



GCE A LEVEL EXAMINERS' REPORTS

**SPANISH
A LEVEL**

SUMMER 2019

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SPANISH
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COMPONENT 1

General Comments

It is a pleasure to be able to report that the majority of candidates have really take to this task and there was a wide range of topics chosen covering many cultural, historical and socio-political aspects of the Spanish-speaking world. The pro-formas provided evidence of well-chosen targeted reading. However, some candidates referred to articles or books originally written in English rather than Spanish.

Furthermore, there was an increase in IRP titles aiming to contrast the Hispanic world with England. This has to be avoided as the AO4 marks in Tasks 1a are specifically for knowledge and understanding of different aspects of the culture and society of Spanish-speaking countries / communities. Likewise, the AO4 marks in Task 1b are specifically for knowledge and understanding of, and critical and analytical responses to, different aspects of the culture and society of countries / communities where Spanish is spoken. There should be no doubt at all in students' mind that the language of study is Spanish, not English.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Task 1a: Presentation of the IRP

Although it is not prescriptive to try to answer a question in the IRP, my advice remains that approaching their research in such a way is more likely to enable candidates to analyse and critically evaluate their project from the beginning. For example, soccer is a favourite topic among boys and some candidates this year chose as a title something like Real Madrid, Barcelona or Lionel Messi only to find themselves going down a narrative or descriptive track. On the contrary, others asked a question such as "Was Franco's support for Real Madrid a deliberate political act?" or "What have been the economic and political consequences of the rivalry between Real Madrid and Barcelona?"

As happened last year, not all candidates or centres lodged the pro-formas in time, and there remains room for improvement here. However, candidates paid more observance to the two minutes allocated to their presentation. However, not all candidates made sufficient references to their sources during their discussion; some claiming to have read just "una página web". Moreover, some candidates came prepared to deliver a three-minute presentation in two minutes with the result that they started rushing it. Candidates should be reminded that this is a two-minute presentation and that the examiner will ask them to finish if they overrun the guideline. They should also be advised to consider carefully how they are going to access the 5 marks available for AO2 in this task, so it is advisable to find time to refer to at least one main source. Some did this, others did not. The 5 AO4 marks available required candidates to show knowledge and understanding of different aspects of their topic.

Task 1b: Discussion of the IRP

I wish to remind candidates that this is an examiner-led discussion and that they should not ask the examiner questions; a fair number did this. This takes away valuable time from this task which is worth 30 marks. Teachers should remind their students that the discussion is 50% of the oral component. The 5 AO1 marks require the candidates to interact with the examiner by responding to the questions asked. The 10 AO4 marks require the candidate to show critical and analytical ability when responding to the questions asked. Weaker candidates allowed their opinions to be easily challenged or just answered *sí* or *no*, which does not always add to the discussion. They should always follow up with a justification of their reply.

Task 2: The topic-based card discussion

Candidates were allowed to see two cards briefly before choosing one to prepare during the five minutes allowed. It was noticeable that when Card 9 was offered, many candidates chose it without hesitation. Similarly, when offered Cards 4, 8 or 12 many candidates – especially the strong ones – selected the two Spains, and there were some excellent performances on this topic area. Nevertheless, the fact remains that this is the part of the oral test where there is most room for improvement.

Given that the candidate has to choose and prepare the card in the presence of the examiner, the provision of a separate space for preparation is desirable. Generally speaking, this task was not as well done as the IRP tasks. Some candidates admitted that they had skipped this or that sub-theme which was not really a strategy to be recommended. Secondly, while some candidates asked two relevant questions near the beginning of the exam, others had to be prompted to do so just before the end. Candidates should be reminded that the questions should be relevant; for example, asking the examiner what he or she thinks of youth unemployment in the England is **not** relevant and does **not** earn any AO1 or AO4 marks because the United Kingdom is not a Spanish-speaking country.

There is still a great deal of room for improvement under the AO2 heading. Let me remind teachers and candidates that the short text is there for a reason and candidates need to think about how they are going to access the 5 marks available. Candidates are reminded on the front of each card that they “must make specific reference to information in the stimulus text to show the examiner that [they] have understood that material”. These words, as well as those underneath reminding candidates that they can discuss the text with reference to Spain or Spanish-speaking countries “depending on the context in which [they] have studied the theme or sub-theme” might as well not be there for all the notice that some candidates take of it. Take Card 5 on job opportunities for young Mexicans as an example. First of all, some candidates say that they cannot speak about Mexico which is fair enough. However, they then disregard the material in the text which, in this specific example, gives them three very good pieces of information: (i) in Mexico / another Spanish-speaking country a university Degree does not guarantee a job; (ii) there are almost 900,000 unemployed university graduates (in Mexico) – what is important here is not the number but the fact that university graduates cannot find work, a fact which can easily be applied to Spain; (iii) the surprising point is that the rate of unemployment is higher for university graduates than for those who have the equivalence of GCE qualifications and never went to university. This leads straight into the first seen and the second unseen questions that the examiner will ask the candidate. There is unquestionably more than enough information here to fill in the 5-6 minutes allowed for Task 2.

