



Course Report 2018

Subject	Spanish
Level	Advanced Higher

This report provides information on the performance of candidates. Teachers, lecturers and assessors may find it useful when preparing candidates for future assessment. The report 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 assessment documents and marking instructions.

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any Post Results Services.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Summary of the course assessment

It is very pleasing to report that the number of candidates taking Spanish at Advanced Higher has increased this year. There were no significant setting issues for the 2018 paper and no changes to the experienced setting and checking teams.

Component 1 — question paper: Reading and Translation

Candidates responded well to this paper, especially when answering the comprehension questions (questions 1–6). The vast majority engaged with the subject matter of the text, which related to highly skilled professionals leaving Latin America.

Candidates generally did not respond well to the overall purpose question (question 7), and a number of them found some of the sense units in the translation challenging.

Component 2 — question paper: Listening and Discursive Writing

Candidates performed reasonably well in the listening question paper, which focused on food banks. Overall performance was slightly better for item 1.

In the discursive writing question paper, there were some very good essays that demonstrated flair, appropriate use of idiomatic language and accurate expression of opinions. However, occasionally candidates scored only 16 marks because they did not fully address the question and relied instead on the reproduction of learned material or an essay they had previously written.

It was pleasing to note that the four essay titles were attempted. The most popular choices being question 3 on *familia tradicional* and question 5 on *futuro laboral*.

Component 3 — portfolio

There was a reasonable degree of variety in the way this was approached, however average scores for the portfolio were down on last year's performances.

Component 4 — performance

As in previous years, candidates did very well in this skill area.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1 — question paper: Reading and Translation

Candidates generally responded well to the comprehension questions, in particular questions 2, 3 and 5(a), where they provided mostly accurate responses.

Sense units 1, 3, 8 and 10 in the translation section seemed the most accessible to this year's candidates.

Component 2 — question paper: Listening and Discursive Writing

In the listening question paper in item 1, candidates did particularly well when answering question 1(d). In item 2, questions 2(b), 2(e) and 2(j) were answered very well.

Overall, essays were fairly 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.

Candidates achieved best results when they fully addressed the titles and produced structured essays containing coherent language and interesting ideas. Of the four choices available to them, question 3, the essay on traditional families/new-family structures, was the one which was attempted most successfully.

Appropriate linking structures, and phrases relating to expressing opinions were characteristics of good practice: *nadie puede negar ... si tuviera que dar mi opinión ... sin lugar a dudas ... cabe agregar ... vale mencionar ... hay que destacar que ... que yo sepa ... me inclino a creer que ... mantengo que.*

There was also some excellent use of structures, for example:

- ◆ en primera instancia...
- ◆ el mundo ha cambiado a velocidad de vértigo...
- ◆ la diversidad cultural va de la mano de una sociedad tolerante e igualitaria...
- ◆ se puede constatar que ... se suele afirmar que...
- ◆ es esencial que examinemos/consideremos...
- ◆ con el fin de llegar a una conclusión definitiva ... a modo de conclusión...

Component 3 — portfolio

Presentation of portfolio work was good overall. The best essays were those that had a question or title that genuinely led candidates to adopt an analytical approach, or allowed for two sides of an argument to be developed. Essays also often worked better, when there was an element of comparing and contrasting, for example characters in novels, short stories, plays, films, or some analysis of poetry focusing on specific themes from an anthology.

Areas where results justify special mention were those portfolios which focused, for example on Neruda's *España en el Corazón*, the novels *Los Peces de la Amargura* and *Golpes en la Puerta*, and those which evaluated the film *Mar Adentro* and incorporated good analysis of

cinematographic techniques. Essays that stood out were those which were well structured, displayed a good level of English and provided accurate and justified quotation from the text and/or screenplay which supported the arguments being presented.

Reliable bibliographies containing three or more references to sources were a feature of good practice. It was pleasing to observe that no candidate incurred a penalty for exceeding the word limit or failing to produce a bibliography.

Component 4 — performance

Most candidates were comfortable and confident in the language with the majority scoring 30 marks or more out of 50 marks. Generally, the choice of topics afforded candidates the ability to talk at length. Fluency and readily taking the initiative were features of good performances. Overall, candidates were enthusiastic and very well prepared. Many appeared motivated to do well and made good use of learned material. They 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, using the language at the required level of sophistication.

Topics such as *la tecnología, los medios de comunicación, la inmigración, las nuevas familias* and *el medio ambiente* lent themselves to more complex and sophisticated language structures than topics like *un año sabático* and *las ventajas de aprender idiomas*. Discussion related to the specialist study was fairly well done. Candidates were very much at ease with the method of assessment.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1 — question paper: Reading and Translation

Questions 1–6

Question 1 caused candidates some problems. Most found difficulty with how to best express the verb *negar* (line 9).

