



GCE A LEVEL EXAMINERS' REPORTS

**SPANISH
A LEVEL**

SUMMER 2018

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COMPONENT 1: SPEAKING

Task 1a The Independent Research Project – Presentation

Many candidates accomplished this task very well indeed. There was widespread evidence that they had put careful thought and planning into the task and were enjoying communicating their findings. The majority scored between 3 and 5 for AO2 and AO4. The choice of topics was pleasingly ample and ranged over wide areas of Spain and other Spanish-speaking communities. The best IRPs were those that asked and attempted to answer a question: “*Was Juana la Loca really mad?*” rather than a straightforward title “*Salvador Dalí*”. The former is more likely to lead to analysis and evaluation (thus accessing the full range of AO4 marks available in Task 1b), while the latter could lead to a narrative and uncritical approach.

Unfortunately, not all candidates or centres lodged the pro formas in time, and this requires attention and early preparation before next year’s exam. Not all candidates made sufficient references to their sources during their discussion; some stated that they had read just “una página web” or a book in English as their main source.

As predicted, some candidates came prepared to deliver a three-minute presentation in two minutes with the result that they started rushing it. The specification is clear on this point and candidates should be reminded that this is a **two-minute** presentation. They should also be advised to consider carefully how they are going to access the 5 marks available for AO2 in this task, so they must find time to refer to at least one main source. Some did this, others did not. Finally, the 5 AO4 marks available require candidates to show knowledge and understanding of different aspects of their topic. Therefore, they need to emphasise the most essential in their presentation.

Task 1b The Independent Research Project - Discussion

I wish to remind candidates that this is an examiner-led discussion; candidates are not required to ask the examiner questions about his or her views, although some persisted in trying to do this. This takes away valuable time from this task where there are 30 marks available. In other words, 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, for example, when one candidate could not answer the claim that “Franco personally killed just a few people”, whereas a strong candidate on a similar topic argued that Franco facilitated the elimination of many of his perceived enemies.

With regard to AO3 I intend to deal with this under Component 3 because the same repeated errors were heard and later seen in the essays. However, my main advice for improvement is to try to teach students to stop thinking in English and then translating word for word into Spanish. The better candidates, of course, had acquired the skill to avoid this pitfall.

Task 2 Card Discussion

Given that the candidate has to choose and prepare the card in the presence of the examiner, the provision of a reasonably pleasant space would seem to be in the candidate's best interests. Some candidates were able to move to another table and preserve their personal space. Unfortunately, in some centres candidates had to prepare at the same small table used by the examiner.

Generally speaking, this task was not as well done as the IRP tasks. Some candidates admitted that they had omitted this or that sub-theme which was not really the best strategy to adopt. Secondly, while some candidates asked two relevant questions near the beginning of the exam, others had to be prompted to do so right at 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 UK is not relevant and does not earn any AO4 marks because the UK is not a Spanish-speaking country.

There is room for improvement here under the AO2 heading: the short text is there for a reason and candidates need to think about how they are going to access the 5 marks available. I would invite teachers to remind their candidates that the AO4 here is exactly like the AO4 in Task 1b: they need to demonstrate critical awareness as well as knowledge. However, the performance under AO4 was generally good to very good overall.

The same cannot be said about the AO3, and this also affected the best candidates. Too many candidates made up words (see my report on Component 3) and far too many could not conjugate common irregular verbs like *ser*, *estar*, *decir*, *traer*, *salir*, and radical-changing verbs (*mi penso* and *penso* were common). Thus, some candidates who scored in the top band for AO3 in task 1b fell into band 4 in this task. There is room for major improvement here.

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COMPONENT 2: LISTENING, READING AND TRANSLATION

This first A Level paper of the new specification offered candidates the opportunity to access the whole range of marks available. Many candidates found the paper enjoyable and were able to attempt most questions successfully.

There were some questions that caused candidates some problems. Question 4 (B) on the anti-bullfighting activist caused a number of issues. Some candidates did not pay attention to the rubric of this listening task and tried to copy chunks of Spanish from the transcript. However, more serious was the fact that some distorted common Spanish words often obscured their answers. For example, in (b) the iconic word *torero* became *torreo* or *torrero* just as the *toro bravo* became *torro*. In (b) Pedro was attacked with *patatas* and was *golpado* and in (c) he spent a night in a *comisería de policía* [accents missing]. Question (g) caused similar problems with some candidates inviting the examiner to find the answer in long sentences.

