



External Assessment Report 2010

Subject	Spanish
Level	Advanced Higher

The statistics used in this report are pre-appeal.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers/lecturers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published question papers and marking instructions for the Examination.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

It is gratifying to note that candidate numbers at AH Spanish have risen significantly from 196 in 2009 to the highest number yet — 247 in 2010. The number of centres presenting AH Spanish has also increased to 66, with 19 new centres coming on board this year.

There were no significant setting issues for the 2010 paper and no changes to the experienced setting and vetting teams. There were two additions to our team of Visiting Assessors for Speaking, and they carried out their duties in a highly professional manner.

Speaking

As in previous years, candidates did very well in this skill area, managing to achieve an average mark of 38 out of 50, slightly better than in the previous two years.

Folio

A reasonable range of texts and topics were attempted but candidates performed slightly less well in this component as compared to last year, averaging a score of 17.1 out of 30.

Paper 1: Reading and Translation

In general, candidates responded well to this paper, especially when answering the comprehension questions. They seemed to engage well with the subject matter of the text, which related to road safety advertising campaigns. As before, candidates still had difficulty when tackling the inferential question. As regards the passage for translation, some candidates coped well while others found this section fairly demanding.

Paper 2: Listening and Discursive Writing

Candidates did well in this paper, and performance was commendable especially in Part A of the Listening component, where results were very encouraging. The theme of shopping habits and the environment seemed to generate a positive reaction.

In Discursive Writing, the standard was broadly comparable to previous years, perhaps slightly better.

The examining team were again pleased to note that all essay titles were attempted, although those on *Techo de Cristal* (no. 4) and *Tele/Cine/Internet* (no. 5) were the more popular choices.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Speaking

Once again, confidence in language, fluency, and taking the initiative were features of good performances this year. The vast majority of candidates were enthusiastic and well

prepared. Many candidates appeared motivated to do well, made good use of learned material, were enterprising in their attempts to go beyond minimal responses, and incorporated some useful and interesting discussion techniques into their conversation with the Visiting Assessor.

Folio

As in previous years, the presentation of essay work was excellent. All pieces were word-processed. However, some candidates this year were penalised for exceeding the word limit or not providing a bibliography.

As in previous years, for the extended reading/viewing Unit, the study of literary texts was tackled more successfully than background topics. Some candidates excelled in their essays on a literary text, while others unfortunately performed poorly on a background topic. There were no Language in Work reports this year.

Paper 1: Reading and Translation

Candidates generally responded well to all of the comprehension questions (1–5), providing detailed and accurate responses.

Paper 2: Listening and Discursive Writing

Candidates attempted all questions in both parts of the Listening component and, like last year, tended to be more successful in Part A.

Overall, essays were well structured and written in paragraphs. Candidates generally achieved good results when they incorporated appropriate learned material into their answer and when their essays were relevant to the question. Good practice was characterised by some excellent renderings of opinions/debating phrases such as:

- ◆ *es un hecho bien sabido que*
- ◆ *la historia ha sido testigo*
- ◆ *cabe preguntarse si es verdad*
- ◆ *convendría analizar esta afirmación*
- ◆ *se debate con frecuencia*
- ◆ *existe una gran divergencia de opiniones sobre este tema*

There was also appropriate use and accurate treatment of subjunctive clauses by some candidates.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Folio

Many candidates found it difficult to select a title or essay question that generated debate or critical analysis.

Some were unsuccessful in effectively proof-checking Extended Reading/Viewing (ERV) Folio pieces, especially when quoting in Spanish from a literary text.

Often, there was too much of a narrative approach taken and insufficient critical analysis or evaluation, particularly in relation to background topics, including occasionally the study of film.

Inferential question in Paper 1

As in previous years, many candidates provided information from the text rather than attempting to draw inferences. Some included quotes from the text in their answer and then merely repeated these in English, instead of using them to develop their argument.

Translation

No single sense unit in particular was found to be demanding by candidates. However, some had problems with rendering the following words or phrases into good English:

- ◆ *responsables*
- ◆ *cada vez más*
- ◆ *cómo*
- ◆ *se dibujó*
- ◆ *cinturón de seguridad*

Listening, Part A

In Question 1, some candidates failed to score a point relating to the number 16,000 million.

In Question 3, a fair number did not achieve the mark relating to *el tubo digestivo obstruido*.

Listening, Part B

In question 3 (b), *petróleo* was often mistranslated as 'petrol', and not many candidates scored a point relating to plastic bags taking 500 years to decompose.

Not many candidates picked up on the 'packaging of **food** products' in Question 3 or 'brands **and** services' in Question 4.

Discursive Writing

As in previous years, candidates ran into difficulties when going beyond prepared material. This led, in many cases, to some unidiomatic translation from English into Spanish and poor control of tenses/verbs (use of *deber* in particular), as well as errors in the use of adjectival agreements.

Other major errors related to the misuse of *Ser* and *Estar*, mistakes concerning past participles especially of *romper*, and failure to employ the subjunctive mood when required.

There was too much emphasis at times on high frequency language like *hay* and *me gusta* and the occasional repetition of language structures throughout the essay.

A small number of candidates did not fully understand the concepts of *sociedad cosmopolita* and *techo de cristal*.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

General

Share all criteria/Grade Related Criteria/pegged marks/performance descriptors, etc, and SQA documentation with candidates. Incorporate exemplification of standards and professional development workshop materials into lessons.

Encourage candidates to make full use of the SQA website, especially by referring to External Assessment Reports for AH Spanish from the last couple of years, as well as the marking instructions for specific past question papers.

Speaking

Continue the good work in preparing candidates for this assessment, but perhaps with an increasing focus on grammatical accuracy, particularly with regard to use of verbs, gender of nouns, and adjectival agreements.

