

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

How to work out the answer even if you don't know all the words!

There are hints and tips on how to discover the meaning without needing your dictionary, too.

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

or How to work out the answer even if you don't know all the words

In your GCSE examination you will sometimes need to understand or use words which you haven't met before. Don't panic! This is where you need communication strategies or ways of working out the answer even if you don't know all the words. The next few pages give you plenty of tips. Use these and your common sense and you will find life much easier.

Understanding words when Listening and Reading

In the examination, as in real life, when you are listening to someone speaking German, you don't have time to use a dictionary. When you are reading German, you would quickly lose the thread if you had to look up every word. So you need some help in finding the meaning quickly, without any help from anywhere else.

It will help to ask yourself a few simple questions.

Do I need to read or listen to every word?

Sometimes the same thing will be written or said more than once, in different ways. Sometimes there will be extra information which you do not need in order to answer the question. In both cases, you need to know what's important and what you can ignore.

To help you pick out the information you really need to know so that you can answer the question

- make sure you really understand the question set
- decide what kind of a question it is – is it asking for details, or for an overall impression?
- watch out for the words which will help you answer it, and ignore the rest.

Asking for details:

For example

"The girl was tall and thin, with brown hair. Her coat and shoes were blue. She stopped at the kiosk and bought a newspaper".

Question: "What colour were her clothes?"

To answer this you need to watch out only for words for **colours** and **clothes**. You can ignore the rest of the sentence, because you don't need the other words to answer this question.

Asking for an overall impression:

When the question asks you to sum up what you have heard or read, or give an overall impression, you will probably need to gather clues from different places in the text. In this kind of question it is very important not to make snap judgements from just one or two words – you need to read or listen right through to the end before you decide on your answer.

For example

"Although he didn't have much money, Jim always tried to help other people. Jim was small and thin and his clothes were old but he would rather give a few pence to charity than spend money on himself"

Question: "What does this tell you about Jim's character?"

To answer this, you need to watch out for the words which tell you about the kinds of things Jim did. The question isn't asking you what Jim looked like, so you can ignore the words which tell you about his appearance and concentrate on the ones which tell you how he behaved.

Are there any useful clues in the sentence?

The rest of the sentence can help you to work out the meaning of a word you don't know. The following sentences contain made-up words, but you can make a reasonable guess at what kind of things they are from the rest of the sentence.

"The man was wearing a *fizzo* on his head." (some kind of hat)

"The woman was accompanied by a long-haired *bilpo* on a long lead." (some kind of animal)

Intelligent guesswork of this kind can help you to make an attempt at the answer.

How can my knowledge of grammar help me?

If you know about how plurals of words are formed, how different tenses are made and such things as the rules for making words agree with each other, you will have some idea of what kind of unknown word you are dealing with. This can help you to make an intelligent guess at its meaning.

Look at this example in English:

"The hungry cows waited at the gate."

Here are some of the things which you know about English and which would help in working out what kind of words you are dealing with.

- Adding '-s' usually makes a noun plural in English
- Adding '-ed' to a verb usually makes a verb into the past tense
- A word between 'the' and a noun is often an adjective describing the noun

Using clues of this kind in German can help you to find your way through the sentence and to work out

- what kind of word you are dealing with
- how the sentence as a whole fits together

What do I know about the German way of life?

If you know something about the country and the way of life of the people whose language you are studying, you will have a better chance of working out what something means.

For example, your knowledge of the money they use could help you. It is obvious, from your knowledge of British currency, that

- "They paid three pence for the cinema tickets" is nonsense, but
- "They paid three pounds for the cinema tickets" makes sense.

Knowledge of this kind can also help you in making sense of German

Are there any patterns in the language to help me?

It can help you to unravel the meaning of a word if you understand how the word itself has been put together. Look particularly for *prefixes* (letters added to the front of a word) and *suffixes* (letters added to the end of the word).

For example

- The suffix *'-in'* makes a male noun into a female one e.g.

<i>Freund</i>	-	male friend
<i>Freundin</i>	-	female friend

- The suffix *'-chen'* makes something smaller e.g.

<i>Katze</i>	-	cat
<i>Kätzchen</i>	-	kitten

- the suffix *'-heit'* makes an adjective into a noun e.g.

<i>schön</i>	-	beautiful
<i>Schönheit</i>	-	beauty

- The suffix *'-keit'* also makes an adjective into a noun e.g.

<i>freundlich</i>	-	friendly
<i>Freundlichkeit</i>	-	friendliness

- the suffix *'-er'* means a person e.g.

<i>Physik</i>	-	physics
<i>Physiker</i>	-	physicist

- The prefix *'-un'* makes an opposite e.g.

