

Examiners' Report /
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2012

International GCSE Spanish (4SP0)
Paper 03

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Examiner Report

General comments

This year saw another increase in home entries and it was noticeable that most students were well prepared for this examination. There were some excellent conversations that highlighted the excellent command of Spanish that the students had developed over the course of two years.

The most popular topic was Home and Abroad with the photo often being a holiday although all the other topic areas were covered by candidates in equal measure. Those centres that followed the instructions in the specification to the letter ensured that students could achieve their best performance. Teacher examiners were largely encouraging towards candidates and pushed their linguistic boundaries appropriately with unprepared comments and questions interspersed with a more standardised set of questions around familiar topics.

A few centres failed to indicate clearly the breaks in each conversation and so unnecessarily disadvantaged their own candidates. Teachers should aim to complete the examination within the 10 minutes, as a fair number tended to go beyond the allotted time. Teacher examiners should remember that examinations that are too long or too short may be self-penalising.

Conduct of the Speaking Examinations

Candidates often gave original and interesting responses and creativity into their opening conversation, the best ones continuing the complexity of language and vocabulary into the remaining two dialogues. Weaker candidates showed a marked decline in ability once the opening presentation was completed.

Conversations around a photograph or picture often centred on questions in the present tense, though a good strategy used by a number of centres consisted of the candidate being asked to speculate what had happened before the picture was taken and what they thought would happen afterwards. The best candidates were very astute in ensuring that a range of tenses was included within the initial one minute presentation.

Accuracy by the Teacher examiner can be critical when consistent errors made by them are repeated by candidates in their answers. Dual linguist teachers specifically should ensure any undue influence from their other language does not affect their own performance in Spanish.

Teacher examiners who only ask questions in the present tense or asked closed questions also disadvantaged candidates at times. Questions such as 'What is your name?' or 'When is your birthday?' are by their very nature demanding of a brief answer. Often teacher examiners struggled to formulate questions and the best teacher interviewers had clearly prepared thoroughly for the examination.

Similarly, good practice amongst teacher interviewers is to stretch strong candidates with more challenging questions and give less demanding questions to weaker candidates. This can only serve to ensure that the examination is a positive experience for the student rather than an ordeal where they struggle to answer questions. There is a lot of sympathy for a candidate who struggles to answer in the present tense and is then faced with an if clause question.

The best candidates were given the opportunity to use a wide range of structures and a full range of tenses. Some candidates with a good command of Spanish lost marks as they only gave brief answers to questions. In order to achieve the top mark for Spontaneity and Fluency students must be very responsive to the question asked, expanding their answer as much as possible. Teacher examiners should also refrain from correcting the candidates' Spanish as the candidate cannot be credited for their response.

Good practice carried out by some teacher examiners was to ensure that they listened to the candidates responses carefully and asked a follow up question that allowed the conversation to flow naturally.

Pronunciation at times affected communication and this was most noticeable with inaccurate, and interchangeable, confusion of 'fui' and 'fue' in particular. There is often a marked improvement in pronunciation once the candidate has completed the presentation element of the discussion.

Administration of the Examination

The administration of this examination was completed efficiently and professionally by most centres. Excellent administration was carried out by those centres where both pages (41 and 42) had been photocopied allowing examiners to enter their marks appropriately, CDS/USBs and cassettes had been labelled appropriately and wrapped carefully and the picture discussed was attached. Attaching a clearly visible identifying label to the memory stick is good practice as memory sticks have a natural ability to slide out of plastic envelopes. The excellent quality of recording that can be reproduced by the use of digital recorders cannot be underestimated and teacher examiners would be advised that this is the best form of recording. Some recordings done using cassettes were so poor that examiners struggled to hear the examination. Teacher examiners must ensure that at the end of each recording they check that the exam is audible.

Grade Boundaries

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