2023 VCE German oral external assessment report

Refer to the relevant [study design](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/vce/vce-study-designs/Pages/languages.aspx) and [examination criteria and specifications](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/assessment/vce-assessment/past-examinations/Pages/Languages-index.aspx) for full details on this study and how it is assessed.

Section 1: Conversation

What students did well

In 2023 students:

* were engaged in a general conversation about their personal world. Most students were able to explore four (family, school, interests, future plans) of the ‘big five’ topics in detail, responding to follow-up questions and giving an impressive picture of who they are. Humour was often employed to illustrate a specific account of their lives. It is a great strategy to conquer one’s nerves and engage the assessors
* provided a range of relevant information, ideas and opinions with an appropriate depth. Most students were able to talk about themselves with sufficient detail. Students who scored highly explored select aspects of their lives in great detail and readily enhanced facts with ideas, evaluations and opinions
* elaborated on, clarified and defended ideas and opinions. Most students responded well to follow-up questions and were able to support the opinions they offered
* demonstrated a very good level of understanding, and responded confidently, including the use of appropriate repair strategies as needed. Most students were able to understand and answer the assessors’ questions, and asked for clarification when a question was not readily understood
* used appropriate vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure and expression (pronunciation, intonation, stress and tempo). Many students used a range of vocabulary and grammatical structures which matched the topics they talked about in this section. Their linguistic expression was also appropriate.

Areas for improvement

In preparing for this exam, students could:

* ensure adequate preparation for the conversation with relevance, depth and range of information, ideas and opinions. Some students were quite sparse in their responses, for example, when a description of their family did not extend beyond mentioning who the members of the family are, or when a question about interests was restricted to a sentence or two about one particular sport. Students are expected to go deeper, and to not just recite facts but offer ideas and opinions. (Why is a particular sport fascinating? How could it be made more popular?) The recently added topic of one’s engagement with the German language and culture presented an issue for some students, who were unable to go beyond some superficial remarks about, for example, the fact that they dislike German grammar because it is difficult, or that Christmas markets are the best feature of German culture. On the other hand, students with higher scores would discuss a favourite German word or explain in detail their culture shock when they first went to a German-speaking country
* practise answering a range of questions to be able to advance the conversation. Advancing and carrying forward the conversation was difficult for some students, who were too reliant on the assessors to ask question after question. The objective here is for students to learn to explore in detail something they were asked about, and to then move the conversation on by addressing a related topic. For example, an in-depth account of one’s family traditions may lead to the student pondering the importance of their heritage, or why a certain food, sport or game is important to them. It is also important that students and teachers remember that, as this section is a conversation, assessors will interrupt any rote-learned monologues. While some elements of this section will, of course, have been well prepared and practised by the students, they are also expected to give spontaneous responses and listen closely to the assessors’ questions and prompts
* build confidence through practising interactions in the language. Fluency was an issue for some students who spoke very haltingly and lacked in confidence; more and regular practice in the lead-up to the examination is required
* practise using more complex sentence structures and syntax. Quite frequently, vocabulary and syntax in this section lacked complexity, as in some cases it was restricted to a basic level. One example: Ich spiele gern Basketball, weil ich mit meinen Freunden spiele. Es ist Spaβ (this is a common and intrusive error, instead of Es macht Spaβ) und ich trainiere zweimal pro Woche; ‘I like to play basketball because I play with my friends. It’s fun, and I train twice a week’). Students should endeavour to make this more complex, e.g. Ich spiele wirklich gern und oft Basketball, weil dieser Sport mir als Mannschaftssport die Möglichkeit gibt, mit einigen meiner Freunde zusammen zu sein. Seit ich mit elf Jahren Basketball zu spielen begann, habe ich groβen Spaβ an diesem Sport. (‘I really enjoy playing basketball often because, as a team sport, this sport gives me the opportunity to be with some of my friends. Since I started playing basketball at the age of 11, I have really enjoyed the sport.’)
* practise using repair strategies to advance the conversation when needed. Students are reminded that a good way of asking for clarification, rather than asking an assessor to repeat a question, is to ask them to rephrase it, as mere repetition of a question one has not understood may not resolve the issue
* revise grammar. Verb grammar was an issue for many students, from conjugation in the present tense (subject–verb agreement especially with modal verbs) to past participles (especially with irregular verbs). Another recurring error was the position of the conjugated verbs in subclauses. Further problems concerned the declension of possessive articles and adjective endings. Some examples of frequent errors (with correct versions in parentheses) are: Er musst das machen. (Er muss das machen; ‘He has to do this.’); Das Schuljahr hat gut beginnt. (… begonnen; ‘The school year has started well.’); Das esse ich gern, weil es ist gesund. (… weil es gesund ist; ‘I like to eat this because it’s healthy.’); meine Vater (mein Vater; ‘my father’); das verwöhntes Einzelkind (das verwöhnte ...; ‘the spoiled only child …’). Careful, thorough and regular revision of these grammar topics is strongly advised (and is equally important for success in the written examination)
* build vocabulary specific to the students’ personal world and their interactions with the language and culture as learners. Some students did not have the linguistic means to explore something they had mentioned in the conversation and thus offered for questioning, for example the specifics of playing a musical instrument. Students are reminded that when they mention something, they have to expect to be quizzed about it by the assessors
* practise pronunciation, intonation, stress and tempo. In general, quite a number of students (and their teachers) need to be more aware of the particulars of German intonation and pronunciation. In terms of pronunciation, the issues that stood out were diphthongs (ei [also in contrast with ie], eu, au), the distinction between the sounds represented by the letters f/v/w (e.g. saying something that sounds like ‘maine Water’ for ‘mein Vater’) and umlauts (ä, ö, ü). There is also the need to be exact with pronouncing verb and adjective endings. With the wide variety of German media available online (e.g. podcasts and TV streaming), it is strongly advised that students immerse themselves regularly in the sound and pronunciation of German native speakers.