At the expense of repeating myself, I wish to ask teachers to remind their candidates that the AO4 here is exactly like the AO4 in Task 1b: candidates need to demonstrate critical awareness as well as knowledge of a Spanish-speaking country / community. Therefore, the questions to the examiner should not be personalised. For example, in Card 2 it would be irrelevant to ask the examiner if s/he has ever visited the Parque Güell. However, some candidates persisted in doing that.

AO3 marks

This paragraph should be read in conjunction with the report on Component 3. The number of mistakes in basic Spanish structures is another area which requires remedial work in the classroom. Too many candidates are still making up words or thinking in English and translating word for word into Spanish. Many cannot conjugate common irregular verbs like *ser, estar, decir, traer, salir*, and radical-changing verbs are treated poorly: *mi penso* and *penso* are common). Another common pattern used by many candidates is to end a statement by momentarily pausing and then saying *pienso que* or *creo que*. The grammatical problems are more acute in Task 2 than in Tasks 1a and 1b for obvious reasons: they have had more time to prepare the IRP and possible questions.

Summary of key points

- When preparing their IRP candidates should think carefully how they are going to access the AO marks in Tasks 1a and 1b.
- Referring to a key source recorded on their pro-forma during their presentation would be a useful strategy.
- When preparing the discussion card in Task 2 candidates should analyse the text carefully.
- They should also prepare two relevant and non-personalised questions to ask the examiner.
- In all tasks candidates should concentrate on getting the basic grammatical structures of Spanish correct.

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COMPONENT 2

General Comments

Many candidates are to be congratulated on the standard of their performance in this paper. The paper as a whole contained a good range of listening and reading texts with a variety of tasks which allowed candidates to access marks according to their individual abilities. The translations in questions 7 and 8 were appropriate discriminators worth 40% of the overall marks. Although the comprehension questions were not marked according to AO3, some candidates lost marks because they wrote incomprehensible Spanish. In fact, when answering comprehensive questions some candidates throw the basic rules of Spanish grammar, especially concerning agreements, out of the window. This is a poor strategy when possibly preparing for university entrance. When practising comprehension tasks, candidates should get into the habit of trying to write correct Spanish. One of the worst habits is the constant use of *porque de*, an observation that is repeated in report after report.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A – Listening

Question 1 was a multiple-choice task based on an interview with an old Republican, and most candidates accessed at least two marks. Marks were lost mainly in 2 and 3 where some candidates paired *falangista* with *sindicalista* or *republicana* with *comunera*.

Question 2(A) was a pairing task based on the first part of the radio report on a cultural programme during a Cuban summer. As usual with this type of task there was evidence that some candidates were guessing the answers. Question 2(B) on the second part of the radio report was one of the main discriminators on the paper, as was shown by the Facility Factor data. Most errors of comprehension occurred in answers to (b), (c), (e), (f) and (g). In (b) only the better candidates understood ‘the variety of styles’ and ‘remote areas’. In (e) some did not understand the idea of ‘historical routes in the provinces’, with many taking *recorridos* to be some sort of bullfight or thinking that some people had gone to Africa. Others simply did not get the idea of the German photographer in (f), and in (g) some did not understand the sea voyage to Cuba, with many saying that it was a sea journey in New York.

The tasks in Questions 3(A) and 3(B), based on the interview with the young Colombian entrepreneur, were more accessible to candidates and many gained marks here. This was most pleasing because 3(B) was a summary question, which usually causes difficulties for candidates.

Section B – Reading

The reading text on Spanish grandparents in the twenty first century allowed all candidates to access some marks. The multiple-choice task in Question 4(A) was particularly well done. The only items that caused problems in Question 4(B) were (d) and (e).

