

# FIRST LANGUAGE GERMAN

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Paper 0505/01  
Reading

## Key messages

To do well in this paper candidates should:

- take care to read the sub-questions in **Question 1** carefully and consider the number of marks available for each
- produce a structured response to **Question 2** in which each point is made briefly rather than expanded on
- use their own words as far as possible to gain higher marks for Language in all questions.

## General comments

Candidates read two texts on a common theme: the reduction of private car usage. Text 1 talked about a city in Spain that has banned cars from its centre; Text 2 describes initiatives in Germany to promote public transport in order to convince more people to leave their car at home.

Candidates then answered comprehension questions relating to the first text for **Question 1**. In **Question 2**, candidates were asked to summarize both texts with reference to the positive aspects and the challenges of a car-free city and of free public transport.

The majority of candidates coped well with the demands of this exam and showed a good understanding of the two texts as demonstrated by their answers to **Question 1** and **Question 2**.

The quality of language varied from excellent to poor. While some candidates wrote confidently using their own words, others restricted themselves to copying large chunks of the original text(s) without attempting to rephrase ideas and opinions, which attracted little to no credit.

In **Question 2**, candidates should be reminded to keep the specifics of the summary task in mind and not to rephrase both texts generally without reference to the terms of the question. Copying sentences from the text will not gain credit as it does not demonstrate summary skills.

## Comments on specific questions

### Question 1

- (a) A straightforward warm-up question. However, some candidates gave too much detail to explain that Pontevedra was now quiet (e.g. you can hear birds etc.), thus only achieving one out of two possible marks.
- (b) The majority of candidates coped well with this question and scored full marks.
- (c) Candidates coped well with this question and were mostly able to gain at least two out of three possible marks. However, some candidates failed to mention that car parking spaces had been transformed into green spaces.
- (d) The majority of candidates answered this question correctly and were able to identify the differences in quality of life between the two cities.

- (e) Most candidates scored at least one out of two possible marks and mentioned that the increased footfall had a positive influence on small businesses.
- (f) Many candidates did not provide enough detail in this question and could not be awarded full marks. They talked generally about Pontevedra being an inspiration to other cities, but they either failed to mention that representatives of German cities travelled to Pontevedra or that a representative from Pontevedra organised workshops all over Europe.
- (g) Some candidates struggled with this question as they were unable to draw their answer from the whole text and not just from a single paragraph.

## Question 2

Most candidates coped well with this task and were able to identify many positives and challenges of a car-free city and free public transport. The quality of language was mostly good. On occasion, however, poor quality of language and/or inappropriate register made it difficult to understand some summaries.

Candidates should be reminded to adhere to the word limit. Any points made after the 250-word cut-off will not be credited. The aim of this question is to produce a concise summary; candidates should be discouraged from copying sentences from the text; instead, they should summarize points succinctly.

# FIRST LANGUAGE GERMAN

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Paper 0505/02  
Writing

## Key messages

To do well on this paper, candidates should:

- write accurately
- use a wide range of vocabulary and structures
- provide a range of well-developed ideas
- ensure their essays are relevant to the chosen topic, well organised and coherent.

## General comments

The best work this session came from candidates who planned their time and their essay. This led to well-structured discursive or persuasive arguments, swift storytelling and engaging descriptive texts with precise and convincing detail. It also made for fine legibility due to unhurried handwriting and a minimum of crossed-out words or sentences.

In **Section 1**, candidates showed some impressive, in-depth knowledge of their chosen topics, often linking points using a variety of phrases and specific vocabulary to point out finer details and intricate connections between their arguments. In **Section 2**, a large number of captivating ideas was presented, not only in innovative stories but also in insightful, convincing descriptions of atmospheres and thoughts. Here, successful essays were based on a clear adherence to the respective essay-types.

## Style and accuracy

In the case of a large number of essays, there was a noticeable discrepancy between fluent, well-controlled syntax, combined with impressive, sophisticated and varied vocabulary and a lack of knowledge of, or attention to, spelling, punctuation and grammar. Otherwise impressive language that might have achieved a high number of marks often failed to do so on account of a high number of mistakes.

Secondly, there was a marked tendency to disregard the need for an appropriate register in **Section 1**. An expression such as *‘Das Ding ist, deine Familie kannst du dir nicht aussuchen’* serves to illustrate the level to which colloquialisms have crept into essays where formal language is expected. Other examples are: *klar* instead of *natürlich*, *‘raus* and *‘rein* instead of *heraus*, *herein*, and *mal* instead of *einmal*. The use of *wo* as a universal conjunction for relative clauses highlights another persistent issue that needs resolving. Anglicisms were also often used when trying to reach for more sophisticated vocabulary, for instance *‘eine große Nummer von’* instead of *eine große Anzahl an* and *‘Experienz’* instead of *Erfahrung*. Wide reading and learning about synonyms and antonyms might help avoid neologisms such as *‘unendlich’* and *‘unerfolgreich’*, *‘manipolierte Leser’* and *‘extermierte Bücher’*. Examples of poor grammar and spelling included: *‘sie langweiligen sich’*, *‘ich hatte übergeschlafen’* and *‘man kann auf dem Kindle nicht heileiten’*.

