

### Teil A: Leseverstehen und Schreiben

1. *Here you need to give a detailed account of the situation. Try to answer the wh-questions, e. g. where the scene is set, who takes part, what the characters are doing, how they are dealing with each other and why they behave that way.*
  - *Mae, Mercer and her parents are at the kitchen table eating.*
  - *Mae came in late because she posted a photo of Mercer's chandelier without asking him for permission.*
  - *Mae's mother wants to propose a toast but each time she starts, a phone rings.*
  - *In response to the photo Mae posted, she quickly receives many messages.*
  - *She tells the others about the messages.*
  - *Mercer is appalled at the news, which Mae does not even realise because she is busy checking for one particular message.*
  - *When she looks up, Mercer has gone.*
  - *Her parents just stare at her.*

The excerpt from Dave Eggers' novel *The Circle* is set in the kitchen of Mae's parents. Her parents and her former boyfriend Mercer have been waiting for her so they can have dinner together. Mae comes in late because she has been posting a photo of the chandelier Mercer gave to her parents. The other characters do not know about her posting the photo and Mae intends to surprise them with it. Mae's mother wants to propose a toast but she is interrupted several times by either Mae's or Mercer's phone ringing, so she gets a little upset. Whereas Mercer turns off his phone, Mae's phone keeps receiving messages in response to the photo she has posted. Finally, she cannot wait any longer and tells everybody what she has done. While Mae is proud of herself and Mercer, Mercer himself seems to be appalled and leaves the room without another word. Mae does not even realise his departure because she is too busy checking her phone for a message from Dubai. When she finally looks up from her phone, she only sees her parents staring at her. (187 words)

2. *First, take notes of the things Mae says and does and how she speaks. In addition, consider how the other characters treat her. Then interpret what all this tells you about her character. In the assignment you are also asked to analyse the effect the narrative perspective has. Therefore, you need to check through whose eyes we see the story and how this affects the amount of information we get, and if we are allowed to see the story objectively. The narrative perspective also influences who the readers tend to identify with.*
  - *Mae has good intentions. She posts the photo to make Mercer's work public.*
  - *However, she is not sensitive and does not realise that Mercer is not happy with her action.*

- *She is so obsessed with her smartphone and the world it connects her to that she is unable to really connect with the people she is actually facing.*
  - *She does not realise that Mercer is leaving or that her parents are staring at her because she is looking for a message from overseas (cf. ll. 36–38).*
  - *She does not understand that her parents are upset because she arrives so late (cf. ll. 3–6).*
  - *She acts rudely when she does not switch off her phone although it interrupts her mother several times (cf. ll. 10–12, 19–21, 26/27).*
- *The story is told from Mae's perspective. The reader first shares her excitement for Mercer and only realises later on that she is not in touch with the people around her. → The reader is misled.*

Mae is the protagonist in Dave Eggers' novel. At first sight she seems to be a nice girl who cares for others but throughout the excerpt the reader realises that Mae is very insensitive and much too concerned with her smartphone than to empathise with the people sitting with her at the table.

At first Mae seems to be quite likeable because she appears to care for others. Thus she apologises for coming in late and praises the food her parents have prepared as well as Mercer's handicraft (cf. ll. 5/6). She is "proud of Mercer" (l. 23) and wants to promote his chandeliers for him. When she realises how many messages she receives in answer to the photo she has posted, she actually beams and wants to celebrate what she perceives as Mercer's success (cf. ll. 29/30).

While Mae certainly has good intentions, she is utterly insensitive and, therefore, incapable of putting herself into Mercer's position. Mae should have known that she was not doing Mercer a favour by promoting his handicraft because he cannot produce his chandeliers quickly enough for online sale. Her parents had to wait "for one of his creations for a year" (ll. 7/8). The fact that Mae does not take this into account underlines how little interest she really has in her former boyfriend and how little she knows him. Even when he does not "look amused" (l. 31) she still believes that learning about a message from Dubai will make his resistance crumble (cf. ll. 33/34) because "she [is] sure [it will] impress him" (l. 33).

In this context the narrative perspective is relevant. The story is told from Mae's point of view. The readers perceive everything through her eyes, e. g. the readers know that a chair has been moved but only when Mae looks up, do they learn that Mercer has left the room (cf. ll. 36–38). This has the effect that the readers first tend to identify with Mae because of her positive traits described above. They are invited to share Mae's excitement (cf. l. 22) and only realise later on that they have been misled.

Once this becomes clear, certain remarks by the characters acquire a greater significance. For example, at the beginning her parents mildly reproach Mae for being late. Her mother should not have to point out, "We like to eat when it's hot" (l. 4), as this is a habit Mae should be well aware of. So this incident hints at her lack of empathy.

Moreover, when her mother wants to make a toast, Mae's phone rings but instead of turning it off, she apparently leaves it on the table and observes "her phone screen updat[ing]" (l. 27). Mercer's reaction contrasts sharply with Mae's. He immediately turns off his phone when it rings and apologises twice to Mrs Holland (cf. ll. 15–18). This underlines how rude Mae is.

This lack of empathy seems to arise from her obsession with her smartphone and the world it connects her to. She is too impressed with the number of messages her post has provoked and with the distant places some of these messages come from to even notice that the person she thinks she is doing all this for is leaving (cf. ll. 36–38).

All in all, Mae seems to be too caught up in the digital world to be really interested in the people surrounding her in person. Her relation to them seems very superficial because she does not really know what is important to the people she should be close to. Thus, she herself appears to be superficial and insensitive.