<i>möglich</i>	-	possible
<i>unmöglich</i>	-	impossible

- The prefix *'-auf'* on a verb means 'up' e.g.

<i>räumen</i>	-	to clear
<i>aufräumen</i>	-	to tidy up

- The prefix *'mit'* on a verb means 'with' e.g.

<i>gehen</i>	-	to go
<i>mitgehen</i>	-	to go with somebody

- The prefix *'-aus'* means 'out' e.g.

<i>gehen</i>	-	to go
<i>ausgehen</i>	-	to go out

- The prefix *'ein'* means 'in' e.g.

<i>steigen</i>	-	to climb
<i>einsteigen</i>	-	to get on (a bus etc)

Understanding words when Reading

Here are some extra hints to help you to understand words which you have not met before when you are reading. Try asking yourself the following questions.

Are any words the same in English?

There are a lot of words which look the same as in English and have the same, or almost the same meaning. These words are often called *cognates*. They can help you to understand words you don't know in German, though you do need to be careful, as you'll see below.

Here are some *cognates*

<i>Hand</i>	-	hand
<i>Museum</i>	-	museum
<i>Name</i>	-	name
<i>Instrument</i>	-	instrument
<i>Bus</i>	-	bus
<i>Holland</i>	-	Holland
<i>August</i>	-	August

And some *near-cognates* – words which have *nearly* the same spelling in German as in English

.Adresse	-	address
Klasse	-	class
Datum	-	date
Universität	-	university
kopieren	-	to copy
Vater	-	father
Onkel	-	uncle
interessant	-	interesting
Buch	-	book
Jacke	-	jacket
Tee	-	tea
Haus	-	house
Kaffee	-	coffee
Konzert	-	concert

BEMWARE! There are also a few 'false friends' – words which look the same in German and English but have different meanings. Watch out for words such as

Gymnasium	-	grammar school
also	-	so
Dose	-	tin
Menü	-	set meal
Rock	-	skirt

What else helps?

German and English are closely related languages. There are a lot of words in German which you can understand if you know a few simple spelling rules. These will help you to work out what the word is in English.

Here are some examples:

- Words where 'ch' in German is replaced by 'k' in English.
e.g. *machen* - to make
Becher - beaker
- Words where 't' in German is replaced by 'd' in English.
e.g. *trinken* - drink
tanzen - dance
- Words where 'd' in German is replaced by 'th' in English.
e.g. *Leder* - leather
danken - to thank
- Words where 'pf' in German is replaced by 'p' in English.
e.g. *Pfund* - pound
Pfeffer - pepper

- Words where 'p' in German is replaced by 'f' in English.
e.g. *sieben* - seven
liber - over

- Words where 'ss' or 'r' in German is replaced by 't' in English.
e.g. *weiß* - white
Mineralwasser - mineral water

- Words where 'cht' in German is replaced by 'ght' in English.
e.g. *Nacht* - night
acht - eight

- Words where 'z' in German is replaced by 't' in English.
e.g. *zehn* - ten
zu - to

- Words where 'g' in German is replaced by 'y' in English.
e.g. *gestern* - yesterday
gelb - yellow

- Words where 'v' in German is replaced by 'f' in English.
e.g. *Vater* - father
voll - full

Understanding words when Listening

It is easier to use guidelines when you are reading than when you are listening to German, because you have more time to stop and think about the unknown word and the words around it. All the same, there are some ways in which you can help yourself.

Are any words the same as in English?

There are many words which sound the same, or almost the same as in English, and have the same meaning, such as

Finger	Zoo
Supermarkt	Wetter
Student	Spanisch
Job	Sommer
Telefon	Bäckerei
Tee	Tennis
Theater	Industrie
Paket	Pullover
Konzert	Mechaniker
modern	Nummer
Geographie	Bungalow
Foto	Februar
Radio	Salz

How else can I help myself?

Some words which look the same as in English do not sound the same, but if you know something about *sound patterns* in German, you will find them easier to recognise. Here are some examples where knowing about sound patterns can help.

- The pronunciation of '-tion' ('-tzeoon') in words such as *Station, Nation*.
- The stress pattern of words such as *Tourist, total, Student, Garage, Kassette, Toilette*.
- 'Voiced' sounds at the end of words in English are often 'devoiced' in German e.g. *Bart-* beard, *Bett-* bed, *Pfund-* pound, which are pronounced with a *t* sound at the end of the word in German and a *d* sound in English.
- The hard 'k' sound in English is often a soft 'c' sound in German (e.g. *Milch* – milk, *Flasche* – flask or bottle)

Producing words in Speaking and Writing

When you are speaking or writing German you may sometimes find yourself 'lost for words'. Think about what you do if this happens to you when you are speaking your own language.

