

Writing Section: Instructions

09.05.2007

- You have 2 hours (FP1 and 2)/ 2½ hours (FP3) in which to do this section,
- give yourself half an hour to think through your ideas and plan your essay,
- you may use your own print dictionaries,
- **write between 500 and 700 words (between 600 and 800 words if you are doing FP3)**
- write the number at the end of your essay.

Do not forget to put:

- your **registration number** at the **top of each page** of your essay,
- **which Fachprüfung** you are doing,
- and **the title of the essay**. (Do NOT invent your own title!)

PLEASE NOTE:

1. The essay should be written in a **formal, objective style**.
2. Please note that an essay is **not** a personal account or an 'inner monologue', and should be written **as far as possible from the third person perspective**.
3. You **must answer the question** (which means fulfil the task) **and include** ideas of your own.

Write an essay on the following topic
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The Austrian government proposes lowering the voting age to 16.

Is this a good idea?

You MUST:

- give *reasons* for this proposal,
- describe what this will entail for *parents, teachers* and *anyone else* concerned,
- state whether this is a *good* or a *bad proposal* and say *why*.

**The Austrian government proposes lowering the voting age to 16.
Is this a good idea?**

After years of discussion, the government of Austria have finally decided to allow 16-year-olds to vote. The actual reasons behind this decision are not completely clear; on the surface, however, it looks as if politicians begin to acknowledge that young people are growing up faster nowadays, seem to be more worldly-wise, and have firm opinions on political questions, and are therefore competent and mature enough to take part in the workings of the democracy.

As a recent poll has shown, many teenagers claim to be interested in politics and appreciate the lowering of the voting age, contrary to the popular belief of most adults. The young people of today appear to be well-informed and seriously concerned about what happens in the world and how to influence its course: issues not even all adults give thought to, although no-one would question *their* right to vote. Indeed, being allowed to vote should not be a question of age. One can find uninformed, disillusioned, stupid, ignorant or gullible people in all age groups, voters or no, but since there *are* politically-minded teenagers, they could be the support needed to increase the usually rather low turnout in elections.

This point might also be one of the government's reasons for lowering the age: fresh blood – more potential voters to be won to their cause by their various political parties. Like many other adults, politicians tend to take young people not too seriously, especially if they are, like the majority of citizens, not interested enough in state affairs to have a reaction that is stronger than a loud complaint among friends. That is probably why the government even considered allowing 16-year-olds to the ballot boxes: they hope they will be able to influence the young with “cool” slogans and cheap little presents, and impress them by dressing fashionable and make ridiculous attempts at street slang, as if teenagers were not able to understand standard language and behaviour, let alone see behind the façade of those who pull the strings. Young people might not always be wise but they are definitely not stupid.

Still, there has to be something done to increase the political knowledge of the young generation, or to raise interest in those who have no idea about politics at all. In the poll mentioned above, people also expressed their wish to have some kind of political education at school; not as appendage of history, though, but as a standalone subject.

This of course means that devising a syllabus for this subject would be another task for the teachers, and a tricky one, since it will not be easy for them to disregard their own political opinions and preferences, and also to reach a consensus on what is to be taught and what is of lesser value. If there will be such a subject as political education, it is important to teach it as unbiased as possible without being too boring/ dry/ detailed/ superficial. Perhaps it would be better if pupils were taught how and where to inform themselves properly, instead of letting the teacher do all the work, especially since teenagers normally prefer surfing the internet to sitting in a classroom.

Certainly the situation for teachers will change in one way or the other, but this does not necessarily mean changes in parental behaviour too. Lowering the voting age does not affect the pupils' parents directly. Those families who talk politics at home will continue to do so – for the benefit of the young voters – while those who do not discuss “adult things” with their teenage children will probably complain about the lower voting age, if anything.

Who will be affected most are obviously the young people themselves, and the politicians. The former might get a first taste of responsibility, and by being directly involved will learn how it feels to be disappointed and betrayed by politicians: but only negative experiences make people think, and wish for changes. As for the politicians, they might soon regret their decision to lower the voting age when they will find out that young people actually question current politics and begin to understand what is going on in the country and stop believing everything the government say.

So it could turn out to be a bad proposal in the long run, at least, as far as politicians and their power and credibility are concerned, but for democracy, the country and its people it is a good idea and an interesting outlook to the future. Basically, this is what the world needs: educated citizens who still have idealistic views and youthful enthusiasm but combined with a critical view of the world and the courage to defy authorities instead of choosing the easiest way.

(784 words, excl. title)

Band 1**Justification**

There is a broad lexical repertoire with a considerable share of low frequency items (*gullible, appendage, standalone, defy*), collocations (*sth. of lesser value, devising a syllabus*), idiomatic phrases (*pull the strings*), consciously employed colloquialism (*“adult things”*) to convey the vagueness of the concept; competent use of near-synonyms (*competent and mature, political opinions and preferences, idealistic views and youthful enthusiasm; critical view + courage to defy authorities* among others).