In question 6, candidates experienced some difficulty with the phrase *está fuera* (line 55). Many did not capture the idea of making the most of qualified people who are abroad or who have moved away.

Question 7: overall purpose question

Candidates in general, are still not providing a sufficiently reflective or analytical response to this question. Many candidates failed to go beyond a recounting of the facts outlined in the text. In a number of cases, expression in English was questionable and answers tended to lack structure and/or come to an abrupt end. Very few candidates gave a response that incorporated the idea of the writer, providing a balanced viewpoint on the impact of skilled professionals leaving their countries of origin in Latin America, or mentioning that the passage ends on a positive note.

Candidates tended to find it challenging to express their ideas using 'inferential' type language or to focus on the writer's techniques. They may make mention of stylistic features but many fail to explore the impact of, for example the title of the text, the use of questions or forceful language, the structure of the text, the use of statistics, direct speech and real life examples.

Question 8: translation

In sense unit 1, there was occasionally a literal translation of *fuga de cerebros* and candidates lost 2 marks. In sense unit 2, the phrase *a medida que* proved to be challenging for many candidates, some of whom made reference to size and or measurement due to dictionary misuse. *Empresarios petroleros* was often mistranslated in sense unit 7 as 'petroleum companies'.

Component 2 — question paper: Listening and Discursive Writing

Listening: item 1

Question 1(a): a large number of candidates lost a mark by failing to understand that *hizo un tiempo malísimo* referred to awful weather.

Question 1(b): many candidates lost a mark by not identifying the number 120,000.

Question 1(d): presented a challenge for some candidates who did not notice the word *ambiente*.

Question 1(e): some candidates did not grasp the idea of wide online coverage.

Listening: item 2

Questions (c)(i) and (ii): presented problems as candidates tended to provide information for question (c)(ii) in (c)(i), and therefore they lost a mark in the second part of the question. The expression *fecha de caducidad* proved to be challenging in this question.

Questions (f) and (g): some candidates found it problematic to achieve full marks for these questions. Occasionally, a mark was lost for misunderstanding, or failing to answer the point relating to *personas que quieran regresar al mercado laboral*.

Question (h): there was a mixed response to relating to CVs and gaining an advantage when looking for a job.

Discursive writing

Some candidates ran into difficulties when going beyond prepared material, and this occasionally led them to not fully addressing the question. These candidates were inclined to 'disguise' their essays (mostly unsuccessfully) to suit the title of the essay, or to write a pre-prepared essay that clearly compromised relevance and focus. In addition, these memorised essays also led to candidates making more grammatical errors and omission of words, rather than creating an original piece of work by using their knowledge and ability to manipulate the language. In particular, question 6 on *diversidad cultural*, occasionally generated a pre-learned essay focusing solely on immigration or racism, which was largely irrelevant.

Some candidates adopted a personal response essay approach and therefore struggled to sustain the level of sophistication required at this level for discursive writing. In question 3, a number of candidates limited themselves to writing about their own personal family experiences.

There were also instances of:

- ◆ candidates repeating the title, sometimes on several occasions within the essay
- ◆ errors in adjectival agreements
- ◆ random and inappropriate use of infinitives
- ◆ inability to conjugate the verb
- ◆ incorrect use of gerund in the wrong place, for example *se* inserted when not required
- ◆ confusion between *ser* and *estar*, especially for *divorciado* and *casado* in question 3 on *familia tradicional*
- ◆ *discutir* not followed by *de* and *buscar* followed with *para*
- ◆ many missing articles and prepositions, for example *Universidad* and *divorcio* at start of sentence
- ◆ *gente* followed by the verb in the plural
- ◆ some unidiomatic translations from English into Spanish, for example *después de años de estudiar/han sido en empleo*

Essays which were repetitive rarely did better than a borderline pass, and those which did not fully address the question may have achieved less than this if it was felt that more than half of the essay was irrelevant.

Component 3 — portfolio

The selection of titles this year was more disappointing than in previous years. Many candidates still find it difficult to select a title or essay question which generates debate or critical analysis. Too many candidates had poorly worded titles, or titles that were too vague, contrived, over-complicated or not framed as a question. There continues to be a fair number of obvious titles with predictable conclusions, for example ‘To what extent is Don Gregorio an important character in *La Lengua de las Mariposas*?’, ‘How significant is the theme of food in *Como Agua para Chocolate*?’

Historical or media-type essays were inclined to be more informative and less investigative.

Some candidates used the first person in their essays, for example ‘in my opinion...’, ‘I think that...’ Essays of this type tended to be lacking in detailed analysis. Where the third person was used, there tended to be a better critical evaluation of the subject matter.

