

SPANISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8685/01
Speaking

General

Colleagues in Centres are thanked for their professionalism and cooperation in conducting and administering the speaking tests.

The syllabus for the examination remained unchanged and Centres were generally familiar with the format and nature of the examination. Most tests were carried out competently and with due regard to the intended level.

Some minor points: occasionally it was unclear when each part of the test was completed. Candidates and Moderators need to know when the end of each section has been reached. The initial presentation should last up to three minutes, without interruptions or questions, and there should be a clear distinction between the Topic conversation and the General conversation. Candidates are required to obtain information and opinions from the Examiner in both conversation sections (up to five marks are awarded for this in each section). This element of the test was still sometimes overlooked. Candidates should show an ability to form and apply questions appropriate to the context under discussion and marks should not be awarded unless this is done explicitly. All-purpose or one-word questions should not be given a high mark and Examiners' follow-up answers should be brief.

Administration

The majority of Centres complied fully with the syllabus requirements. In a few cases, timings of the tests were not in accordance with instructions. There were instances of tests that were significantly under (less than ten minutes) the stipulated time as well as some that were well over twenty minutes. In the case of the former, candidates were not given sufficient opportunity to develop the discussions in either the Topic or the General conversations. When timings run over, candidates are at risk of making unnecessary errors, without gaining extra credit for the material covered. Some presentations were considerably over the three-minute limit, sometimes at the expense of the following Topic conversation, as a result of which marks for the Topic conversation were necessarily depressed since that section of the test was short. It is in a candidate's interest that timings for each section of the test comply with the timings stipulated in the syllabus.

The most serious problem with the paperwork continues to be failure to complete fully the mark grids on the Working Mark Sheets, or not to enclose these with the recordings. It is not sufficient just to enter a total mark for the whole test or section totals for the Presentation, Topic conversation and General conversation. If a candidate is awarded, for example, 15 marks for the Presentation, Moderators need to see how the Centre has arrived at that mark in the three constituent elements, Content, Pronunciation, Language, so that the Centre's interpretation and application of the marking criteria can be assessed. Without this full information, Centres' marks cannot be confirmed and results may be delayed.

Recording quality is generally good and many Centres are now using CDs rather than cassettes. In all cases, please ensure that candidates' names and examination numbers are clearly announced at the start of each recording and are written on the tape/CD and the cassette box/CD case.

Topic presentation and conversation

The presentation, as has been stated in previous reports, is an exercise in formal speaking and requires relevant information and planning. Candidates who spoke on their chosen topic at a superficial level and without evidence of preparation and organisation could not be awarded a high mark. In contrast, speaking clearly, with accurate pronunciation and intonation and using an appropriate range and register of language gained credit.

The topic must be related to the Spanish-speaking world. An interesting range of topics was discussed with very few inappropriate subjects, though some candidates included the Hispanic context by implication rather than focusing on showing clearly how the topic related to the Hispanic world. To gain access to the full range of marks, candidates should, for example, include precise detail, concrete reference, statistics, opinions and analysis.

As this should be an advanced-level discussion, candidates must be given every opportunity to perform at an appropriate standard. Examiners needed to provide, for example, opportunities for a candidate to counter an argument or substantiate a point of view in the discussion. Spontaneity, responsiveness and fluency are among the assessment criteria applied in the conversation sections and sometimes a degree of over-rehearsal or the use of trigger questions prevented candidates from showing real spontaneity. Prepared answers or mini presentations are rarely in candidates' best interests since these prevent access to the highest marks for fluency and spontaneity. Similarly, candidates must be encouraged – and given the opportunity – to respond to higher-level language to gain maximum credit in the assessment criteria for language.

General conversation

The General conversation has the same mark scheme as the Topic conversation: the General conversation should be at an advanced-level standard, both linguistically and contextually and allow and encourage candidates to deal with topics in an informed though non-specialist manner. There was still a tendency for some Centres to limit topics to everyday or elementary matters and to deal with topics more suitable to lower-level examinations. Opinions and the ability to discuss issues in both factual and hypothetical contexts are important. Candidates are assessed on their ability to use an appropriate range of linguistic skills, so again questioning should allow and encourage the use of as wide a range of structures as possible. Accuracy in grammar, vocabulary and register, are all taken into consideration.

SPANISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8685/21
Reading and Writing

General comments

This examination contained tasks of varying degrees of challenge and was a good test for candidates of all levels of ability. There was a wide range of marks awarded, with some candidates putting in excellent performances and, at the other extreme, some candidates who clearly were not ready for an examination at this level.

The majority of Centres had encouraged their candidates to present their work well; an extra space left between questions made reading easier. Good presentation also tended to coincide with good examination technique. Regrettably, there were still a small number of Centres whose candidates offered brief answers for high-scoring questions, disregarded the word count for **Question 5** or introduced irrelevant, generalised material in their summaries.

Comments on specific questions

SECCIÓN PRIMERA

Question 1

This exercise in matching a paraphrase with a phrase used in the text generally gave candidates a confidence-boosting start. Scores of five out of five were not infrequently recorded, although the majority were closer to the middle of the range.

Candidates should be reminded that they are looking for a precise match, and a superfluous word or words will invalidate a correct answer.

Question 2

The language manipulations in this question always prove to be challenging, and only the better candidates recorded marks above three out of five.

A considerable number of variations were possible in the answers, all of which were acceptable as long as they were grammatically correct and would fit back seamlessly into the original text.

Some candidates failed to use the targeted expressions in their answers, for example in **(a)** some candidates used *solemos* instead of the required *suele*, and in **(b)** some answers omitted *que* in the phrase *es preciso que*. In both these instances answers were invalidated.

- (a)** Many candidates were successful in forming the variety of infinitive constructions which could follow *suele*. Answers were sometimes invalidated by the omission of *que*, as they would no longer fit back into the text and retain the same meaning.
- (b)** A subjunctive was required here, as was realised by most native speakers and the better candidates amongst the non-native speakers. Those who opted for *utilizar* sometimes encountered orthographical problems.
- (c)** The majority of candidates were able to form one of the many constructions which could be followed by the infinitive *justificar* and express the same idea as the original phrase.
- (d)** Out of all the five manipulations, this one, requiring the use of *tantas*, generated the highest number of acceptable permutations.

- (e) There was mixed success in the use of *les hace falta* or *les falta* as an alternative to *necesitan*.

Question 3

This text contained some challenging sections, although candidates were quickly able to appreciate the underlying theme that physical appearance can often be a discriminatory factor where job opportunities are concerned.

- (a) This question stretched candidates. Many were able to note that the barrier to reaching the *sitio deseado* arises from shortcomings in personal appearance. Not so many correctly identified the *sitio deseado* as the sought after job.
- (b)(i) This question was more accessible than the first but unfortunately some candidates lifted “*el aspecto físico y la personalidad*”, and were therefore unable to score.
- (ii) By contrast this part of the question was far more testing, with candidates required to demonstrate a good command of Spanish in order to express their views as to why a 'selection process' might equate to 'discrimination'.
- (c)(i) Many candidates used the *encajar en un cierto grupo de trabajadores* from **Question 1(c)**, showing that they were observant and had understood the information needed to answer the question correctly. Some answers were too general and could not be awarded any marks, for example, *explica el término excelente presentación mediante una asociación, una ejemplificación y una comparación*.
- (ii) This was a fairly accessible question which most candidates answered correctly. Some, however, gave very vague information for which they could not get any marks, for example, *por su aspecto físico y los contrastes en su apariencia* or *por la forma en que viste*. These answers did not give specific details about the differences between *banqueros* and *programadores*. A few even missed the force of *es poco común ver* and suggested the banking profession was characterised by long hair.
- (d) This was a more challenging question. Some candidates understood that the trend was *invertir más dinero en su apariencia* but quite a few failed to get the second point *es más fácil negociar...* Incorrect answers ranged from *la nueva tendencia es preocuparse más por un aspecto físico* to *cambiar de imagen por la moda*.
- (e) Candidates scored well on this question, successfully identifying the ideas that there were not so many job opportunities for the over-thirties, so in order to improve their chances or to be promoted they needed to look younger. The mistake that was sometimes made was to give a more general answer, such as *para mejorar su imagen*.
- (f) The two elements of the answer were fairly easily identified in the text. Marks were occasionally invalidated by the lifting of phrases such as *una cultura laboral menos discriminatoria*.