Try to train candidates in discussion techniques in the language to enable them to deal with any question they may be asked that goes beyond their comfort zone of learned material.

Folio

This is still an area where candidates should be achieving better results.

The choice of a title for the two Folio pieces for the ERV Unit is of crucial importance. The title should not be vague or general or obvious, eg 'How important is Bernarda Alba's role in the play?' but should generate a discursive/evaluative approach.

For the ERV Unit, either try to encourage the candidates to study two literary texts or to tackle their background topic in a manner that is appropriate to Advanced Higher (ie less information and more evaluation).

A 'compare and contrast' approach usually meets with some success, provided that the focus of the comparison and contrast is rooted in Hispanic literature and/or culture.

Discourage candidates from choosing to study only **one** poem or song as a literary text or only **one** film as a background topic. Many candidates did not score well in essays of this type as their approach tended to be limiting, mostly narrative and one-dimensional.

Discourage candidates from undertaking background topics on football, flamenco, Spanish cooking and the study of a Spanish city. The treatment of these was almost always inappropriate to Advanced Higher.

When studying a film as a literary text, ensure that candidates have read the screenplay or source text, make reference to it in Spanish in their essay, and incorporate this into their bibliography.

Candidates should pay more attention to structure and save their conclusion until the final part of their essay, rather than reveal this in the first paragraph. Independent research should be reflected in the bibliography.

Candidates are encouraged to develop the quality and breadth of their bibliographies overall — eg Wikipedia (without mention of a website), a reference to a newspaper (on its own with no article noted) and ‘teachers’ notes’ do not constitute appropriate items for a bibliography.

More care and attention is needed for proof-checking the use of English, spelling and punctuation, as well as accuracy in quotation from literary texts. Candidates should avoid the use of inappropriate register and expressions such as ‘swept under the carpet’ and ‘in his book’ meaning ‘in his opinion’. They should vary their expression throughout their essay and avoid the repetition of words and phrases.

Candidates should be made aware that plagiarism will be punished severely and that they may lose their AH award if this is discovered. Advances in technology have ensured that plagiarism can be much more easily detected by Examiners these days.

Paper 1

General

Now that candidates have 1 hour and 30 minutes for this paper, they should divide their time appropriately between the comprehension questions, the inferential question, and the passage for translation.

Unfortunately, there were a few instances this year of candidates not attempting or completing Question 6 (the inferential question).

Translation

More attention should be given to the development of translation skills, and in particular to ways of converting idiomatic expressions from Spanish into English. Centres should ensure that all candidates at this level have developed their skills in the use of a dictionary.

Inferential question (Question 6)

Centres should encourage candidates to draw inferences from the passage, and not just provide factual information or repeat the answers to their comprehension questions when doing this task. A balanced approach in answering the 2010 question, which took into account both sides of the argument about road safety campaigns, generally got better results this year. Answers to the inferential question should be well structured and have a rounded conclusion, preferably at the end. Any quotation from the text should be appropriate and relevant, not just a repetition of what has been argued in English.

The standard of English is crucial in this question, and phrases like ‘this implies that’, ‘would seem to suggest’, ‘thus it can be claimed that’, ‘backs up the idea that’, and ‘by stating this,

the writer makes it clear that' may help to generate the level of sophistication required to achieve good results.

Perhaps, in due course, SQA could provide exemplification of candidate performance in this question to assist candidates and to provide teachers with guidance on how to develop inferencing skills.

Paper 2

Listening

Candidates at this level should be familiar with recognising numbers (high or low) in any Listening text.

Encourage candidates to access Listening materials on the internet, especially short news items on Spanish radio.

Advise/consult on appropriate use of time spent when looking at questions before they hear the recording on the day of the examination.

Advise/consult on strategies candidates use for note-taking while they are listening to the recording.

Make appropriate use of a foreign language assistant (if available) by timetabling him/her with the AH class and getting him/her involved in recording suitable materials.

Discursive Writing

More grammatical accuracy is required (see 'Areas which candidates found demanding' above).

Ensure candidates address the question at all times and do not reproduce an irrelevant but well rehearsed prelim essay. They will be penalised for irrelevance.

Encourage candidates to avoid high frequency language, and adopt a strategy to incorporate sophisticated language appropriate to Advanced Higher level and to the subject matter of the essay.

Encourage candidates to set aside some time during the examination to use their dictionary to proof-check their essay.

Try to get candidates to focus on structure and to reveal their conclusion at the end of their essay, not in the first paragraph.

Ensure candidates have or are provided with a dictionary of quality, appropriate to the demands of the Discursive Writing task at Advanced Higher.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2009	196
Number of resulted entries in 2010	247

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum mark — 200				
A	32.0%	32.0%	79	139
B	23.1%	55.1%	57	119
C	25.5%	80.6%	63	99
D	9.7%	90.3%	24	89
No award	9.7%	100.0%	24	–

General commentary on grade boundaries

While SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which will allow a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary) and a well prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional A boundary), it is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level.

Each year, therefore, SQA holds a grade boundary meeting for each subject at each level where it brings together all the information available (statistical and judgemental). The Principal Assessor and SQA Qualifications Manager meet with the relevant SQA Head of Service and Statistician to discuss the evidence and make decisions. The meetings are chaired by members of the management team at SQA.

The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the exam is more challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.

The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.

Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

An exam paper at a particular level in a subject in one year tends to have a marginally different set of grade boundaries from exam papers in that subject at that level in other years. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. If SQA has already altered a boundary in a particular year in say Higher Chemistry this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter boundaries in their prelim exam in Higher Chemistry. The two are not that closely related as they do not contain identical questions.

SQA's main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as Arrangements evolve and change.