In some instances, candidates struggled to sustain a quality of performance and expression of ideas throughout the course of their essay. At times, there was too much information and not enough evaluation. Candidates’ use of critical terminology tended to be limited. Instead of selecting and analysing evidence and then drawing conclusions, too many candidates wrote their conclusion at the start of their essay and then tried to justify this for the remainder of their piece.

A significant number of candidates did not proofread their work effectively in English, and especially when quoting in Spanish from a literary text or film screenplay. Unfortunately, too many essays associate the themes of Lorca’s plays, which were written in the early 1930s, with the Franco regime which began in 1939.

Some bibliographies were sparse and unsophisticated, indicating lack of research, for example simply stating Wikipedia, and this generally had a negative impact on candidate performance.

Component 4 — performance

Despite this being the skill area where candidates generally do well, some still have difficulty in manipulating and adapting learned material to cope with questions they are asked.

Some candidates were not able to respond to questions on topics they had listed on their STL forms. Others, who had chosen to discuss, for example Brexit, democracy, or the influence of music, sometimes ran out of ideas and found it challenging to sustain the discussion at an advanced level.

Section 3: advice for the preparation of future candidates

- ◆ Share all criteria, detailed marking instructions, pegged marks, performance descriptors and appropriate SQA documentation with candidates.
- ◆ Incorporate Understanding Standards materials into lessons.
- ◆ Encourage candidates to make full use of SQA's website, especially by referring to course reports for Advanced Higher Spanish from the last two years, as well as the marking instructions for past question papers.
- ◆ Remind candidates that handwriting needs to be clearly legible to ensure marks awarded equate to content.

Component 1 — question paper: Reading and Translation

General

- ◆ Time should be divided appropriately between the comprehension questions, the overall purpose question, and the text for translation.
- ◆ Candidates should think carefully about the context of the text when attempting to express certain language items or constructions, for example *negar* (line 9), *movilización* (line 19) and *está fuera/incentivar* (line 55).
- ◆ In general, candidates provided a good level of detail in their answers to the comprehension questions. However, it would still be helpful to advise them to look closely at the number of marks being awarded for each question. This guides them towards the amount of information they are required to provide. In question 4 for example, some candidates did not quite grasp the idea of Chávez coming into power and instead thought he was just 'arriving'.
- ◆ When using a dictionary, candidates should explore all meanings of the word they are looking up to ensure they choose the one which best fits the context of their answer. In line 13, the expression *ante la falta de suministros* was one of a series of expressions which presented difficulties as a result of dictionary misuse.

Question 7: overall purpose question

Centres should encourage candidates to draw inferences from the text and not to merely provide factual information, or repeat the answers to their comprehension questions, when

doing this task. Good responses to the question this year provided a good balance between candidates identifying the writer's standpoint and the techniques they used to exemplify this.

Answers to the overall purpose question should be well structured and have a rounded conclusion. Any quotation from the text should be appropriate and relevant, not just a repetition in English of what has been argued. It is also just as important to note that if candidates are quoting in Spanish from the text, adding a word-for-word translation in English adds nothing to their argument.

A succinct answer using 'inferential' type language, for example 'the writer implies or suggests that...', 'this leads me to believe that...' would be more likely to achieve a good mark than a long, drawn-out response which simply provides information from the text, most probably already covered in the answers to questions 1–6.

Candidates should consider the title of the article, how it ends, the structure of the text, reference to any statistics, quotations from experts, the use of questions and/or rhetorical questions, lists of words, any instances of emotive language. They should then examine the impact of techniques such as these in relation to how the writer develops their argument. Is the writer optimistic/positive/in favour of what is being discussed in the article? Alternatively, are they pessimistic/negative/against the theme of the passage? If the text allows for a balance of arguments, this should be incorporated into the answer.

Centres should continue to share with candidates the overall purpose exemplification on the SQA website, as well as discussing and reviewing the best format and type of language required to answer this question successfully.

Question 8: translation

- ◆ More attention should be given to the development of translation skills and, in particular, ways of converting idiomatic expressions from Spanish into English.
- ◆ Care should be taken with recognising and accurately translating tenses.
- ◆ Ensure that all candidates at this level have developed their skills in the use of a dictionary. Candidates should take into account not just the first item they see, but all meanings of the word or phrase they are looking up to ensure they choose the one which best fits the context of their translation, for example mistranslation of a *medida que* and *petroleros* (line 31).
- ◆ Encourage candidates to read and review their translation when they complete it to ensure it makes sense in English.

