2021 VCE German oral external assessment report

General comments

The 2021 German examination assessed the VCE German Study Design *2020–2024* and examination specifications. It is important that students and teachers familiarise themselves with the specifications for oral examinations, available on the VCE German examinations webpage of the VCAA website. Students and teachers are also reminded that a [series of videos](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/assessment/vce-assessment/past-examinations/Pages/RevisedSecondLanguageOralExaminationVideos.aspx) has been produced to help with preparation for the oral examinations.

It should be noted that during the oral examination:

* students may be asked a variety of questions of varying levels of difficulty. Questions may also be asked in a different order from the one that students anticipate
* assessors may interrupt students to ask questions during either section of the examination; this should be regarded as a normal process in a discussion
* assessors may also repeat or rephrase questions
* normal variation in assessor body language is acceptable.

Specific information

Section 1 – Conversation

Section 1 of the examination involves a general conversation between the student and the two assessors about the student’s personal world and their interactions with the German language and culture as learners. It is an organic conversation about the student’s personal world.

Students of all ability levels showed extended preparation and were able to keep talking throughout this section.

Conversations that scored highly were advanced well, with the students passionate about getting their thoughts across and prepared to tell the assessors something unusual or funny about their experiences during this last year. These students listened carefully to the questions posed by the assessors, answered concisely and then proceeded to elaborate further. This elaboration often included why they had a particular opinion or how their answer could be illustrated with an example. Others answered the questions directly but then used it as an opportunity to take the conversation into a related area of interest. More capable students were not reliant on rote-learned answers and often included a range of appropriate idioms, making it a real conversation, rather than an interview. Many students used repair strategies when they didn’t understand a question; this meant that students produced relevant responses and the conversation proceeded to flow naturally. It was clear that the more that students had thought about their contribution, the more engaging it was for the assessors. This made for a lively conversation and positive atmosphere.

Choosing an original way to answer a question was an excellent strategy. For example, a basic question such as ‘tell me about your family’ elicited the more unusual ‘*Wir sind zu viert*’ (we are four / there are four of us) as an opener. Other examples showing originality were ‘*Ich räume mein Zimmer nicht oft auf: meine Mutter sagt, es sieht aus, als ob ein Orkan ständig im Zimmer weht*’ (I don’t often tidy my room; my mother says it looks like there’s always a hurricane in there), ‘*Ich mähe den Rasen und dafür bekomme ich Taschengeld* … *ich spare einen Teil und gebe einen Teil aus* … *oft für* …’ (I mow the lawn and get pocket money … I save some of it and spend some … often on …) or ‘*Ich mähe den Rasen jeden Samstag, weil ich am Sonntag* …’ (I mow the lawn every Saturday, because on Sunday I …), segueing nicely onto another subtopic. Similarly, ‘*Ich treibe keinen Sport, aber ich kann Ihnen sagen, was ich in meiner Freizeit mache*’ (I don’t play sport, but I can tell you what I do in my free time). Students are advised not to wait for a question, but rather to lead the conversation as much as possible. However, long monologues are not permitted, and students need to be prepared to be interrupted when assessors wish to ask a follow-up question or move to a different subtopic; this applies to the discussion section of the examination as well.

On a linguistic level, conversations that scored highly showed competence in a variety of tenses, used modal constructions accurately and used some examples of subjunctive; for example, ‘*wenn ich mehr Zeit hätte, würde ich* …’ (if I had more time, I would …) and ‘*es wäre gut, wenn ich* … *könnte*’ (it would be good, if I could …). Pronouns are commonly used and all cases need to be practised. Some students used a variety of expressions and fillers, which increased their confidence, as their ‘throw-away’ lines made the conversation more natural and fun; for example, ‘*aber das würde ich nie machen!*’ (but I’d never do that!), ‘*aber so ist das Leben*’ (but life’s like that), ‘*genau!*’ (exactly), ‘*gute Frage*’ (good question) and ‘*mehr oder weniger*’ (more or less). Also, interesting and unusual adjectives lend themselves well to enhancing the linguistic quality of a student’s German; for example, rather than simply listing off the names of one’s parents and siblings, one could describe them using words such as *strebsam* (ambitious), *ausgelassen* (hilarious) or *miesepetrig* (grumpy). Common errors noted this year were mismatched pronouns, incorrect verb conjugations and word order. Students are advised to revise and practise personal pronouns – all cases and genders, singular and plural – and present tense verb endings, past participles and word order, in particular the placement of the verb.