(609 words)

- 3.1 *In your discussion you need to present both sides before you come to a conclusion. Consider the positive aspects of modern communication as well as the negative ones. You need to refer back to Mae's way of communicating but also go beyond the text. Try to remember what texts you have discussed in class. Maybe this will also allow you to put in some facts.*
- *Arguments why modern means of communication are a blessing:*
    - *They are necessary in a globalised world.*
    - *They allow to communicate with people without travelling to see them. → environmentally friendly*
    - *People stay in touch more easily. Communication becomes easier.*
  - *Counterarguments:*
    - *People communicate more but also more superficially.*
    - *Despite face-to-face contacts people still tend to use their smartphones (reference to Mae).*
    - *A lot of people are obsessed with and addicted to their smartphones.*
    - *Communication becomes quicker. → more pressure to react*
    - *Communication also becomes more anonymous. → cyberbullying*

These days, in many countries smartphones, laptops and other portable devices are very common. Especially among teenagers they are widely distributed. Most teenagers could not imagine living without a smartphone; they are so-called smart natives and feel their mobile is a blessing. On the other hand, one often hears that the device is a curse. So which perspective is right?

Modern ways of communication certainly have many advantages. For one, communication has become much quicker than it was some thirty years ago. This saves a lot of time and also money, especially as we live in a globalised world. Transnational companies could not work that efficiently if they still had to rely on landlines and the postman. These days video conferences replace meetings

for which people from different places used to have to travel to one conference room. This saves time and also energy and thus is far more environmentally friendly.

Additionally, research has shown that people communicate more because of smartphones and the like. People tend to talk less to each other but communicate in written form via instant messenger applications. For teenagers, these applications are the most important ones on their smartphones and more than 80 % of them have them installed.

However, one must not forget the drawbacks. It is very common for teenagers to meet friends but instead of talking to each other they are all occupied with their smartphones. Mae, the protagonist of Dave Eggers' novel *The Circle*, is a good example. Although she is sitting with her parents and her former boyfriend at the table, she has her smartphone turned on and checks incoming messages. What more, she does not seem to know any longer that there are people around her. Communication seems to become more indirect and superficial, which leads to relations becoming more shallow.

The fact that communication has become quicker definitely has its advantages as shown above but the disadvantages are considerable, too. People are expected to react instantly to incoming messages, which may lead to spontaneous but wrong decisions and to words better left unsaid. An example is the widespread phenomenon of cyberbullying when teenagers hide in the anonymity of the web to insult others without really thinking about it.

In the end, it depends on the users if mobile devices are a blessing or a curse. If they use their mobile devices cleverly, they can save a lot of time and get in touch with others if it is really necessary, for instance in cases of emergency. In order to prevent these devices from becoming a curse, users must decide to ignore them, or even turn them off in certain situations, such as when they meet friends. Otherwise one might easily turn into a slave mastered by one's smartphone and the messages sent.

(465 words)

- 3.2 Before you start writing you need to try and put yourself in Mercer's shoes. Read the text once again and focus on what you learn about Mercer. How does he react to Mae and her post? What do you learn about his values? Once you have considered this, you can decide what is important to include in the letter and what tone to use. Remember that you are writing a personal letter of a (probably) young adult so you should use everyday English. Even though you might be tempted to use some informal words or even swear words, remember that this task is set in an exam, so you need to restrain yourself.
- Mercer explains why he left. → anger, disbelief at her lack of empathy
  - Mercer is angry at Mae because she has not asked him for permission (however it is up to you to decide how angry he actually is because he may take into account her good intentions).
  - Economic success is not important to him.
  - He only uses antlers from trusted suppliers.

- *He is disappointed with her for knowing so little about him.*
- *He may also comment on her obsession with her smartphone.*
- *He will probably ask her to remove the photo.*

6 May, 2013

Dear Mae,

Yesterday, I left your parents' house without a word. Hopefully you know that this is not like me but it only goes to show how furious I was and still am. You posted a photo of my chandelier without asking me about it first. I would like to believe that you meant well but I'm really shocked at how little you know me after all the years we spent together.

Your parents had waited for the chandelier for one year for a good reason. I only get the antlers from suppliers I trust because I don't want any deer to be shot just for the sake of my chandeliers. So how am I to satisfy the demand of people from all over the world? Plus, money is not important to me. I like my work and like to be independent. What you have done puts far too much pressure on me. My phone starts ringing as soon as I turn it on and I get orders from all over the world. If I wanted to answer them all, I wouldn't be doing anything else. That's not the way I work or communicate, so please, remove this photo straight away to undo at least some of the damage you've done.

I'd also like to tell you that I was horrified by your obsession with your smartphone. Your parents see so little of you and when you visit them, you keep your eyes on the screen. For heaven's sake, Mae, talk to the people who are sitting face-to-face with you and do not constantly interrupt the conversation because your phone displays a message. I really worry about you because you seem to have become a slave to your smartphone. You are like a puppet reacting to the impulses given by a remote control.

I've shut down my mobile for good because I can no longer stand the pressure you've put me under and I advise you to do so, too, at least when you visit your parents.

Whatever you do, Mae, remove that photo. Quickly and for good! You had no right to post it in the first place.

Mercer

(363 words)

## Teil B: Sprachmittlung

- Der Zieltext ist hier ein Beitrag zu einer Online-Diskussion im Internet. Dies bedeutet, dass die formelle Sprache aus der Rede des Ministers in einen eher informellen Sprachgebrauch umgewandelt werden muss. Inhaltlich gilt es, die Informationen aus der Rede herauszufiltern, die sich auf Aspekte beziehen, die nach Ansicht des Ministers belegen, dass Privatsphäre und Datenschutz durchaus Themen sind, die für die Bevölkerung und damit auch für die Wirtschaft relevant sind. Hierzu gehören:
- *Durch verschiedene Datenskandale wurden die Menschen sensibilisiert (hier*

