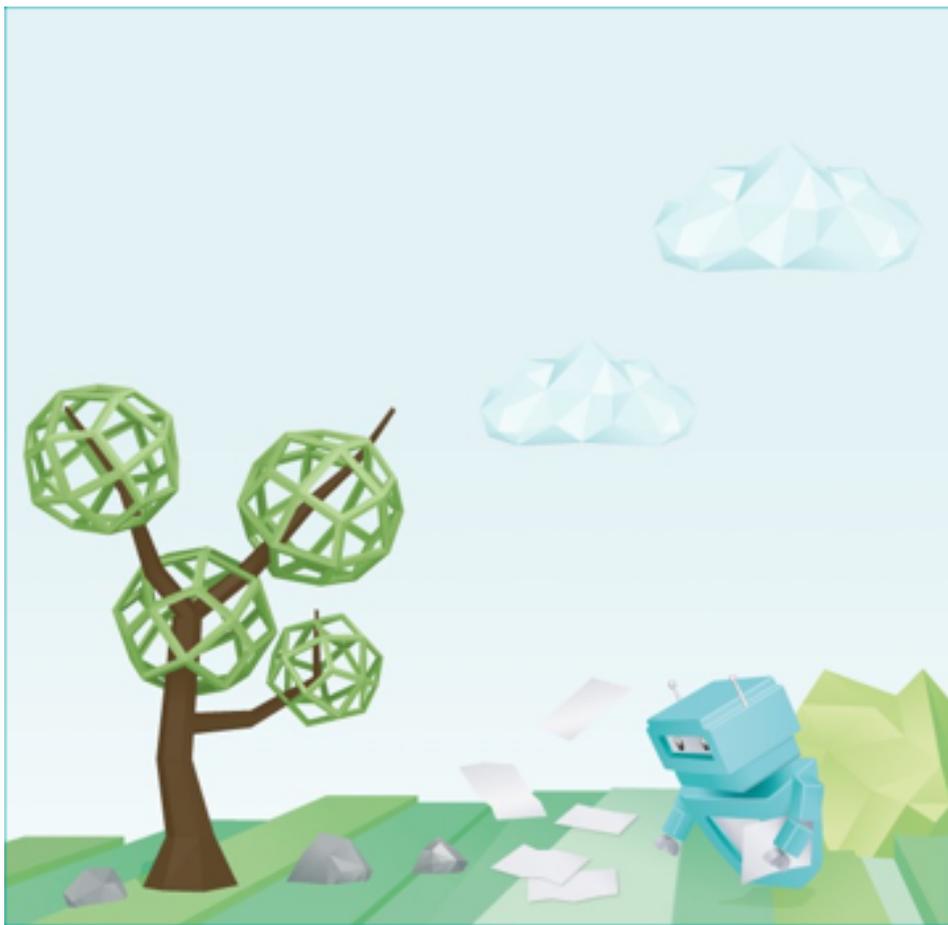


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German

How to get a Distinction in Junior Cycle German



by **Killian B.**

Killian B. got a Distinction in Junior Cycle German. Here, he shares what he learned.

German is a fascinating language, and, as one of the most widely spoken languages in the European Union, truly rewarding to learn. Like any other foreign language, it can be difficult at the start - I remember feeling totally out of my comfort zone in first year! There seemed to be endless rules to learn and words to remember - but don't let that throw you off! I like to think of learning a language as the same as climbing a mountain - it's a bit of a journey, and takes time, effort and perseverance. You can't jump halfway up that mountain in a couple of weeks - you need to work away little by little, but before you know it, you'll notice yourself improving and reaching those high grades at the top! Plus, you have three full years to get there, so don't worry! And, in spite of the work you will have to put in to get these grades, learning German can still be a really enjoyable experience.

Contents

Exam Layout	3
CBA 1: Oral Communication	4
CBA 2: The Student Language Portfolio	7
Assessment Task	9
Final Assessment	11
Some Final tips	15



Exam Layout

- ▶ Junior Cycle German is **marked out of 400**. The Written Exam is worth **360 marks (90%)** and the Assessment task is worth **40 marks (10%)**.
- ▶ You will be marked using the following grade descriptors, which will appear on both the **certificate you receive on results day** and your **Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA)**:

Grade Descriptor	Percentage
Distinction	≥90 to 100
Higher Merit	≥75 to <90
Merit	≥55 to <75
Achieved	≥40 to <55
Partially Achieved	≥20 to <40
Not Graded (NG)	≥0 to <20

- ▶ There are also **two CBAs (Classroom Based Assessments)** on the course and they are marked using different grade descriptors again: **Exceptional, Above expectations, In line with expectations, and Yet to meet expectations**. The grades you receive on your CBAs will only appear on your JCPA, and do not influence your overall grade on the course.