Most students were able to reflect on their experiences as language learners, giving a variety of reasons why they were studying German, and conversations that scored highly indicated what was most challenging/rewarding about learning this language, using sophisticated language and idioms to explain their thoughts. Students who had been on exchange gave personal examples and other students mentioned aspects of German culture that they found interesting in order to weave cultural differences and comparisons into the conversation.

Lastly, students should be aware that rushed responses can appear rote-learnt and are often unclear. Students should speak with a measured pace, which gives them time to pay attention to the more unusual German sounds and the specific intonation of the language. The key strategy here is to practise regularly with classmates and teachers – this is the best way to improve fluency and pronunciation, increase spontaneity and gain confidence.

Section 2 – Discussion

Following the conversation, the student is required to discuss their chosen subtopic and the supporting visual material that they have brought with them.

The specifications require the student to explore aspects of the subtopic, including information, opinions and ideas. It is important to carefully consider the choice of subtopic and supporting visual material when preparing for this section of the examination. Images that included rich information provided more opportunity for students to be able to offer a greater depth and range of information, ideas, opinions and reflections about the subtopic. While the quality of the visual stimulus was not assessed, students who selected images that were easy to share with the assessors found it easier to communicate their ideas.

Students are reminded that it is not the image that is being assessed – it is the quality of the discussion. Students should therefore select an image that adequately enables them to integrate that image into a discussion about their selected subtopic.

Stronger students demonstrated a high level of thorough preparation and were experts in their subtopic. They could explain, expand and give opinions, and moved the conversation forward confidently. They offered extra information and insights and had the vocabulary to do this effectively. This led to engaged and interesting discussions. Other students did not know a lot about their subtopic, so could not expand much in response to questions from the assessors.

The selection of the subtopic is therefore key, and consultation with the teacher is important to match the enthusiasm and personal interest of the student with the expertise of the student. The choice of subtopics should carefully consider the ability and interest of the individual student. A good subtopic is one that allows students to explore something new and also enables them to relate the subtopic both to themselves and to Australia or other relevant cultures. Depth is key here, as is the suitability of a subtopic to serve as an opportunity for students to offer thoughts and opinions rather than presenting a mere collection of facts. Giving some sort of chronology or history behind an important event is a useful strategy, especially when the student can then bring strands together, including their own personal experiences in relation to the subtopic. This makes the discussion engaging and relevant.

Most students had prepared a rationale as to why they had chosen a particular visual stimulus – this is useful both in the selection phase and also in giving the student a rich stimulus to work with. Discussions that scored highly used the image well, making it the focus of the discussion, referring to several aspects that were shown in the picture and using the image to initiate various directions for the discussion. ‘Creative use’ of an image means to use the image to create opportunities for discussion. Some students used the image to introduce the subtopic, explaining its relevance, then expanded on the subtopic, coming back to the image repeatedly to illustrate a particular point. Others highlighted what was not on the image and used this as a basis of comparison. In addition, students are advised to practise speaking with an image in their hand that is facing the audience – how to speak to this, how to indicate aspects for discussion, not wave it around, etc.

Discussions that scored highly used broad vocabulary, lots of phrases to reflect and express opinions and showed competence in using past tenses to describe what the student had studied, past events, etc. Modal constructions such as *hier kann man sehen* … (you can see here …), were heard frequently, though students should also learn phrases to describe where on the page something is (e.g. *auf der rechten Seite des Bildes* / *links unten* / *hier in der Ecke* / *in der Mitte* (on the right hand side of the image / bottom left / here in the corner / in the middle)). Many students used expressions such as *das ist ein gutes Beispiel von* … (this is a good example of …) as a springboard to a new aspect for discussion.

Students are not expected to know every possible fact about their selected subtopic, however, they should have a range of repair strategies prepared that will allow them to acknowledge what they have not focused on to bring them back to the aspects that they have. Some useful phrases such as *Tatsächlich habe ich mich nicht darauf konzentriert, aber ich habe gefunden, dass* … (Actually, I didn’t focus on that, but I found that …) should be learnt.

Finally, many students had prepared an appropriate conclusion to their discussion. They rounded off the assessment well, either with a quote or well wishes to the assessors, which made for a natural finish to the discourse.