Spelling in general seemed to suffer from neglect: many umlauts had not been applied, often leading to grammatical mistakes and changes in meaning. Examples include: *musste* instead of *müsste* and *wurde* instead of *würde*. Another important issue centred on the spelling of imported (mostly English) words and phrases. Newly integrated, frequently used words, especially from the areas of IT and computer science, need to be in the correct gender (*das WLAN*, *die LED*) and candidates need to use the correct declensions. German spelling rules apply here too, and the Duden dictionary is the best source for clarifying individual, as well as general, cases. Candidates are advised to revise and practise these points of grammar before taking the exam.

Difficulties with grammar also arose with word order, particularly in more sophisticated syntactical constructions where more than one subordinate clause needed to be slotted into place, especially when

combining *wenn* and *dass* (e.g. 'Das bedeutet, dass, wenn der Leser auf eine längere Reise geht, muss er einen Anschluss für ein Ladekabel haben'). Problems with the use of relative pronouns often led to misunderstandings or vagueness, especially the mixing up of *deren* and *ihren* (e.g. 'Viele Jugendliche haben Probleme mit deren Eltern'). Candidates are also advised to revise verbs and their usage as problems with the use of the past tense of strong verbs have increased (e.g. 'fallten' instead of *fielen*, 'schlafte' instead of *schliefen*, 'gingen' instead of *gingen*). Problems also occurred with the use of participles such as *vermeidet* and *gegleitet*. The use of tenses was also sometimes problematic. In **Section 2**, for instance, there were many shifts in tense (e.g. preterite to present and back) when the narration stayed in the same time frame – at times even within the same sentence. Tenses need to be consistently accurate for an essay to merit marks in the top band for grammar. Narrative essays in particular often lacked use of the pluperfect to relate chronological events. The wrong use of subjunctive forms to outline possible future scenarios (*Konjunktiv II*) and to quote experts (*Konjunktiv I*) undermined the effectiveness of otherwise sound arguments in **Section 1**.

Candidates are also advised to pay attention to punctuating direct speech correctly as this was sometimes overlooked. German comma rules should also be revised more thoroughly, also with a view to avoiding applying English punctuation rules in sentences such as 'Nach einer halben Stunde, hörte der Regen langsam auf'. Candidates will benefit from using all punctuation marks at their disposal: colons, semi-colons, dashes, question marks and exclamation marks. If used correctly, these enhance the quality of the essay. Attention must also be drawn to the end of sentences as these were increasingly left with no punctuation mark at all.

### Content and structure

Marks scored for Content and structure were usually higher than for Style and accuracy. Examiners reported a high number of well-structured essays.

In **Section 1**, many good points and arguments were used, and most essays provided an introduction as well as a conclusion. Some candidates did not appear to be aware of the difference between an argumentative approach that focuses on one side of a given topic (*Erörterung – linear*) and a balanced, two-sided discursive approach (*Diskussion – dialektisch*). This sometimes led to vague threads of argument and in several cases a conclusion which contradicted the points presented in the main body of the essay. Candidates should read the title carefully as this will indicate the type of response required.

This year's creative writing essays generally showed a good grasp of the requirements of the two essay-types. Most candidates made a plan before they started writing and this generally had a positive impact. The best descriptive pieces not only supplied details of sensory perception but also insight into the narrator's thoughts and feelings. Many narrative essays had a tight plot structure and often captivated the reader's interest from the start with imaginative storylines and interesting dialogues.

Candidates need to be careful with deploying prepared words and phrases for specific essay-types; using both *Kritiker* and *Befürworter* to introduce points against an idea, for instance, is confusing for the reader. Words and phrases must fit in logically in the context in which they are used. Phrases such as 'Mir wird kalt und es ist ein bisschen langweilig – ach, könnte ich nur für immer in diesem Moment verweilen!' were sometimes crowbarred into essays to no particular discursive purpose and in fact to their detriment. A similar unconvincing effect was produced by quoting studies with rather implausible statistics, e.g. 'Eine Million Büchereiangestellte verlieren ihre Arbeit'.