- You get your message across either
 - *non-verbally* by using your face or hands, perhaps with a few words, to show what you mean,
 - or
 - *verbally* by talking your way round the problem.
- You can do exactly the same things in German.

What can I do to get my message across non-verbally?

This method of communicating can be useful when you are speaking German abroad, but you shouldn't rely on it in the Speaking Test, because the examiner can only mark what you **say!** All the same, it's worth knowing what you could do. Here are some ideas.

- Pointing and showing e.g.
 - Showing the size of something with your hands and saying *So groß*
 - Pointing at an object and saying *Was ist das?*
 - Pointing to where it hurts and saying *Es tut weh – hier*
- Expression e.g.
 - Showing surprise or anger by your tone of voice
 - Showing anger, surprise, fear or pleasure by the look on your face

- Mime e.g.

You've forgotten how to say *Kann ich beim Abtrocknen helfen?* You could mime the action of the drying the dishes while saying *Kann ich Dir helfen?*

- Drawing e.g.

To show how you get from one point to another, such as from your house to the station.

How can I get my message across verbally, if I don't know all the words?

There are ways of doing this, and it's well worth practising them because they are useful in lots of different situations, not just the Speaking Test. All of them are better than saying nothing. Here are some ideas.

- Using a word which refers to a similar thing. For example, if you can't remember how to say

<i>Dorn</i>	you could say	<i>große Kirche</i>
<i>Mantel</i>	you could say	<i>Jacke</i>
<i>Rose</i>	you could say	<i>Blume</i>
<i>Sessel</i>	you could say	<i>Stuhl</i>
<i>Kaufhaus</i>	you could say	<i>großer Laden</i>
<i>Naturwissenschaft</i>	you could say	<i>Physik, Chemie</i>
<i>Brieftasche</i>	you could say	<i>Geldtasche</i>

You could make a list of others which you might find useful.

- Describing something

You could describe the thing you've forgotten the word for. For example, if you can't remember how to say

<i>Bushaltestelle</i>	you could say	<i>wo der Bus kommt</i>
<i>Jugendherberge</i>	you could say	<i>Hotel für junge Leute</i>

- Using simpler language

If you can't communicate your idea exactly as you want to, try saying it more simply e.g.

If you can't say *Ich freue mich auf Deinen Besuch*
you could say *Es ist gut, daß du kommst*

If you can't say *Ich bin um 5 Uhr angekommen*
you could say *Ich war um 5 Uhr hier*

Is it all right if I just invent a word?

No – please don't! It really isn't a good idea. At best you will probably have a word which doesn't exist and at worst one which means something quite different from what you intended and which leads you into a lot of awkward explanations!

Using a dictionary

REMEMBER - you can use a dictionary for classwork and for coursework, but you **cannot** use it in the examination

A dictionary is a useful tool, but it isn't a substitute for learning words and learning how to communicate. Like most tools, a dictionary is only as good as the person using it. It's worth the effort to find out how your dictionary works and to practise using it.

Here are some hints to help you get the best out of your dictionary.

What do I need to remember when looking up a word?

You will find words much more quickly if you remember that

- a bilingual dictionary comes in two halves – German-English, followed by English-German
- the words are listed in alphabetical order, so you need to know what the alphabetical order is for German
- the words at the **top** of the page will help you find the word you want your knowledge of grammar will help you to find the want – for example, it is no use looking up *er hat* because verbs are listed as *Infinitives* so you must look for *haben*.
- to look up an expression such as 'pocket money', you may have to look up both parts separately to make up the word *Taschengeld*
- to look up difference between a masculine and a feminine form it's useful to know that adding the suffix *-in* makes the feminine form. Masculine and feminine forms may not be shown separately e. g. *Lehrer(-in)*
- to look up the adjective 'cloudy' you may have to start with word 'cloud' and look through the entry until you find 'cloudy' – *wolkig*

What can help me to understand the dictionary entry now that I've found it?

Quick ways of giving you information are used in dictionaries. You need to know what these are, so that you can find your way through the entry easily and without wasting time.

Remember that

- feminine and plural forms are often given without writing the word out in full
- masculine and feminine forms may not be shown separately
e.g. *Engländer (-in)*
Spieler (-in)
- plural forms may be
- not shown at all
- shown using an abbreviation

e.g. *Kind(-er)*

- shown in full if there's a complication

e.g. *Schaf pl Schafe* - sheep

- if plurals are not shown at all then it's useful if you know some common plural patterns

TYPE 1

Singular and plural are the same or an *Umlaut* is added for the plural.

