



External Assessment Report 2009

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

Introduction

It is pleasing to note that candidate numbers at AH Spanish continue to be steady with a slight increase from 189 in 2008 to 193 in 2009. There were no significant setting issues this year and no changes to the experienced setting and vetting teams. The increase in the length of time by 10 minutes for candidates for Paper I was generally beneficial.

Speaking

As in previous years, candidates did very well in this skill area, similar to performance in 2008, managing to achieve an average mark of 37.4 out of 50.

Folio

A reasonable range of texts and topics were attempted and candidates performed slightly better in this component as compared to last year, averaging a score of 17.4 out of 30.

Paper I 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 the growing number of people who choose to remain single. As before some candidates still had difficulty when tackling the inferential question. However this year some candidates also found the passage for translation demanding and performance was disappointing in this area.

Paper II 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 immigration 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 Technology and the Environment were the more popular choices.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Speaking

Once again, confidence in the 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 made good use of learned material and incorporated some useful discussion techniques into their conversation with the Visiting Examiner. Candidates who spoke about a literary text in the ERV unit tended to have more to say than those who spoke about their background topic.

Folio

Presentation was excellent. All pieces were word-processed and few, if any, candidates were penalised for failure to provide a bibliography or for exceeding the word limit.

As in previous years, for the Extended Reading/Viewing Unit, the study of literary texts was tackled more successfully than background topics. There were a number of pleasing performances relating to the study of García Márquez's "El Coronel no tiene quién le escriba" where essay titles/questions were carefully composed and clearly thought out.

Paper I Reading and Translation

Candidates responded well to all of the comprehension questions (1-5). Perhaps the increase in the time limit for this paper allowed them to provide more detailed and accurate responses.

Paper II 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 the vast majority addressed the question fully. There were some excellent renderings of opinions/debating phrases as well as occasional suitable and accurate treatment of subjunctive clauses.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Folio

Selecting a title or essay question which generates debate or critical analysis.

Effectively proof-checking ERV Folio pieces or Language in Work report.

Often, there was insufficient critical analysis or evaluation in approaches to background topics and especially the Language in Work reports.

Inferential question in Paper I

Most candidates took a narrative approach to this question by providing 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

The passage for translation this year was found by many candidates to be challenging. They had difficulty in particular with sense unit 4 (where they struggled with translating the verb "quedar"), sense unit 7 (where many failed to provide sufficient detail in their answer relating to the cost of the ham) and sense unit 9 (where the phrase "la última exquisitez" caused them significant problems.)

Listening Part A

In Question 1 a surprisingly high number of candidates failed to score a point relating to the number 3,500.

Listening Part B

In Question 2, some candidates did not provide sufficient detail relating to the **building** of a house and in question 4 (a) again there were surprising errors concerning numbers and the misunderstanding of “**mayores**” and “**menores**”

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 Spanish into English and poor control of tenses/verbs, especially differentiating between the present and the imperfect.

Other major errors related to the misuse of **Ser** and **Estar** with **obsesionado** as well as adjectival agreements, mistakes concerning the 1st and 3rd person singular (**tiene/puede** for **tengo/puedo**), the treatment of **Gustar** in the 3rd person, writing **porque de..** instead of **a causa de ...**, confusion between **mejor** and **mayor/más grave**, and failure to deploy the subjunctive mood after impersonal phrases like **es imposible que..**

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

General

Share all criteria/GRC/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 which goes beyond their “comfort zone” of learned material. Constantly asking the examiner “¿Cómo se dice.. en español ?” should be avoided at this level.

Folio

Unfortunately, although there was a minor improvement in performance in the Folio in 2009, I find myself repeating a lot of what was said in previous years.

The choice of a title for the 2 Folio pieces for the ERV Unit or the Language in Work report or is of crucial importance. The title should not be vague or general but should generate a discursive/evaluative approach. Candidates should be encouraged to avoid a choice of title where the answer is obvious (eg the impact of the protagonist on the novel or play).

For the ERV Unit, either try to encourage the candidates to study 2 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. Many candidates did not score well in essays of this type as their approach tended to be limiting, mostly narrative and one-dimensional.

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

Encourage candidates to develop a personal response without being over-reliant on teachers' notes, especially for literary texts. They 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 should 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 re proof-checking in relation to the use of English, spelling and punctuation as well as accuracy in quotation from literary texts. Candidates should avoid the use of colloquial English and contractions such as “wasn’t/doesn’t”. They should vary their expression throughout their essay and avoid the repetition of words and phrases.

For the Language in Work Unit, reports should be directly related to using the FL in work-based situations and not just a background studies essay more suited to the Extended Reading/Viewing unit

Make candidates aware that plagiarism will be punished severely. Advances in technology have ensured that plagiarism can be much more easily detected by examiners these days.

Paper I

General

Now that candidates have 1 hour 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 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 (Q6)

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 2009 question, which took into account both sides of the argument about being single 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..**”, “**by stating this, the writer makes it clear that..**” may help to generate the level of sophistication required to achieve good results.

Paper II

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 for note-taking while they are listening to the recording.

Make appropriate use of a Foreign Language Assistant (if you are lucky enough to have one !) by timetabling him/her with the AH class and getting him/her involved in recording suitable materials.

Discursive Writing

More grammatical accuracy required (see “Areas which candidates found demanding”).

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 set aside some time during the examination to proof check their essay.

Try to get candidates to focus on structure and to reveal their conclusion at the end of their essay and 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 2008	193
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Number of resulted entries in 2009	196
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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	32.7%	32.7%	64	138
B	25.0%	57.7%	49	118
C	24.0%	81.6%	47	98
D	7.1%	88.8%	14	88
No award	11.2%	100.0%	22	-

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 SQA therefore 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 Business Manager 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.