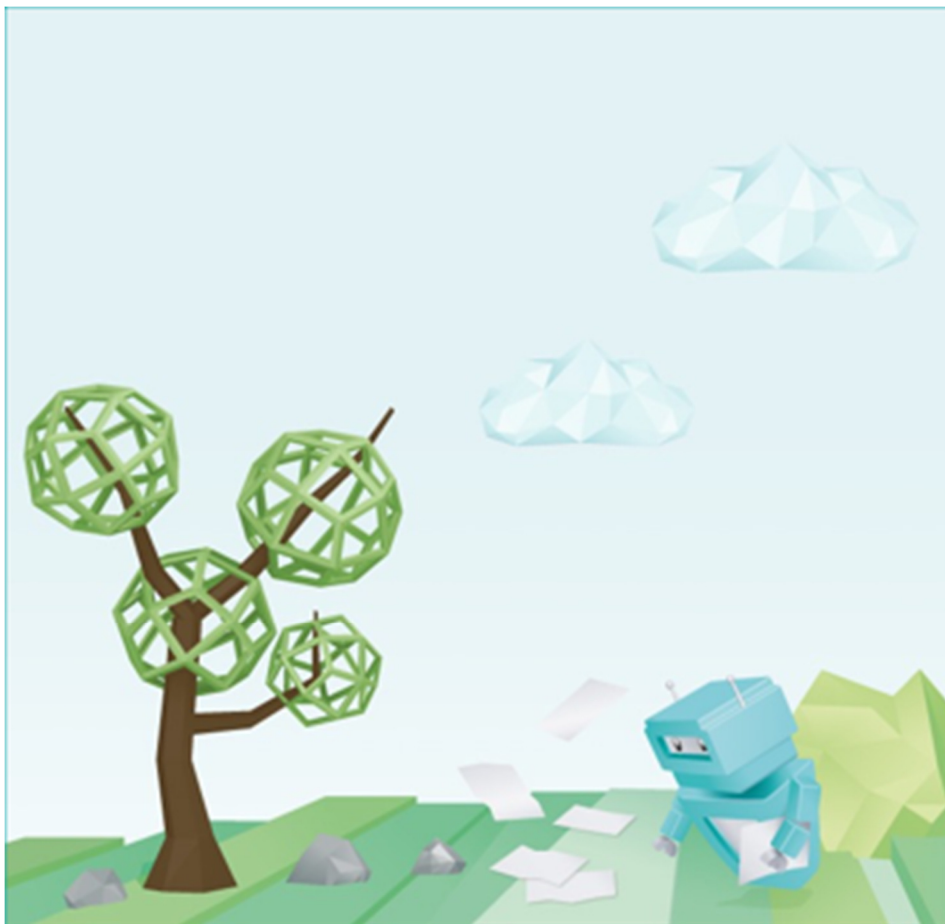


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# German

How to get a H1 in the Leaving Cert  
German Exam



by Gráinne D.

*Gráinne got a H1 in her higher Leaving Cert German paper. She is currently studying General Engineering in UCC. Here she shares what she learned.*

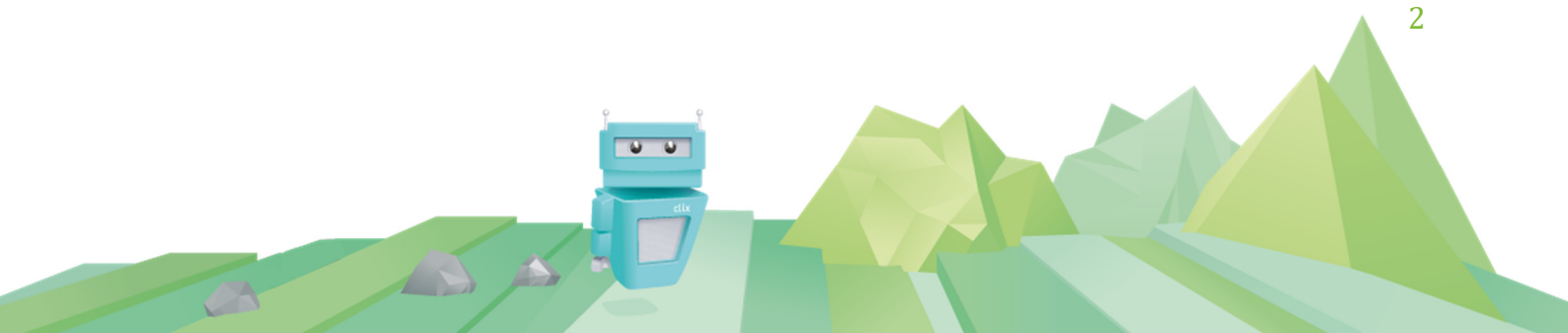
German is the most widely spoken native language in Europe, but it is only the 2nd most popular foreign language taken by Leaving Cert students. With only 6.6% of higher level German students receiving a H1 in 2016, more and more students are opting to study Spanish or Italian.