<i>Singular</i>		<i>Plural</i>	
<i>Onkel</i>	-	uncle	<i>Onkel</i>
<i>Lehre</i>	-	teacher	<i>Lehrer</i>
<i>Vater</i>	-	father	<i>Väter</i>

TYPE 2

The letter 'e' is added to form the plural.

<i>Arm</i>	-	arm	<i>Arme</i>	-	arms
<i>Hund</i>	-	dog	<i>Hunde</i>	-	dogs
<i>Tag</i>	-	day	<i>Tage</i>	-	days
<i>Monat</i>	-	month	<i>Monate</i>	-	months

TYPE 3

The letters 'er' are added to form the plural. An *Umlaut* may also be needed.

<i>Bild</i>	-	picture	<i>Bilder</i>	-	pictures
<i>Ei</i>	-	egg	<i>Eier</i>	-	eggs
<i>Buch</i>	-	book	<i>Bücher</i>	-	books
<i>Mann</i>	-	man	<i>Männer</i>	-	men

TYPE 4

The letters 'n' or 'en' are added to form the plural.

<i>Name</i>	-	name	<i>Namen</i>	-	names
<i>Katze</i>	-	cat	<i>Katzen</i>	-	cats
<i>Antwort</i>	-	answer	<i>Antworten</i>	-	answers
<i>Woche</i>	-	week	<i>Wochen</i>	-	weeks

TYPE 5

The letter 's' is added to form the plural.

<i>Job</i>	-	job	<i>Jobs</i>	-	jobs
<i>Auto</i>	-	car	<i>Autos</i>	-	cars
<i>Hotel</i>	-	hotel	<i>Hotels</i>	-	hotels
<i>Park</i>	-	park	<i>Parks</i>	-	parks

- abbreviations are used to show parts of speech e.g.

n	noun
m	masculine
f	feminine
nt	neuter
v	verb
adj	adjective

Make sure that you know where the lost of abbreviations is in your dictionary, and what they mean. Practise looking up words and working your way through the entry for them. You need to be able to use your dictionary quickly and confidently if you are to get the best out of it.

How do I choose the correct word from the ones I'm given?

Sometimes you look up a word and find that several different translations are given. This can be a problem – if you choose the wrong one, you won't be saying what you intended.

For example

- You look up 'lounge' in your dictionary. The words you find are

Bummel, Wohnzimmer, Gesellschaftsraum

You might find that all you needed was a reminder – perhaps *Wohnzimmer* looks familiar straightaway and so you pick that.

But sometimes none of the words you have to choose from look familiar, so what do you do now? The only thing you can do is look each one up in the German-English part of the dictionary, and see which fits the meaning you had in mind. For the example we are using, you would find something like

<i>Bummel</i>	means	'stroll'
<i>Wohnzimmer</i>	means	'sitting room'
<i>Gesellschaftsraum</i>	means	'reception room'

This shows that the words actually match **different** meanings of 'lounge' in English. Now that you know this you can choose sensibly the word you need.

- You look up the word 'chemist' in your dictionary. The words you find are

Chemiker (-in), Apotheke (-in), Apotheke, Drogerie

By looking up these words in the German-English part of the dictionary, you find which fits the meaning you had in mind. *Apotheke* is the person who dispenses medicine.

- You look up the word 'cream' in your dictionary. The words you find are

Sahne, Rahm, Creme

By looking up these words in the German-English part of the dictionary, you find which fits the meaning you had in mind. All three can mean a cream which you eat, but *Creme* can also be a cream you put on your skin.

- You look up the word 'garage' in your dictionary. The words you find are

Tankstelle, Garage, Werkstatt

By looking up these words in the German-English part of the dictionary, you find which fits the meaning you had in mind. All three can be translated as 'garage', but only one, *Tankstelle*, is the place where you buy petrol.

Will I do best if I look up every word?

No! A dictionary can help you, but it's only as good as the person using it. If you don't know how German works and how it fits together, the dictionary can't do it for you. There really is no substitute of learning vocabulary and grammar. Looking up every word can lead you into writing gibberish. This is because people often communicate their thoughts by **groups** of words.

For example, if you looked up every word to translate 'I want to leave school' in German, you could come out with *Ich fähle zu lassen Schule*. These are German words, one for each English word, but as a group they wouldn't mean anything to a German-speaker.

So think about how German communicates **ideas**, and keep well away from word-for-word translation.

To sum it all up...

If you

- know your vocabulary
- know how German works – its grammar and structures and how it all fits together
- learn to use communication strategies and practise them as often as possible

you will stand a very good chance of producing good work in the examination and, better still, being a person who understands and communicates well – In other words, you'll get real pleasure from being able to talk to German-speakers and from being able to understand their language and way of life.

VIEL GLÜCK!