



German Leaving Certificate Exam: Reading comprehensions

Overview

The reading comprehension section is a crucial part of the German Leaving Certificate exam, with the two reading comprehensions collectively worth **120 marks**. This is more than the oral exam and accounts for a significant portion of the written production section, which totals **220 marks**.

Here's what you need to know about the two texts:

- 1. The First Reading Comprehension**
 - Usually an extract from a fictional story.
 - Includes **Question 4**, which is worth a lot of marks and needs detailed answers.
- 2. The Second Reading Comprehension**
 - Based on real-life topics like events, people, or organizations.
 - These texts are often more factual and may involve topics like scientific discoveries, cultural events, or interviews.

Timing Tips

Managing your time is super important here. It's easy to lose track and end up rushing.

- Spend about **40 minutes** on the first comprehension, making sure to leave time for the detailed Question 4.
- Spend **30 minutes** on the second reading comprehension. This one tends to be more straightforward but still requires focus.

How to Tackle the Comprehensions

1. Read the Questions First

Before jumping into the text, skim through the questions. This helps you figure out what to focus on.

- Highlight the key parts of each question so you know what's important.
 - As you read the text, watch out for details that answer the questions and highlight those too.
 - Answer in the Right Language: the first four parts of **Question 1** are in **German** and must be answered in **German**. If you respond in English, you will lose marks even if the answers are correct. The rest of the questions are in **English**, and you should answer those in **English**.
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2. Don't Copy and Paste from the Text

When answering questions, especially the ones in **German**:

- Avoid copying full sentences or chunks straight from the text. If you do, you'll lose marks.
 - Instead, write the answers in your own words. Show you understand the text and can rephrase the key points.
 - Always include as much detail as possible—vague answers won't cut it.
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3. Nailing Question 4 (the Big One)

Question 4 in the first reading comprehension is worth a lot of marks and tests your deep understanding of the text.

- The marks are usually split into **4x3** or **3x4**, so you need to write detailed answers for each part.
- Go back to the text and reread carefully to ensure your responses are thorough and relevant.
- Always write an extra point if you can, in case one of your answers isn't detailed enough.

Since **Question 4** is so important, practice writing detailed answers using past papers. Aim to write **3-4 sentences per part** of the question, ensuring each sentence adds something new.

4. Know Your Question Words

For the German questions, make sure you're familiar with common question words like:

- **Wann?** (When?)
- **Warum?** (Why?)
- **Wie?** (How?)
- **Was?** (What?)

If you mix these up, it's easy to lose marks, so practice recognizing and answering them.

5. Making Use of Connectors

Pay attention to **linking words** in the text, as they can help you understand the structure and flow of ideas:

- **Aber** (but)
- **Deshalb** (therefore)
- **Obwohl** (although)
- **Weil** (because)

Knowing these words can help you identify contrasts, reasons, and conclusions, which are often key to answering the questions.

6. Marking Scheme Awareness

Understanding how marks are allocated can make a big difference.

- Questions that ask for **specific details** are usually split into parts. For example, if a question is worth 4 marks, the examiner will look for **two detailed points** (2x2) or **four smaller points** (4x1).
 - If the question mentions **“two examples”**, don't list more than two. Marks are only given for the first two points you write.
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Some more things to bear in mind

1. Dealing with Unknown Words

It's normal to come across words you don't know. Don't panic!

- Look at the context of the sentence to guess the meaning. Sometimes, surrounding words can give you strong clues.
 - Focus on the main idea of the text, not every single word. Understanding the overall meaning is more important than getting stuck on one unfamiliar term.
 - Watch for cognates (words that look similar to English) and common prefixes or suffixes in German that might help you decode the meaning.
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2. Handling Compound Words

German loves compound words, and they can look intimidating at first glance.

- Break them down into smaller parts to figure out the meaning. For example:
"Umweltverschmutzung" = **Umwelt** (environment) + **Verschmutzung** (pollution).

- Even if you don't know the whole word, understanding part of it can give you enough context to answer correctly.
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3. Types of Questions You Might Encounter

There are different types of questions in the comprehension section, and each requires a slightly different approach:

1. **Factual Questions:** These test your ability to find specific information in the text. Highlight or underline where you find the answers.
 2. **Inferential Questions:** These require you to read between the lines and interpret the meaning. Be ready to explain implied ideas.
 3. **Vocabulary/Translation Questions:** You may be asked to explain the meaning of a word or phrase. Use the context of the sentence to figure it out.
 4. **Personal Response Questions:** These often come in **Question 4** and might ask for your opinion or interpretation of a part of the text. These require thoughtful, detailed answers.
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4. Brush Up on Cultural Knowledge

The real-life comprehension texts sometimes touch on topics like German culture, current events, or famous individuals.

- Reading about Germany in general (e.g., popular cities, traditions, recent news) can give you context and make these texts feel less unfamiliar.
 - Topics like environmental issues, technology, or education are frequently used. Be familiar with basic vocabulary around these areas.
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5. Practice with Authentic Materials

To get used to the types of texts you'll encounter, read:

- Short stories or articles in German (fiction and nonfiction).
 - German news websites like **Deutsche Welle**, **Tagesschau**, or **Der Spiegel**.
 - Blogs or forums in German—these often use conversational but authentic language.
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Extra Tips to Smash It

1. **Practice Makes Perfect:** Go through past papers so you know what to expect.
2. **Build Your Vocab:** Having a solid vocabulary for both fictional and real-life topics will make things much easier.
3. **Stay Consistent with Spelling and Grammar:** In German answers, small spelling errors can cost you marks, especially if they change the meaning of a word. Use

correct verb conjugations and sentence structure to avoid losing marks unnecessarily.

4. **Stay Calm:** Don't overthink the questions. Stick to your time plan, highlight the key points, and move on.
5. **Grammar Counts:** When writing in German, make sure your sentences are clear and grammatically correct.
6. **Use Synonyms:** If you can't rephrase something completely, try using synonyms for key words to make your answer feel less like a copy-paste job.
7. **Review Before Moving On.** If you finish early, use the extra time to review your answers: Check that you've answered every part of the questions and make sure you've used the correct language (German or English) where required.

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