Section 2: Discussion

What students did well

In 2023 students:

* clearly introduced the focus of their subtopic, alerting assessors to the image brought to support the discussion of the subtopic. Many students were able to give the assessors a clear account of their subtopic, thus enabling questions and facilitating a discussion. While some students indicated right away the role their image was to play in the discussion, a strategy that worked well was to hold the image back initially and to then bring it into the discussion when it was most relevant. Overall, students were well adjusted to the new format of this section of the examination
* demonstrated in-depth knowledge of their subtopic. Many students demonstrated a thorough knowledge of their chosen topic, at times going well beyond its immediate scope and thus being able to open the discussion to wider perspectives. Some students impressed with an unprompted and highly relevant comparison of (some aspects of) the subtopic to Australian matters or daily affairs and to their own personal world
* used the image skilfully to support the discussion on the subtopic. Well-chosen images were used to stress points students were making and even to advance the discussion by offering another layer of the subtopic. Students who scored highly would come back to the image once or twice to exploit it at different stages of the discussion and explore as many of its aspects as possible
* engaged in a discussion using relevant information, ideas and opinions, and clarified, elaborated on and defended them. A number of students who scored highly used information from their personal world or experience to introduce their subtopic, and/or frequently related elements of their discussion to their own opinion and ideas. Some employed hypotheticals successfully, for example, discussing what – in their opinion – would happen if a certain German phenomenon (such as the rise of the AfD) took off in Australia. The most impressive performances came from students who demonstrated a passionate engagement with their subtopic and thus engaged the assessors in a meaningful discussion for the full duration of this section
* communicated effectively with assessors throughout the discussion, including through the use of repair strategies
* used appropriate vocabulary
* used appropriate grammar and sentence structures
* used appropriate expression, including pronunciation, intonation, stress and tempo.

Areas for improvement

In preparing for this exam, students could:

* choose an appropriate subtopic to suit ability and interests. It is vital that the choice of subtopic is informed as much as possible by students’ interests, heritage or preferences. Too often it is hard for assessors to determine a student’s personal relationship with the subtopic. The discussion will be greatly enlivened when a student’s passion for the topic shines through
* prepare a wide range and depth of information, ideas and opinions with an original perspective on the subtopic
* avoid listing facts without expressing a point of view, or presenting general knowledge as research
* convey information learnt from sources but also express an opinion with an original perspective on the subtopic. The above three points need further work as a number of students continue to treat this section as a presentation of facts. While facts are at the core of a student’s preparation, they need to be treated as a means to foster a discussion, which requires a personal approach to the subtopic, including a student’s opinion and ideas
* use the image to support the discussion on the subtopic and describe its relevance to the selected subtopic. The selection of the image should be informed by its role to support or even advance the discussion, illustrating points made but ideally also adding further valuable insights. It was noticed that some students were unable to bring the image into the discussion in a meaningful way. Images should not contain much writing; while slogans on political posters, for example, are perfectly acceptable, a full paragraph in German or students’ notes certainly are not
* avoid relying on pre-learned responses that do not address an assessor’s question. For this section, too, it is important that students and teachers remember that, as this section is a discussion and not a presentation, assessors will interrupt any rote-learned monologues. While some elements of this section will of course have been well prepared and practised by the students, they are also expected to give spontaneous responses
* practise using repair strategies. Not all students were aware that they are welcome to ask for clarification when needed, for example, requesting the re-wording of a question. It is also legitimate to point out to the assessors that a question might be beyond the scope of their preparation – as long as such a claim can be justified (which would not be the case, to use a made-up example, if a student whose subtopic is ‘The Berlin Wall’ could not provide information about how this wall affected people in East and West Germany or did not know crucial dates)
* revise grammar (see the same point above for Section 1)
* build vocabulary specific to the selected subtopic. As this section is a discussion of a researched topic, students are expected to use more complex language and more specialised vocabulary than they would in Section 1
* practise pronunciation, intonation, stress and tempo (see the same point above for Section 1).