Candidates performed better than usual in Question 5, the comprehension summary on changes to the curriculum in Mexican schools to allow for diversity and difference. However, some candidates are still not getting the idea that a summary does not necessarily have to be answered in full sentences and are copying straight from the text is common. Candidates will not be given a mark for a straight lift with no linguistic manipulation. The first bullet point caused most problems with a fair number of candidates opting to answer from the initial sentences of the text instead of focusing on the key word *informe*. This showed a lack of concentration on their part.

Question 6 on how Franco was transported from the Canary Islands to Spain before the Civil War led to many errors of comprehension. The only question that was well answered was (a) and (b), (d) and (e) surprisingly proved to be the most difficult in which to gain marks. Some candidates scored no marks in (b) and (e), with the need to focus on ‘organisations’ in (d) once again showed a lack of concentration on the part of many. This point was emphasized again in (e) where too many answered that ‘Franco was wearing a dress’ (*Franco llevaba un vestido*), a highly unlikely scenario in view of Franco’s machista character.

Question 7, the translation into English, was better done than Question 8, the translation into Spanish. Many candidates acquitted themselves well in this task, though some incorrectly translated *el deseo de emigración* by opting for ‘immigration’. Other phrases that caused problems were *fomentan el movimiento*, *las naciones desarrolladas* where some said ‘underdeveloped’, *los grupos guerrilleros* which some translated as ‘groups of gorillas’, and *mejores opciones* which led to ‘greater options’. Nevertheless, it was pleasing to see that some knew the best translations like ‘push and pull factors’ that affect emigration and found excellent translations for *pujantes* and *imán*.

Question 8 was a discriminator from beginning to end. Many just rushed at the first five words and wrote Spanish full of errors like *Las redes televisiones de las lenguas ingles Americana y español* [all sic]. Yet the exercise of more care and attention when examining the meaning of the English words – one of the main principles of any translation– would have led them to the straightforward *Las redes hispanohablantes de television americanas*.

The rest of the first sentence then led to too many making up the non-existent verb *promotar* instead of the correct *promocionar* or *promover*. This pattern of concocting words was later repeated in *attractar* for *atraer*, *su rival chanel* for *su canal rival*, *competar* for *competer*, *la contenta* for *el contenido*, and *advertisadores* for *anunciantes*.

Other vocabulary or concepts that caused difficulties were ‘viewers’, ‘no longer’, ‘media company’ (*compañía de medias*) was common, ‘premiere’, ‘successful’, and ‘shrinking’. Of course, the best candidates found acceptable ways of translating these.

Summary of key points

- Candidates should listen and read carefully before doing the corresponding tasks. Lack of attention to detail leads to loss of marks.
- Marks are lost in comprehension tasks not because candidates write inaccurate Spanish but rather incomprehensible Spanish.
- What frequently makes their Spanish incomprehensible is the invention of non-existent Spanish words.
- When translating candidates need to remember the basic principle that they need to analyse the meaning of what they are putting into another language.
- They should also remember that, if what they are writing does not make sense to them, it is unlikely to make sense to an examiner.

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COMPONENT 3

General Comments

This was the second linear exam under the new specification in which candidates had to write two literary essays or one essay on literature and one on film but could not write two film essays. A few candidates wrote two literary and two film essays, and the higher of the film essays was accredited. Many candidates wrote well in excess of the approximately 300 recommended words and where weaker candidates were concerned this almost invariably had repercussions on their AO3 marks.

However, examiners found it a pleasure to read so many very good essays and I am happy to report that it was noticeable that the majority of candidates did try to focus on the set questions. As was the case in 2018, every one of questions 1-20 was attempted, but the subsequent questions on *El Lobo* and *La Caja 507* were the only ones omitted. This was disappointing because *El Lobo* analyses moral degradation towards the end of Francoism while *La Caja 507* focuses on corruption and land speculation in modern Spain.

Another observation that I wish to make is that the handwriting of some candidates is increasingly hard to read. In such cases, candidates could help themselves and examiners by leaving a space between paragraphs or writing on every second line. This year I had more illegible scripts referred to me than ever before.

A final general point, applicable to many essays, concerns the use of quotations. Let me reiterate that candidates are not required to quote from their chosen texts. However, if they choose to quote, their quotation should be apt and accurate. Examiners read too many quotations that are both irrelevant and incorrect.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Literature

AO4

Both questions on *La casa de Bernarda Alba* were attempted in equal numbers and in many essays, candidates wrote an excellent analysis of both statements. Unfortunately, some candidates were still emphasising that Lorca was condemning Franco and his regime, an error that I have had occasion to highlight before. What Lorca deplored was the backward society of *La España profunda*. But even he could not have foreseen the bloodshed during and after the Civil War. Right-wing activists saw to it that he never lived to see the slaughter.