SECCIÓN SEGUNDA

Question 4

Answers to questions on the second text were commonly not so accurate as the answers to the first text. One possible reason for this was that candidates often resorted to their own ideas about ways in which disabled people experienced discrimination instead of offering the specific details stated in the text.

- (a)
(i) & (ii) Although four marks were offered for the two parts of this question answers often lacked the necessary detail. For example, some candidates mentioned that *las autoridades no han hecho nada*, which is not the same as saying that they have not succeeded in changing this attitude.

- (b) This should have been quite a straightforward two marks. However, candidates frequently failed to take full advantage, either because they did not mention how many pupils were affected, or because they directly lifted *rampas, aulas y baños adecuados*.
- (c) (i) There were some very good explanations of the term *violencia arquitectónica*, although a number of candidates used information which answered the second part of the question and could not be rewarded here. One or two misinterpretations of the term to mean 'physical violence against the disabled' were also noted.
- (ii) Noting the three obstacles to mobility for disabled people which were mentioned in the text did not turn out to be such a straightforward three marks as had been anticipated. There was quite a lot of lifting of *ausencia de semáforos para ciegos* and *el mal estado de las veredas*. Some answers failed to get a mark for the last point as they did not include information about the lack of facilities in buses for wheelchairs.
- (d) This question was answered successfully by most candidates.
- (e) Sometimes candidates offered answers containing information not extracted from the text, for example, *los discapacitados necesitan apoyo público para su integración como facilidades para poder depender de ellos mismos y no de otra persona*. But all in all most answers were correct.

Question 5

Quite a lot of candidates were aware of the word limit and stuck to it, and the number who exceeded the stated limit decreased in comparison with previous sessions. Anything more than 20 words over the maximum of 140 words is disregarded, and in extreme cases this can lead to very low or even no marks for the personal response.

- (a) As has been often stated in previous reports, what is required here is not a generalised summary of the two texts but a succinct statement of the main points which they contain. There is no need to paraphrase as no penalty is exacted for copying phrases from the texts. Also, personal opinions are not required in this part of the question.
- (b) In the two or three sentences which candidates have at their disposal here it is important to give a personal point of view and to attempt to incorporate original ideas rather than those merely taken from the texts.

SPANISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8685/22
Reading and Writing

General comments

This examination contained tasks of varying degrees of challenge and was a good test for candidates of all levels of ability. There was a wide range of marks awarded, with some candidates putting in excellent performances and, at the other extreme, some candidates who clearly were not ready for an examination at this level. A few candidates suffered from poor time management and were unable to complete their work. Candidates seemed well aware of the environmental issues underpinning the two texts, although the first text frequently proved more of a challenge to some candidates than the second one.

Comments on specific questions

SECCIÓN PRIMERA

Question 1

This exercise in identifying the correct definition of vocabulary used in the text generally gave candidates a confidence-boosting start. Scores of five out of five were not infrequently recorded, although the majority were closer to the middle of the range.

The key to success in this test type is, of course, to look at the vocabulary item in the context in which it appears in the text. It should in fact encourage understanding of the text in advance of the specific comprehension demands made by **Question 3**.

Question 1 (a) was often incorrectly answered as (ii).

Question 2

Few candidates recorded marks above three out of five in this exercise.

- (a) Most candidates were successful in constructing the third person singular of the perfect tense.
- (b) Only a minority of candidates knew that a subjunctive was required here and many of those that did failed to spell *modifique* correctly.
- (c) A number of answers were incorrect because of a failure to make the correct agreement with *colocadas*.
- (d) Finding a connection between *visibles* and *verse* and forming a construction which correctly included the latter frequently proved to be too much of a challenge for some candidates.
- (e) Greater success was noted here, possibly because there were several permutations in which *tanto* could be correctly used.

