students need to remember that the question asked them to argue a case ( i.e. give reasons for and against), not just to agree or disagree. Above all, they needed to give examples from their own experience. There is the added benefit here that examples always make a piece of writing more interesting and students are rewarded accordingly.

Only a few students addressed all points raised in the text systematically. It is worthwhile pointing out to students that generally each new paragraph in the Reading and Responding B task is likely to introduce a new point that probably will need to be considered in their answers. The lack of paragraphing in the responses of some students can make it very difficult to follow their arguments and to know when they are moving on to discuss another point. It can give the impression that the material is not well organised.

The better responses employed a variety of idiomatic expressions, interesting vocabulary and structures, a range of cohesive devices, and presented their ideas in a clear and logical way with the purpose of engaging the audience. The less successful texts struggled to extend beyond the vocabulary given in the text. They used short and simple sentences with only basic cohesive devices. Accuracy overall was rather varied, but the same list of frequent grammar errors was repeated from previous years: subject–verb agreement, word order in subordinate clauses, use of modal verbs, correct use of the imperative (particularly in the plural), and impersonal pronoun *man/für einen/von einem*. There was no consistency in the use of polite or familiar form when addressing the audience. As soon as students needed to express complex ideas in German or were faced with difficult syntax under examination pressure, all but the most able students fell back on English word order and idioms or translated the whole English sentence quite literally into (often uninflected) German.

### Section 4: Writing in German

The last section of the written exam is often quite challenging for students, but most were able to achieve the prescribed word limit. While the relevance of what they wrote was not generally a problem, students had difficulty providing detail, creating interest, and engaging the audience. Many students opted to list one thing after another in order to emphasise a point, rather than elaborating and working towards a climax or main point of the text. The more successful students used a range of vocabulary and expressions with good command of the more sophisticated areas of grammar like relative clauses, infinitive clauses, indirect questions, a variety of connective devises, and even the passive and subjunctive mood. It was pleasing to see that most students used paragraphs and tried to structure their texts clearly.

Question 8

Text type: speech informative, descriptive writing

This was the least frequently chosen question. Students who chose this question generally demonstrated the ability to elaborate on the use of mobile phones in the school context but only the occasional effort was made to engage the audience and present an interesting explanation of their school’s policy on mobile phones. Personal opinion was rarely backed up with examples or further elaborations.

The purpose of this question was to write a speech that contained some informative as well as persuasive elements. The more successful students put the school phone policies in the context of learning. They argued the scope of mobile phone technology to assist and enhance learning and gave examples to substantiate their opinion.

Less successful answers (in terms of purpose, context, and topic) focused on peripheral aspects, explaining how phones would be useful for the Austrian exchange students to take photos during their stay or mentioned the advantages of certain apps in finding relationships.

Question 9

Text type: article informative, persuasive writing

This question provided some of the most successful responses. Students were able to write about a natural lifestyle in the sense of healthy food and exercise; however, some responses lacked detail and elaboration. Environmentally aware lifestyle choices were rarely mentioned and, again, detailed examples were lacking. Particularly problematic was vocabulary specific to the environment.

The focus of this question was clearly persuasive, as students were asked to argue the advantages of such a life. Many students simply resorted to giving more or less arbitrary accounts of their diets, environmental practices, and preferred sports, but failed to convince the reader of the advantage of particular practices and choices. The more successful answers explained that healthy lifestyles and environmental choices are good for individuals and communities by promoting better health, fitness, and greater happiness. Students mentioned the importance of a balanced diet for health and longer life expectancy. Some argued that avoiding unhealthy foods results in more beautiful skin and hence greater beauty. Several students argued that sports lead to a happier and more fulfilled life, since serotonin levels are elevated following exercise and team sports can lead to new friendships. Some students emphasised the need to be consistent and rigorous in adopting environmental practices to preserve a healthy environment into the future. One student wrote that it is contradictory to cycle to school and still buy imported foods and other goods, since transportation of these goods is associated with high levels of energy use and pollution.

In the course of answering this question, a number of students lost sight of the required text type and started and finished with the salutations and phrases appropriate to letter or speech writing.

Question 10

Text type: letter personal, descriptive, emotive writing

This was the most popular question of the Writing in German section of the examination. Many students recounted Year 12 or exchange experiences and at times barely connected their writing to the opening sentence. Ideas were mostly predictable, fairly simple, and not explored in depth.

Students achieved better results when they took the time to plan their writing and ensure that their answers were consistently relevant to the context, purpose, and audience. More successful answers explained how finishing Year 12 finally allowed them to pursue long-awaited plans. The most successful answers used a range of language and linguistic devices; students also included humour and unexpected elements effectively to explain how something they had long hoped for finally came about. One student talked about finally being able to buy a Beetle and drive around Australia, another wrote about finally joining a famous ballet company, and another reminisced in humorous terms about their first kiss!

Unfortunately, the level of accuracy in expression overall was variable. Subject–verb agreement, use of the present perfect tense, modal verbs, case and adjective endings, word order, and relative pronouns were frequent sources of errors.

Students and teachers are advised to start to practise writing in German as early as possible, paying attention to the requirements of the various text types and styles of writing. It is important to ask students to scrutinise the question carefully to ensure that their response is consistently relevant to the purpose, context, and audience. They must also fully understand the text type and kind of writing required (persuasive, informative, or narrative etc.) and make appropriate choices regarding stylistic and linguistic techniques/textual features.

Students should be encouraged to plan their writing for this section comprehensively; for example, by using mind maps to ensure higher-level answers and consequently higher achievement in this section. Past examination papers provide excellent practice material for this purpose. Copying parts of questions verbatim should also to be avoided.

Operational Advice

School assessment tasks are set and marked by teachers, and teachers’ assessment decisions are reviewed by moderators. Teacher grades/marks should be evident on all student assessment work.

German (continuers)

Chief Assessor