CBA 1: Oral Communication

The first CBA will likely take place in second year. It is an oral presentation, replacing the old oral exam. Here is some advice on how to do really well in it:

▣ **Make wise choices:** Nailing your oral presentation is all down to making choices to best suit *you*. Firstly, you must decide whether you want to do it **individually, with another classmate, or in a group**. There are pros and cons to each of these options, but my personal advice would be to work individually as it is easier to manage and you will have more time to prepare. You'll then have to choose the **format** your presentation will take - are you going to do a role-play or interview, or a regular speech-like presentation? This is something I

would get your teacher's advice on. Finally, the **topic:** I suggest picking a topic that you are really interested in as this will motivate you to learn more about it, which will in turn enable you to produce a high-quality, well-researched presentation.

- ☒ Use a variety of reliable sources when looking for information on your chosen topic. This will help you to get a range of ideas to include in your presentation.
- ☒ **Visual Aids:** The information you gather can be written on



flashcards to aid you in your presentation, but I would advise you to use a poster or an object that is linked to your topic. This will ensure that you are not looking down at flashcards, but towards your audience.

- ▣ **Manage your time:** You will have three weeks to prepare your presentation, and only three minutes to showcase it! I recommend trying to speak as much German as you can during the three weeks of preparation as it will help you to become aware of your weaknesses so that you can work on improving them. Be sure to ask your teacher as many questions as you can in this precious time! You also need to practice your presentation as

often as you can in the days leading up to the recording to make sure you are saying everything you have prepared to say within the 3-4 minute time frame.

- ☒ **On the day:** Your audience is extremely important in a presentation. Try to look out when speaking as it makes your presentation more engaging and effective. Make sure you speak with a loud and clear voice and that you stand up straight when presenting.
- ☒ At the end of the presentation, you will be asked a number of questions by your teacher. These questions are based on the topic you have researched and must



be answered in German. It is therefore important to be familiar with all your information gathered before presenting. Listen to the questions carefully and make sure to ask your teacher again if you did not understand!

- ☒ At the end of the CBA, you will be asked to reflect (on a worksheet provided by your teacher) on your experience doing the CBA .

Be honest in your answers and put down all your thoughts and feelings. The more details, the more marks!

- ☒ Finally, CBA 1 is a great chance to put your German-speaking skills into practice. You have a wide range of vocabulary so don't be afraid to use it! Have confidence in yourself and try not to worry too much about it.



CBA 2: The Student Language Portfolio

The second CBA in German will be completed in third year. It is a student language portfolio, requiring you to pick your three best pieces of work produced during second and third year.

- ☒ **What to include:** For your portfolio, one of the pieces you choose must be an oral piece (excluding CBA 1) and one must show knowledge of a German-speaking country. Make sure all of the pieces you choose are well-written, and that you have added as much information, details, and phrases as possible. For the Oral portion in particular, you should try to include lots of idiomatic German expressions to sound more like a native speaker.
- ☒ Also, just like I said for CBA 1, when doing your oral piece, make sure to speak as loud and clear as you can. I would also recommend that you speak for more than the three minute minimum to really showcase your best Deutsch!
- ☒ **Practice makes perfect:** I would recommend you to do several drafts before submitting your final piece. The more you draft and redraft, the better your piece will be. Also, over the course of the three weeks you have to



complete CBA 2, you should ask your teacher for feedback on your pieces. Listen carefully as this will help you improve.

☒ **Self-reflection:** You will be asked to complete a reflection sheet similar to CBA 1 on each of the

three pieces of work. My advice for this is similar to that of the reflection on the Oral Assessment: write down all your thoughts and feelings you had and make sure to be honest when answering the questions.



Assessment Task

The Assessment Task is a written reflection on the work you have done for CBA 2, and so will take place some time in third year. You will have eighty minutes to complete it, and it is worth 10% of your final grade for Junior Cycle German. That may not sound like much, but remember, that could be the difference between a Distinction and a Higher Merit, so you should try your very best!

Completing the Assessment Task is a process comprising three different steps: Discussion, Reflection, and Writing.

1. **Discussion:** In this phase, you will have to read/watch/listen to and then discuss one piece of stimulus material. You will never be required to write a response to the stimulus directly - the idea behind them is to provoke self-reflection. Make sure you focus and engage in the discussions as this will help you in the next stage of the Assessment Task.
2. **Reflection:** At this point, you will be told/shown the questions from Section A and the writing prompts from Section B that will appear on the Assessment Task booklet so that you can think about how you might respond to them. I would recommend you to think back to the other reflection sheets that you completed for your CBA 2 pieces to decide which aspects you will write about.