Question 3

As mentioned above, weaker candidates often struggled with this first text which dealt with controversy surrounding the siting of a new wind farm. However, those candidates who successfully applied their knowledge of Spanish to the text were rewarded with good marks.

- (a) The journalistic vocabulary and register of the first paragraph proved to be difficult for many candidates. Those who recognised more common phrases, such as *se niega a* and *apoyan diferentes motivos* were able to successfully answer the question.
- (b)(i) Those who recognised the significance of *la licencia de obras* and who were able use this, or paraphrase it with a suitable verb, scored the mark.
- (ii) This part of the question called for inference to be drawn from candidates' understanding of the proposed design of the wind farm. Most candidates came up with at least one suggestion, usually that the turbines should not be so high or so near, or that there should not be so many of them. Some candidates clearly did not understand and merely re-stated the actual details and dimensions of the planned project.
- (c) The impact of the wind farm on the natural environment was correctly identified by many, and better candidates also noted the noise pollution which would occur. Only a minority of candidates recorded the fact that the project would contravene European guidelines.
- (d) Although many candidates considered the wind farm to be potentially life threatening for the migratory birds, a surprising number struggled to use *morir* or the passive of *matar* correctly. Others commented on ecological implications of changed routes and habitats, and some thought the wind farm would have no effect whatsoever – which was fine as long as candidates justified this opinion.
- (e)(i) Candidates scored well on this question. The importance of renewable energy was readily identified, and many backed this up by noting that the impact of the wind farm would be less than that of coal-fired power stations. Many candidates also understood that the birds were not in such grave peril as had been feared.
- (ii) The idea of a pilot plan, to examine the impact of just one or two wind turbines, was also well understood.

SECCIÓN SEGUNDA

Question 4

The text on the tax on plastic bags proved to be more accessible than the first text. Candidates appeared to be a lot more confident with the vocabulary and also the concept involved.

- (a) Many candidates achieved maximum marks on this question, correctly identifying all three of the elements required by the mark scheme.
- (b) A total of two out of three was a common outcome for this question, with there being no clearly identifiable pattern in the element missing from the answer.
- (c) Candidates were generally not so confident in their answers here. The point about the consumers taking time to change their habits was often overlooked.
- (d) At this point many of the weaker candidates decided that the text was not about *bolsas plásticas* at all, but about *botellas plásticas* instead. The majority, however, picked up the mark on offer for the concept of using two or three bags to carry one bottle, although not so many noted the need to plan shopping in advance.
- (e) This question proved to be the most challenging on the second text. Only better candidates were able to demonstrate understanding of the point that if the manufacturers increase their prices to the supermarkets then the latter will pass on this increase to the consumers.
- (f) Even if the previous answer had been answered incorrectly most candidates were able to identify correctly the two elements required by the mark scheme.

Question 5

Both parts of this question were generally handled well. Candidates had clearly been well trained in the techniques required and only a very few exceeded the maximum of 140 words. Anything more than 20 words over this maximum is disregarded and, in extreme cases, this can lead to very low or even no marks for the personal response.

- (a) As has been often stated in previous reports, what is required here is not a generalised summary of the two texts but a succinct statement of the main points which they contain. There is no need to paraphrase as no penalty is exacted for copying phrases from the texts.

Most candidates were well aware of this approach and the only barriers which restricted access to higher marks were either an imperfect understanding of the first text or, when dealing with the second text, a tendency to write about the evils of plastic bags rather than the initiative which had been taken to curtail their use.

- (b) In the two or three sentences which candidates have at their disposal here it is important to give a personal point of view and to attempt to incorporate original ideas rather than those merely taken from the texts. This last question was generally done well, with most candidates being proud of their country's green credentials.

SPANISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8685/31

Essay

General Comments

Once again, the overall impression gained by Examiners during this session was an extremely positive one indeed. As is increasingly the case with this paper, most candidates were able to construct essays that were both clearly relevant to the title set and convincingly argued with an abundance of pertinent facts and impressively articulated opinions. Examiners are in no doubt that the level of linguistic ability shown by many candidates was impressive. There is every reason for the vast majority of Centres and, indeed, candidates, to feel satisfaction at a job well done. Again during this examination session, the Essay Paper appears to offer the ideal opportunity for those candidates who are well prepared and who are self-evidently accustomed to the demands of the titles set to score good marks both for Language and for Content. As is always the case, marks are awarded to those candidates who display linguistic flair and a degree of grammatical precision, together with a clear understanding of the topic selected. As has been said in previous reports pre-learnt compilations of vaguely connected ideas regardless of the actual title set are very unlikely to score good marks for content. Unfortunately, a small number of candidates resorted to this measure and lost marks accordingly.

Whereas in previous reports Examiners have noted the number of candidates submitting an essay well in excess of the 400 word upper limit, it is with considerable satisfaction that for this session there were very few essays either well in excess of the word count stipulated in the rubric (250 – 400 words) or considerably below it. It gives Examiners no satisfaction whatsoever to deduct marks for such rubric infringements. Centres are obviously continuing to emphasise the importance of the word count to their candidates and long may this be the case.

Many candidates were, once again, able to cope well with the demands of the paper and produce essays that displayed a clear understanding of Spanish grammar and its accurate application. Numerous essays showed a pleasing ability to manipulate advanced Spanish syntax and to employ a good range of appropriate vocabulary in order to convey to the reader a clear line of reasoning and thought processes. Nevertheless, the predictability of many of the most common errors was disappointing.

Spanish accents continue to prove to be too difficult an obstacle for many candidates. Candidates should accept without hesitation that the worst strategy for dealing with accents is to leave them out altogether! This will result in marks being lost for repeated errors relating to accentuation. The most common examples of this phenomenon were *tambien*, *paises* and *jovenes*. Many candidates wishing to use the perfect tense should note the mis-spelling of the auxiliary verb in utterances such as *...el gobierno a decidido luchar contra la contaminación...* and make sure the letter 'h' is employed accordingly. Examiners also noted that large numbers of candidates incorrectly used plural verb forms for singular subjects in sentences such as *...la gente prefieren comer de una manera sana...*. Another notable misunderstanding which has been mentioned before on many occasions is the use of the phrase *...en una manera...* instead of *...de una manera...* in an adverbial sense. Candidates should familiarise themselves with the correct form. The confusion of tenses (in particular the preterite and the imperfect) was another common feature of a number of essays, especially amongst the lower ability range. It would appear, however, that the trend for employing English words to make up for a lack of awareness of a suitable Spanish word has, during this session, thankfully disappeared.

Comments on individual questions

Question 1

As Examiners had anticipated, this proved to be a hugely popular title. Candidates adopted a variety of different approaches to the idea that young people are the most important resource in any given country. Almost every single essay written in response to this title took the view, hardly surprisingly, that the statement was indeed correct. Some also opined that society in general needs to show more respect for young people than is currently the case.

Question 2

This was another popular title. Tourism as a topic is clearly one with which many candidates feel comfortable in terms of expressing opinions and constructing an argument. A good number of candidates presented a powerful argument to the effect that beach holidays are very much a thing of the past with many more people opting for eco-tourism as a consequence of our raised awareness of environmental issues. The very best essays tended to refer to specific holiday destinations and to give statistical evidence to support their points.

Question 3

A far less popular title, perhaps surprisingly. Too many candidates simply talked about the effects of pollution in very general terms and managed to disregard the title, all to little avail. The title was an attempt to spark discussion on the inevitability or otherwise of environmental pollution in our modern society. A number of essays did precisely this and, as a consequence, scored high marks for content.

Question 4

Another reasonably popular title. This title produced the most varied set of responses. All candidates showed clear understanding of the impact of the Internet and all candidates were able to point out potential dangers of the world wide web. For many, there was little doubt that the Internet can, and indeed should, be regarded as one of the most important inventions in history.