Component 2 — question paper: Listening and Discursive Writing

Listening

- ◆ Encourage candidates to provide full and detailed answers as far as possible.
- ◆ Continue to revise numbers (especially high numbers) with candidates.
- ◆ Suggest that candidates access listening materials on the internet, especially short news items on Spanish radio.
- ◆ Advise candidates on how best they should use the time for looking at the questions at the start of the recording.
- ◆ Discuss and practice with candidates strategies for note-taking while they are listening to the recording.
- ◆ Use the target language as much as possible in class to help develop listening skills.

Discursive writing

- ◆ Continue to develop the grammatical accuracy required at this level (see 'Areas which candidates found demanding, discursive writing' section).
- ◆ Ensure that candidates address the question at all times and do not reproduce a well-rehearsed essay that may not be entirely relevant. Essays should address all aspects of the title. Candidates should remain within the word limit and have a more focused approach.
- ◆ Encourage candidates to avoid high-frequency language, and to adopt a strategy to incorporate sophisticated language appropriate to Advanced Higher and to the subject matter of the essay.
- ◆ Encourage candidates to build up banks of phrases for use in their essays.
- ◆ Impress upon candidates that they should set aside some time during the examination to use their dictionary to proofread their essay. They should ensure they have, or are provided with, a dictionary of quality, appropriate to the demands of the discursive writing question paper at Advanced Higher.
- ◆ Point candidates to focus on structure, and to reveal their conclusion at the end of their essay rather than in the first paragraph.

Component 3 — portfolio

- ◆ The choice of a title continues to be of crucial importance. The title should not be over-ambitious, vague or too general but should generate a discursive and/or evaluative approach. It may require a narrow focus to allow for deeper analysis. Centres should negotiate appropriate essay titles with their candidates to ensure they adopt a consistently investigative tone throughout their work.
- ◆ Centres should discuss the use of critical terminology with their candidates to enable them to improve the quality of their expression in English.
- ◆ The choice of suitable and compatible sources needs to be addressed. Centres should avoid allowing candidates to access secondary sources that do not closely relate to the primary source. There should be a critical evaluation of the primary source.
- ◆ Titles which include 'To what extent..?' should not be trite or unoriginal but rather should generate a balanced approach, taking a range of arguments into account.
- ◆ Candidates should check the factual accuracy of their work, for example ensure they have a firm understanding of the literary technique of magical realism and disabuse themselves of the idea that this is a theme, as well as of approaches that incorrectly compare the women in Lorca's plays to women living in Franco's Spain. Introductions and conclusions to essays should be looked at very closely. Candidates should avoid the study of texts, articles, or films which are not intended for native speakers of Spanish.
- ◆ Candidates should maintain an objective tone throughout and avoid anecdotal expressions such as 'I personally believe...'
- ◆ Many of the portfolio pieces would benefit from more quotations in Spanish to support the arguments being developed. Translating these quotes into English should be avoided at all costs. Quotations from a literary text or film, or any other sources which are solely in English, could detract from the content and may even lead to the candidate being awarded 0 marks if it is felt they have not read, for example a literary text in the foreign language.
- ◆ Candidates should develop the quality and breadth of their bibliographies overall. Any reference to Wikipedia suggests a lack of breadth of research on the part of the candidate, and any inclusion of, for example university notes provided by a teacher or lecturer does not constitute an appropriate item for a bibliography.

- ◆ More care and attention is needed in proofreading the use of English for spelling, typing errors and punctuation, as well as accuracy in quotation from literary texts. Candidates should avoid the use of inappropriate register and language. They should vary their expression throughout their essay and avoid the repetition of words and phrases. The quality of English in the portfolio is of paramount importance, and an appreciation of how to structure an essay is essential.

Component 4 — performance

- ◆ Sustain the excellent work in preparing candidates for this assessment but perhaps with an increasing focus on grammatical accuracy, particularly with regard to use of verbs (especially the preterite and the perfect), gender of nouns, adjectival agreements, use of *ser* and *estar/para* and *por* and the subjunctive.
- ◆ Encourage candidates to develop banks of phrases, for example in relation to discussion techniques to deal with any question which goes beyond their 'comfort zone' of learned material.

Grade boundary and statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2017	433
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Number of resulted entries in 2018	456
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Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of course awards	Percentage	Cumulative %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum mark				
A	34.0%	34.0%	155	134
B	21.7%	55.7%	99	115
C	19.3%	75.0%	88	96
D	8.6%	83.6%	39	86
No award	16.4%	-	75	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

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.

SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which 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.

Therefore SQA holds a grade boundary meeting every year for each subject at each level to bring 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.

Grade boundaries from exam papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year to year. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for exams set by centres. If SQA alters a boundary, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter their boundary in the corresponding practice exam paper.