3. **Writing:** The final stage in the Assessment Task is the completion of a booklet where you will be asked questions on your language portfolio. In Section A, the questions are quite basic and will ask you to reflect on your chosen pieces, e.g.
- What did you learn while doing CBA 2?
 - Why did you choose certain material to be included in your portfolio?
 - What you might do differently next time?
- ❓ Section B asks you to respond to prompts that are geared toward your language learning experience in general, so you can reference other texts and language learning experiences in responding to them. My advice would be to write as much as you can, including information from CBA 2, in your answer. Try to fill all the space given and as quickly as you can as you have only **35-40 minutes** to complete the questions.

I really enjoyed doing both the CBAs and the Assessment Task in German. They allowed me to address weaknesses and hone my strengths, helping me to become a better student. I also learned lots of useful vocab, phrases, and grammar points that I ended up using in the written exam! I would suggest putting as much effort as you can into all of them - even the CBAs - as it will benefit you going forward. Additionally, it would be nice to have two 'Exceptionals' on your JCPA!



Final Assessment

The German Junior Cycle Final Exam is worth 90% of your overall grade. The exam is two hours long, with a 30 minute listening comprehension at the start.

The **structure of the paper** is very easy to follow. There are always three reading comprehensions and a long written exercise like a blog, letter, email, message, or note. You will also be asked to answer questions based on signs and compound words.

1. **The Listening (140 marks):** This is an important part of the exam as it is worth 35% of your final grade. The questions in the Listening Comprehension can ask you to:
 - identify the correct picture
 - tick the correct box
 - write down numbers and details
- 🔗 It is very important to read the question before answering as **some questions may ask you to respond in German rather than English**. Make sure you write down the German spellings of cities and countries when asked.
- 🔗 There is no need to write full sentences, just make sure the important points are covered in your answers.



- ❓ The questions get harder as the test goes on. If you are unsure of a question, you should make an educated guess. Never leave anything blank!
 - ❓ In order to prepare well for this part of the exam, try to **listen to as much German as you can**. You can practice using Listening Comprehensions from past exam years or the CDs that come with your textbook. In my experience, listening to podcasts or even to the news in German also helped massively!
- 2 In the **Reading** section, you will be quizzed on vocabulary (including compound words), and asked to identify information on signs and advertisements as well as questions based on a couple of reading comprehensions. This section of the paper is also worth **140 marks**, so I recommend spending about **45-50 minutes in total** on it.
- ☒ In order to maximise your marks in the first part of the Reading section, where you are asked the meaning of basic German words, I would advise you to **learn as much vocabulary as you can**. The more vocabulary you know, the easier it will be to tackle the reading and listening comprehensions too!
 - ☒ For the reading comprehensions, I suggest reading the text a few times first and then reading the questions. Pay attention to the question words, e.g. the who, what, where, when, why, and how, as well as the words you know already, as they will help you gain an understanding of the text.
 - ☒ Write down as much detail as you can, at least three pieces of information per question. Again, never leave a space blank!



- 3 **The Written Section (80 marks)** of the German exam contains German grammar and phrases exercises and a question asking you to write an email/blog/letter/message.
- ☒ The grammar and phrases exercises are quite similar to some of the questions asked in the Reading section, so as before, good knowledge of basic German vocabulary (+ grammar) is necessary to do well here.
 - ☒ The written piece (email/blog/letter/message, etc.) is worth a huge percentage of the total marks, so I would advise you to **do this question immediately after the Listening Comprehension.**
 - ☒ The **blog** is one format you are probably not very familiar with, but it is very important that you know how to write one in German as it is very likely to appear on the exam. For the blog, you must answer 20 questions linked to what you have studied throughout your Junior Cycle. These questions will either have a specific answer or leave it up to you to develop an answer.
 - ☒ You need to **make sure you are answering the question you are being asked.** I would advise reading through the questions with a critical eye to make sure you understand them fully before delving into the response.
 - ☒ You are asked to write a minimum of 200 words, but I would advise you to **write as much as you possibly can (without compromising on quality!).** It's all about the detail when it comes to your written piece. The more vocab and phrases you include, the more marks you will achieve. I would try to include a minimum



of five details per question to maximise my marks, and add in more details if I had more time.

- ☒ The best advice I can give for this portion of the exam is to let your mind be creative! Put your language skills to use and you will be guaranteed to ace this question.



Some Final Tips

The best way to learn a language is to immerse yourself in it as much as you can. That said, you don't have to move to Germany to improve! I found the following to be very effective ways of helping me improve my German.

☒ **Learn vocabulary regularly:** Set yourself a daily goal - learn as many words as you can every day. Even if it is only a small amount, it will pay off massively in June. If you come across a word you don't know, use your dictionary to find the meaning. Write the new words down in a vocabulary copybook and learn them off. Learning vocabulary in phrases can help you become aware of where vocabulary fits into a sentence. Phrases can also be used in your writing in the exam. Make sure to write down

new vocabulary in a different copybook to your class copybook. This will help organise your classwork from revision at home. Speaking of classwork, look over the vocabulary you learned in class as regularly as you can.