Candidates found essay 3 easier than essay 4 on *Las bicicletas son para el verano* and some failed to analyse what it means to be 'active' or 'passive' in a situation of national civil war.

There were some very good essays on both questions on *Como agua para chocolate*. Most candidates roundly condemned the behaviour of Mamá Elena and few sympathised with her predicament as the matriarch of the family. In question 6 some argued that both Tita and Mamá Elena are also emancipated, while only the better candidates considered whether Gertrudis could be called 'emancipated' if she worked in a brothel after leaving the ranch.

Both questions on *El otro árbol de Guernica* resulted in some fine essays, with most candidates in essay 7 contrasting Santi's childish petulance on several occasions with his more balanced approach to problems later on. In essay 8 there were also some well-balanced and well-constructed answers.

In question 9 on *El coronel no tiene quien le escriba* some candidates agreed that the Coronel's dreams were indeed unrealistic whereas others argued in favour of his idealism. Fewer chose question 10 on the novel but some analysed the statement very well.

Finally, in question 11 on *Réquiem por un campesino español*, almost all candidates argued that Paco was not the architect of his own downfall, and in 12 most analysed the symbols of Paco's presence in the village after his murder with praiseworthy competence

Films

The film *El laberinto del fauno* continues to be the most popular choice among candidates. There were some good analyses on the meaning of the end of the film in question 13 but many failed to consider the beginning or main body of the text. In question 14 there were some excellent essays but there are increasingly fantastical statements about the meaning of the tasks. A lot of candidates alleged without evidence that the *hombre pálido* represents the crucified Christ but how does that fit in with the devouring of the fairies or the attempt to catch Ofelia? Candidates should beware of perhaps lifting information from the internet without applying their own evaluation to it.

Question 15 on *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios* was more popular than question 16 which is perhaps not surprising – candidates tend to avoid questions on devices used to convey messages in the text.

Both questions on *María, llena eres de gracia* were equally popular. In question 17 most praised Maria's determination to better herself and some thought that becoming a drug mule and swallowing drug pellets represented an acceptable means to an end. Question 18 was generally well answered but some did not point out that Maria was an illegal immigrant without official papers in America.

While there were some excellent essays on *Las trece rosas* some candidates did not analyse what a 'fascist atmosphere' might be while others challenged the idea that the prisoners might be housed in a type of 'concentration camp'. The majority of those who chose question 20 agreed with the statement but failed to mention that the young women had naively distributed anti-Franco leaflets or had been put on trial after the assassination of the Civil Guard officer.

AO3

The written Spanish of many candidates leaves a lot of room for improvement. If the Spanish is weak the communication of the candidate's message will be unclear, and this lack of clarity impacts on AO4 marks. It is clear that too many tend to translate word for word from English. Although this tendency has always been present in my experience, there is now a growing habit of making up words from English. Teachers need to target this in the classroom perhaps getting their students to correct obvious examples like the following: *copar con* 'to cope with', *reliar en* 'to rely on', *prevenster* 'to prevent', *deprivar* 'to deprive' The confusion in common uses of *por* and *para* is widespread with candidates showing their confusion by crossing out one and putting the other, only to reverse the process. Teaching candidates to use *por* or *debido a* instead of the ubiquitous *porque de* by weaker candidates would make their Spanish sound more authentic.

In view of the fact that the 'personal *a*' is generally ignored, getting at least the better candidates to use it would improve their essays immensely. Attention must be given to the conjugation of common verbs, and above all irregular verbs like *decir, hacer, querer, morir* – these are common verbs in any language. Some candidates are still opting for a lazy strategy of just putting the verb in the infinitive or writing in English between brackets. This tendency should be avoided.

There is also a growing tendency to approximate to the Spanish word, which usually affects nouns and adverbs; typical examples would be *el ataco / la ataca* for 'attack', *ell muerto / la muerta* for 'death', *amenzas* for *amenazas*, *probabelmente* for *probablemente*, *posiblamente* for *posiblemente*, *oppurtunidades* for *oportunidades*.

Summary of key points

- Candidates should read the question carefully and ensure that they are answering analytically and not just narrating the story.
- Candidates should try to think in Spanish and not just translate from English.
- When writing in Spanish, candidates need to concentrate on getting the basics correct: correct gender of common words, correct conjugation of, above all, common verbs, paying attention to agreements of nouns and adjectives, subjects and verbs.



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