Question 5

This title proved to be less popular than expected. However, it was generally well answered by those who opted to tackle it. Many made the clear link between a country's eating habits and its cultural heritage. Some candidates even argued passionately that food is a clearly defined art form. The best essays argued that eating is far more than just a biological necessity and many candidates went on to supply appropriate references and detailed evidence to support their claims.

SPANISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8685/32

Essay

General comments

Examiners are able to report that the majority of candidates entered for this paper performed well and were able to showcase their ability to put together an essay written in good Spanish with a clearly constructed line of thought. It is increasingly obvious that most candidates are well prepared to tackle the demands of this paper. As is reasonable to expect, essays that showed linguistic flair and grammatical accuracy, coupled with a good degree of insight into the selected topic, all managed to access the higher ranges of the mark scheme. The need for relevant illustration of the arguments being made as well as a clear response to the title set (as opposed to a pre-learnt compilation of vaguely connected ideas regardless of the actual title set) has now become a firmly established fact amongst most candidates and their teachers. This was not the case, however, for a small number of candidates who insisted on writing an essay that they may well have prepared in their own heads but which, unfortunately, had very little to do with the title on the question paper. Such rubric infringements will result in a significant loss of marks.

With regards to the length of essays, Centres are obviously emphasising the importance of the word count to their candidates and consequently there were very few essays that ignored the rubric.

Many candidates were, once again, able to produce essays that displayed a clear understanding of Spanish grammar and its application. The very best essays showed a well-grounded ability to manipulate advanced sentence structure and to employ an impressive range of appropriate vocabulary in order to put across to the reader a clear line of thought. However, Examiners felt, once again, that too many candidates lost marks for Language as a direct result of failing to check what had actually been committed to paper. Spanish accents continue to catch many candidates out with many resorting to the rather lazy tactic of omitting them altogether! Items such as *jovenes*, *tambien* and *paises* were all too common, even in essays that were otherwise good. Another notable error was the use of the phrase *...en una manera...* instead of *...de una manera...* in adverbial phrases. Some candidates ended a sentence with the expression of an opinion but with utterances such as *...la contaminación ambiental es un tema de suma importancia, creo que*. Whilst the expression of personal opinions is to be encouraged, they need to be done in a grammatically accurate manner. The predictable confusion of tenses (in particular the preterite and the imperfect) was quite a common feature this session, especially amongst the lower ability range. Candidates would be well advised to be much more secure in their knowledge of both these key tenses.

Comments on individual questions

Question 1

As Examiners had anticipated, this was a massively popular title. Surprisingly, perhaps, candidates tended to agree that most young people do not fully appreciate the notion of personal responsibility. Some argued that this was caused by interfering parents never allowing their children to express themselves. It was argued by many that parents should allow their children to learn from their mistakes far more than is currently the case.

Question 2

This was another very popular title. The topic of tourism is clearly one which many candidates felt well prepared to discuss. Most essays concluded that tourists should indeed endeavour to be ambassadors for their own country. Many felt that the creation of national stereotypes is largely due to the behaviour of a minority of self-centred tourists from the more 'developed' countries of the world.

Question 3

A reasonably popular title. Many felt that it would be folly to limit the use of aeroplanes both in terms of tourism and commerce in general. There would be, it was argued, far too much to lose in economic terms if governments were to do this.

Question 4

The most popular title by a considerable margin. The high numbers of essays produced were very well conceived, passionately argued and, on the whole, suggested that animals should not be used for anything other than serious and genuine medical research into the prevention and/or cure of major diseases. Using animals to test cosmetic products, for example, was considered very wrong indeed by the majority of candidates.

Question 5

This title proved to be more popular than expected, and opinions were very much divided on this issue. Some felt that fast food was a perfectly decent alternative to traditional, more healthy cooking whilst others argued that more people need to be made more aware of the nutritional benefits of fresh produce being cooked on a regular basis. Indeed, a number of essays suggested that fast food outlets should be taxed out of existence.