☒ **Listen to German:** In today's world, there are lots of online podcasts for language learners. I would advise you to listen to these podcasts in your free time. This will improve your understanding of pronunciation



and how native Germans speak. Even though you may not understand everything you hear, you may be able to use the vocabulary you already have and contextual information to understand. This will greatly benefit you for the Listening Comprehension, as I mentioned before. However, if you are not a fan of podcasts, do not fear! Music is another great way to improve your listening skills. You can find subtitled videos on Youtube if needed. Find a song that you like and get dancing!

- ☒ **Read German books:** Reading German books will help you to build on your vocabulary and spelling accuracy. Being able to read German is a key skill needed

to do well in the exam. I would advise you to read books on something you are interested in as this will make the process feel less daunting.

- ☒ **Watch/Listen to German News:**

German news may not be on Irish televisions but you can watch a German version of Euronews online. It is a great way to listen and read German, and also learn about current events in Germany. Make sure you pay attention to the subtitles if you need them!

- ☒ **Watch German films:** Films are a

great way to learn German. It doesn't have to be a German movie - it can just be your favourite film with German subtitles!



☒ **Set your phone to German:** This might seem a challenge but you will be surprised how much you are able to understand. Teenagers tend to use their phone on a regular basis so you will be constantly immersed in German!

☒ **Download German language learning apps:** There are some great apps out there for language learners, such as Babbel, Duolingo, and FluentU, that allow you to do daily challenges to improve your language skills. You can develop grammar skills, learn vocabulary and listening skills through short, fun lessons!

☒ **Practice speaking German:**

School and home are great places to practice your speaking skills. Pose questions in German to your teacher. Chat with your classmates in German for one lunchtime every week. Speak German at home, even if your parents can't speak German, why not teach them?

☒ **Practice the German culture:** Celebrate German festivals like the Germans do. Eat German food. Familiarise yourself with German customs.

☒ **Try to book a German holiday:** This won't be an option for everyone, but next time you are looking for a break away, look to Germany! It is a great way to put your German to practice. You can



try to speak to everyone from the taxi driver and the barman to locals!

- ☒ **Employ alternative study methods:** Why not learn and study in a fun way? Write down the names of some household items in German on sticky notes. Go around your house and stick sticky notes on the relevant food, furniture and other objects. This is a fun and easy way to recall learned vocabulary and it may also help your family to learn! Mind maps can also be used effectively for German learners. Write your topic you want to

revise in the middle and then write words around the topic. This is a great way to revise. You can also highlight the words using a highlighter to make them stand out.

- ☒ **... and some traditional methods:** Exam papers are very important. The more you practice them, the more you will become familiar with questions and time management. Practice them under exam conditions. Follow the time suggestions and practice the order in which you will answer the questions.

Here are some of my tips to help you manage the written German exam:

- ☒ **Be prepared:** Organise yourself the night before. Make sure you



have a few black or blue pens in your pencil case.

- ☒ **Time management:** Timing is crucial in the German exam. The Listening Comprehension takes 30 minutes, so you will have only **90 minutes to complete the rest of the exam.** Even though this may sound like a waste of time, I believe you should **take 5 minutes to read over the paper before you start,** as I found it helped me save time in the long run. This will leave you with approximately **45-50 minutes to spend on the reading section and 30-35 minutes on the written section.**
- ☒ **Read before answering:** Like I said before, you want to make

sure you are answering the question you are being asked. That requires an understanding of the question, so my recommendation would be to read the question very carefully before you write a thing. If you do not understand a question, **move on to the next one and come back to it if you have time at the end.**

- ☒ **Don't leave anything blank:** If you do end up coming back to a hard question at the end of the exam and still don't feel like you can answer it, put something down regardless. I always say to answer every question in the exam, because you might just be lucky and pick up a mark or two!



☒ Know your question words:

Many of the questions in the exam are written in German, and in order to answer the questions correctly, you need to know *exactly* what you are being asked, so knowledge of who, what, where, etc. is essential.

☒ Know your verbs and sentence structure:

The verb should always come second in a sentence. If there is a modal verb in the sentence, the other verb goes to the end. Follow the TMP or **Time, Manner, Place** rule to write great sentences.

☒ Quality over quantity: As I have

said before, scoring high in the German exam comes down to showing off your knowledge using as much rich vocabulary and expressions as you can. However, it is important to note that the examiners are looking for high quality German blogs rather than pages and pages of lacklustre work. So, instead of playing it safe and using loads of short, basic sentences to fill up all the space provided for the written piece, try to impress the person correcting your exam by throwing something a bit more complex into the mix. You will be rewarded!





Viel Glück! Wir glauben an dich!