German, unlike many typical Leaving Certificate subjects, is hard to predict and doesn't encourage rote learning, similar to spoken languages in real life.

I decided to study German at second level, as I was lucky enough to study it for a year in 6th class. Having previously traveled to Germany, I found the language to be more useful than French. After studying the language for 5 years at second level, I hope that this guide can help you optimise your grade and achieve that H1 in August!

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## What should my study technique be?

German is quite a broad course, which is heavily based on being exposed to the language rather than sitting at a desk for hours learning reams of information. Luckily, studying in small chunks, but often, is ideal in order to succeed in German. These tips should help you focus your study on certain aspects of the course and subsequently improve your German.

- ☒ **Flashcards:** I personally found that flashcards were the most successful way to revise German. This particularly applied to me when we had finished a topic in class e.g. school, and then I would write words down on a flashcard that evening. This insured that the vocabulary stayed fresh in my head and if I ever needed to revise a certain topic, I would just have to look back at the flashcard and try to recall the words.
- ☒ **Films and Books:** German is a language and **you can't become fluent in by just learning off vocabulary.** In class, we would initially watch films such as *Shark Tale* in German, as the language in it is simple to understand. Then as our German progressed, we watched more advanced films like *Goodnight Lenin*. You might not get the chance to do this in class but you can definitely do this at home too! Reading books or even German reading comprehensions in your book or exam papers allow you to improve your German, as you are immersed in the language, and the more vocabulary you are exposed to, the more fluent you will become.
- ☒ **Internet:** With today's technology, it has never been easier to learn German outside of the classroom. In my German class, we often went to the computer room and used *languagesonline.org.uk*, as we could learn new vocabulary and improve German through a variety of games. Even using apps, such as *Duolingo*, allow you to track your progress and set goals to accomplish. These insure that learning the language remains fun and can be tailored to your level.
- ☒ **Exam Papers:** Exam papers are vital to success in German. Students can often run out of time due to the tight time constraints, so it's important to practice your timing. Try to initially



practice various questions - reading comprehensions in particular - by trying to answer the questions without using notes or a dictionary. As tempting as it may be to use a dictionary, you are more likely to learn a new word or phrase by making the mistake and then revisiting that particular question the following evening. You can practice this easily on Studyclix using the Exam Builder or Print Questions feature to print out any questions you want to practice.

☒ **Conversation:** The oral is one of the biggest aspects of the German course and in order to get a H1, so you need to put a lot of work into it. I would recommend that you ask your German teacher to do a mock oral every couple of weeks or else decide to only speak German with some of your classmates on a certain evening as the oral approaches. If this isn't possible, write out a common list of questions that you can be asked in your oral and sample answers to accompany them and ask a parent/guardian/friend etc. to quiz you, so you can **revise the key phrases** that you want to say in the oral exam.



## The Oral Exam

The oral exam is worth 25% at higher level (100 marks) and therefore shouldn't be overlooked if you want to get a H1. It consists of the picture sequences or project, roleplays and general conversation and lasts about 15-20 minutes.

- ☒ **General Conversation:** This is clearly the most important part of the oral as it counts for 40 of the total 100 marks. A great way to do well is to **have all your main topics well-rehearsed** (school, local area, hobby, Germany, job, next year etc.), **try to also have a few colloquial phrases or sayings prepared**. The main thing to remember is that **the examiner is there to give you marks** and if you simply don't understand what they said, know how to ask them to repeat or rephrase the question. You are always asked if you want to discuss a German film or text, so be prepared to answer that question if you have.
- ☒ **Picture Sequences:** If you choose to study the picture sequences, the 30 marks allocated are broken down into 10 marks for telling the story, 10 marks for questions based on the story, as well as a future prediction and 10 marks on the theme of the picture sequence. There are 5 picture sequences which consist of 5-6 smaller pictures. Each picture needs to be 3-4 sentences long, so don't worry if your picture sequence isn't 30 lines long. **To avoid stress, make sure you practice them every week and are very familiar with them.** This is not something you can cram.
- ☒ **Project:** This is the other option which you can choose. I personally would choose the picture sequences, as you can rehearse them and quite often and the actual exam paper includes themes found in the picture sequences. Your project can be based on anything on the German course e.g. Sport in Germany or German food. Most marks are allocated for discussing your project in general, with 10 marks going for questions based on the general theme of your project.
- ☒ **Roleplay:** Similar to the picture sequences, it is vital to revise them. They are also worth 30



marks and there are 5 to revise. Make sure you know each point inside out, but if you do forget one on the day, the examiner generally goes back to the point. Vocabulary and accuracy are worth 10 marks, so try to focus on those when revising. Also, remember what role you're playing, because if you begin to read the wrong point, it suggests that you haven't revised.