### Comments on specific questions

#### Section A

#### Question 1

- (a) This topic was chosen by a relatively small number of candidates but yielded plenty of food for thought. Do we need well-educated politicians to deal with important political decisions? Some candidates only focused on their own opinions or on one particular politician, but many essays commented on the need to be able to field complex and competing demands, the political and societal knowledge, and the interpersonal skills that politicians require; some of the highest achieving candidates also considered such higher-order concepts as charisma and the public's goodwill. Encouragingly, almost all responses acknowledged the direct link between wealth and education, and how this in turn is linked to democratic processes.

- (b) Would it not be better to only have digital versions of books? This was the most popular question by far. Many candidates showed very good insight into the different aspects of digitalisation of texts, the reactions of various groups within society and the value of the sensory experience of holding and reading a physical book. Many responses included observations on practicality, ease of access, environmental concerns, the pricing of digital books, and the impact on the publishing industry. Most candidates concluded that a binary solution was necessary, or at least a slow phasing out of printed books.
- (c) Candidates were asked to assess whether friends or family were more important for teenagers. The topic attracted a lot of interest, but some candidates found it quite challenging. A large number of candidates relied heavily on personal anecdotes and opinions instead of considering broader (e.g. societal) aspects and wider ramifications and therefore did not score highly in this part of the exam. Most candidates tried to explain the reasons why teenagers turned their backs on their family, or at least why families perceived it this way. The best work touched on the importance of young adults learning to become responsible members of society and on which elements of this process needed to be experienced outside family boundaries.
- (d) The topic of healthy food options was chosen less frequently than other topics. Those who did write about the posited incompatibility between good health and enjoyable, tasty food had plenty of background knowledge and a wealth of healthy recipes to refute the claim. The best essays not only explored the unhealthy aspects of supposedly tasty (fast) food, such as too much fat, sugar, salt and too many preservatives, but also explained how taste is connected to childhood experiences, learnt behavioural patterns and considerations of convenience and/or cost in modern lifestyles. Only a handful agreed with the question's statement, sometimes persuasively; most conclusions advised a more diverse, plant-based and sustainable diet and creative cooking, however.

## Section B

### Question 2

- (a) This topic was the most popular in **Section 2**. Many candidates attempted to recreate the mood, atmosphere and sensory impressions of a warm, starry night in the summer to good effect. Many falling stars, fleeting clouds and silver moon beams evoked sceneries akin to those depicted in romantic paintings. Several candidates included surprising elements or twists to their responses that were generally quite successful when integrated well into the context of the specific response. The highest scores were achieved by seamless pairings of outside stimuli and inner thoughts, for example in relation to the vastness of the universe and our own role as human beings. Many essays included the company of a pet or a fellow stargazer. Some essays managed to refer convincingly to a backstory, e.g. *„Ich hatte immer gehofft, wenn ich aus dem Gefängnis zurückkomme, würden wir zusammen die Sterne betrachten, aber sie hatte mich verraten“*. However, in general, candidates are advised to use narrative elements sparingly to ensure they adhere closely to the requirements of a descriptive essay.
- (b) This topic required candidates to describe waiting for a train at a station. It was chosen by almost as many candidates as **Question 2(a)** but produced a wider range of responses, from some very pedestrian lists of sensory experiences which could not access the higher mark bands to essays that built a genuine sense of atmosphere and a convincing feeling for the moment. Many essays managed to turn mundane details, such as the pattern and colours of chewing gum on the floor, into an interesting part of the waiting experience, thus demonstrating that they had understood the task requirements well. The best work included the point of departure and the destination of the train journey to add some background interest without dwelling on backstory too much to distract from the situation on the platform.
- (c) The narrative topics did not receive the same take-up as the descriptive topics. Only a small number of candidates opted for the story on adverse weather but produced some of the most successful responses. Rain and thunderstorms were often employed to spur on the plot, but some essays also referred to searing heat or bitter cold. There were some ambitious responses set in different contexts (e.g. pirate adventures, surfing stories) and almost all candidates who attempted this question produced a successful build-up to a clear climax. Less successful stories stuck to every-day scenarios, with information on conditions only mentioned in passing and the weather playing no further part in the plot, least of all a central part.

- (d) An impressive range of inventive plots was presented in response to this slightly more popular of the two narrative tasks. The unexpected visitors came from all walks of life, not all of them human. Several cats, dogs, badgers and squirrels frightened the protagonist who was mostly at home alone. Often, a relative or parent who was dearly missed brightened the day with their sudden appearance, some criminal activity was reported to the police and thieves caught in the nick of time; even aliens paid visits to some narrators, and one was never seen alive on this planet again. The best essays ensured that the climax was presented at the right moment, that the lead-up to it was not too long and that the ending – open or not – was clearly formed as well. Most essays had a clear timeline, a rough plan and even a tension curve, all of which proved sound methods to help access the higher mark bands.