☒ **General advice:** The German oral exam is so much easier than both French and Irish orals, so the likelihood of getting a H1 in the oral is higher.

Don't panic on the day, everyone gets nervous, so **make sure you have a decent bank of vocabulary and phrases to fall back on in case you go completely blank**. If you make a few mistakes, it doesn't mean that you have no chance of getting a H1, as the examiner understands that you are human and can make mistakes.

Make sure to **expand on your points**. Don't just reply by saying "yes" or "no". E.g. if the examiner asks you if you like German, they are leaving the question open to discussing what you do in class or if you went on a school tour to Germany, they don't want just a yes/no answer.



## The Reading Comprehension

The two reading comprehensions on the paper are together worth 120 marks, which is more than the oral and makes up the majority of the written production marks (220m)! The first reading comprehension is generally an extract from a fictional story, whereas the second reading comprehension is based on real life events, people or organization.

☒ **Timing:** This is often the biggest challenge, especially in the first reading comprehension. You should spend 40 minutes on the first reading comprehension, which includes the time allocated for the detailed question 4 and 30 minutes for the second reading comprehension.

☒ **How to approach it:** I personally preferred to read the questions first to get an idea about the text and with a highlighter, **highlight the most important words in the question** to focus on what's important in the text. Afterwards quickly read through the text, keeping an eye out for relevant detail to the questions, which you can also highlight.

☒ **Answering Questions:** The first 4 parts of question 1 are generally in German, therefore answer them in German, as otherwise you will lose a lot of marks even if your answer was correct. The rest of the questions are in English and therefore you should answer them in English.

☒ **German Questions:** For the German questions, make sure you **know what the different questions mean** e.g. Wann? (When?), as many people often get confused between them and can lose a lot of marks.



☒ **Question 4:** This is the most weighted question in the first reading comprehension and is based on your understanding of the text. The marking scheme is generally broken down into 4x3m or 3x4m and the question requires you to read the text again to give sufficient detail. Always try to give an extra point in case one of your points isn't detailed enough for a mark.

☒ **Detail:** Similar to the listening comprehension, **detail is required in every answer**, as each reading comprehension is worth 60 marks. When answering question 1 in German, make sure you don't directly copy lots of details from the comprehension as you will lose marks, so try to write the answers in your own words.





## The Grammar Section

At 25 marks, I recommend that you spend approximately 15 minutes on this section. As it is worth the fewest marks, I would leave it until the end, because if you are running out of time, you can quickly fill it out. The section is based on the first reading comprehension and tests you on your knowledge of the different cases and grammatical rules.

- ☒ **Marking scheme:** Marks are split up into 2 sections, with one of the sections based on your ability to recognise the different forms of grammar and the other section based on your ability to write grammatically correct sentences or questions.
- ☒ **Tenses:** This is one of the most common questions asked. They often give you a sentence from the text and ask you to change the tense or ask you what tense it's written in. Therefore, you should **know the irregular verbs** and how they are written in the past tense, perfect tense, past perfect tense (plusquamperfekt), present tense, future tense and the conditional mode (e.g. I would...).
- ☒ **Gender:** Unlike English, German nouns each have a gender and they are often asked in the grammar section, therefore when learning off words, pay attention to the gender of the nouns.
- ☒ **Cases:** This is another type of question that appears quite often on the paper and is based on your understanding of the nominative, accusative, dative and genitive cases. They can be quite difficult to grasp; therefore, many people have to just sit down and learn off the table. I personally found flashcards quite useful for this as I accompanied each case and gender with a common example.
- ☒ **Relative Pronoun:** Known for being one of the most difficult aspects of grammar for LC German, it takes a lot of practice to get a good grasp of it, which is necessary to get a H1. The best way to understand it is to translate the sentences into English and then alter them, because if it sounds right in English, it's right in German.



## The Written Section

The written section of the paper consists of the *Äußerung zum Thema* and the *Schriftliche Produktion* and they are worth 75 marks combined. Many students choose to do these sections first as they are the most time consuming. In order to get a H1 overall, you generally need to get a H1 or a high H2 in this section, because on average, the written aspects of the paper are where students get their worst mark.

### Äußerung zum Thema

- ☒ **Timing:** Since the section is worth 25 marks, I would spend 25 minutes on the section in order to ensure that you answer every question asked.
- ☒ **Plan:** In this section, you get a choice of 2 questions, which are based on the themes of the 2 reading comprehensions, therefore instead of attempting both questions choose 1 and **plan your answers in bullet point form**, as often they require 2-3 reasons for your opinion.
- ☒ **Accuracy:** 12 marks out of 25 in this section are for your accuracy and proficiency in the German language, therefore try to critically analyse your points in case you made any grammatical errors or have poor expression, as they reduce your

chances of getting a H1.

- ☒ **Quality not Quantity:** If you are asked for a certain amount of information, make sure to **fully answer the question in detail, but stay on track!** For example, if you are asked about 2 ways on how to reduce the effects of global warming, don't go off on a tangent about sea levels rising, etc., as this suggests that you can only regurgitate paragraphs you have learnt off or that you are a weaker student, who only recognised the words "global warming" and wrote everything you know. Also, if you write excessively, you tend to make more mistakes, as you rush to put all your points down on the page and therefore will lose more marks for accuracy in expression.



## Schriftliche Produktion

- ☒ **Timing:** I would recommend on spending 40 minutes on this section, as it is worth 50 marks and you want to ensure that you read over the letter a few times in order to make sure that you answer every point.
- ☒ **Themes:** In the letter, a broad range of themes are generally asked, so make sure you are able to discuss basic topics like the summer holidays or university. Every year they ask questions that you couldn't revise for, in order to prevent rote learning, so don't panic! If you get a shock, chances are the vast majority of students are surprised as well.
- ☒ **Layout:** Make sure you know the layout of a letter if you decide to choose this option, as 4 marks go for suitable and elaborate opening and closing phrases.
- ☒ **Details:** Even if you have answered all the points and have written at least 160 words, don't be afraid to give more detail on your points as you can get up to 5 more marks.
- ☒ **Accuracy:** For both options, accuracy is required in word order, grammar and expression, as they account for up to 25 marks. Use also a variety of verbs and phrases, as they highlight your fluency and the more fluent you are, the more likely you are to get a H1!



## The Listening Comprehension

This section is worth 20% and occurs after the written portion of the exam. Most students do better in the listening than the written part of the exam, as sections 1, 3 and 4 in the listening are done through English. Here are some tips which can help you optimise your grade.

- ☒ **Practice:** To do well in the listening, **practice is key!** Try to do at least one listening comprehension a week and correct it with the entire text in front of you, which you can find in the marking scheme.
- ☒ **Vocabulary:** If you are unsure about the meaning of a word, write it down and find its meaning, as certain professions, place names and problems are constantly repeated in various listening comprehensions.
- ☒ **Section 2:** Don't forget that section 2 in the higher level listening paper must be answered through German. Many people, (including myself 😊) have made this mistake and automatically lost around 12 marks
- ☒ **Detail:** Always expand on your points and write down as much detail as possible. Questions often state to "Give Details" and you might think that 2 pieces of information is sufficient, but sometimes the marking scheme could be 3x2m or 4x1m and you could lose marks quite easily.
- ☒ **Blanks: Never leave a blank,** even if you didn't understand a single word! If this happens, read over the questions and any previous answers and give an educated guess.
- ☒ **Section 4:** The most marks are going for this section; "The news". You can always revise for the weather question, as the question is basically guaranteed but the other sections are harder to predict. Therefore, watch small news clips on *Das Erste* or other news channels to keep up to date with news in Germany, Switzerland and Austria.
- ☒ **Breaks:** Don't panic if you don't hear everything the first time! You hear everything 3 times with multiple breaks included so you have plenty of time to write down everything you hear.



## Some Final Tips

- ☒ **Don't cram German and leave it until the last minute.** Constantly study it throughout the year, as it is easier to gradually learn languages and cramming just leads to more stress, which isn't helpful when you are sitting your exams in June.
- ☒ Remember you've been studying German for 5-6 years, so **don't be afraid to show off your fluency by using loads of sayings and impressive vocabulary.** At the end of the day, the examiner is there to give you marks- not deduct them!
- ☒ If you go blank on the day, don't worry! Just move on from that section and come back to it, because the word might come back to you after looking at a reading comprehension.
- ☒ **Know your exam technique and the marks for each section off by heart before you go into the exam,** as otherwise you could lose a lot of marks due to running out of time or forgetting to do a section.
- ☒ Don't treat German like Irish. The language is alive and used daily in Europe. It also looks impressive on a CV, as it highlights that you are bilingual. You never know you if might need it for a job or might end up living in Germany, Austria or Switzerland!





*I wish you the best of luck in  
the exam! You'll do great. 😊*

*Gráinne*