In reading task 6 too many candidates showed that they did not understand the word 'summary', writing sentences that were far too long and often contradicting themselves. The essence of a summary is to write short, focused phrases or sentences, as appropriate. In bullet point 1 some disregarded the word *hizo* and then tried to write down full details of one example of what the writer witnessed. Bullet point 2 caused similar problems and instead of answering along the lines of "a simple tortilla" that was "shared with another family", some wrote very long sentences indeed.

Task 6 highlighted a problem that was compounded in the comprehension task in Question 8. Instead of writing a straightforward answer, some candidates tried to copy (sometimes erroneously) whole tranches of the Spanish original. Furthermore, some showed that they were thinking in English and translating word for word into poor Spanish often omitting *que* between clauses, changing the ending or gender of common words and even making up words based on the English in their heads. And, of course, when in doubt an infinitive would be used where it was inappropriate. Here are a few examples to illustrate the point: in (a) *gente no hacer nada*; in (b) *decir que está el suerte*; in (c) *el fallo de libertad [sic]*; in (d) *todo munda poder ir*; in (g) *el pollucion [sic]*. While it can be argued that such answers show comprehension, the quality of the Spanish is very low. To the above I wish to add the observation that some could not distinguish between or conjugate *ser* and *estar*, and the attempts to conjugate *decir*, *poner* and *pensar* showed much room for improvement.

Question 9 was on the whole well done and many candidates were awarded high marks. While this task was marked according to AO2, it is worth pointing out that too many were unable to spell 'necessary' or 'permanently' in English. Most problems arose from attempts to translate *se necesitarán* and *tanto ... como*.

Question 10 was a real discriminator because it was marked according to AO3 (quality of language). Too many candidates decided to invent their own version of Spanglish and some basic vocabulary was not known. The International Brigades became *Brigas*, *Brigados* and *Brigades*, 'conflict' became *la conflictia*, 'forces' were *fuerzos*, 'work' for 'livelihoods' became *la trabaja* and 'struggle' became *el lucho*. The word 'time' requires remedial work in the classroom: too many cannot tell the difference between *vez*, *tiempo*, *hora* and *época*. Only the best candidates handled *hacer que* + the subjunctive in the last sentence. In order to improve many candidates need to concentrate on basic theme related vocabulary and key grammar.

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COMPONENT 3: CRITICAL AND ANALYTICAL RESPONSE IN WRITING

This was the first exam under the new linear specification whereby candidates could write two literary essays or one essay on literature and one on film; they could not write two essays on film. The format and marking scheme may be new but the traditional problems with essay writing persisted. Some candidates came with a pre-planned essay and proceeded to repeat their classroom or homework practice with total disregard for the topic set. This attracts penalties both under AO3 and AO4. In the exam as a whole every one of questions 1 - 20 was attempted, with the questions on *El Lobo* and *La Caja 507* being the only ones left out. I will address the language used in the essays under a separate AO3 section below.

La literatura

Both of the questions on *La casa de Bernarda Alba* were attempted in equal numbers and with good success. Unfortunately, in question 2 some candidates argued that Lorca was supporting the closed society in *La España profunda*, which not only showed ignorance about Lorca but also of the aim of all good playwrights which is to challenge the established order. I also need to emphasise that Lorca was not criticising Franco or Francoism because he was murdered at the beginning of the Civil War before he could have personal experience of the horrors of the new régime.

Both questions on the play *Las bicicletas son para el verano* and the novel *Como agua para chocolate* attracted well done to reasonably done essays. The same can be said of the two questions on *El otro árbol de Guernica*, but it was disappointing that very few tried to define, in question 7, what a “hero” might mean. This could have added another dimension to the essays.

Questions 9 and 10 on *El coronel no tiene quien le escriba* were also popular. In essay 9 some argued well that the Coronel’s behaviour was perfectly reasonable, while in 10 some argued – again convincingly – that the coronel’s wife is the dominant force in the novel.

Finally, in questions 11 and 12, 11 was the more popular but 12 triggered the better essays. In 11 the best candidates argued that Paco was an idealized hero and in 12 many argued that the novel is an allegory of rural pre-Civil War Spain.

Las películas

Question 13 on *El laberinto del fauno* led to arguably the best and most able essays in this Component. These addressed the meaning of a labyrinth and bravely applied this to the film. However, this essay also saw some pre-prepared essays where candidates disregarded the rubric and just addressed the role of the *fauno*. With regard to question 14, some just agreed with the statement, whereas more thoughtful candidates argued that that the statement was too simplistic and that there was another dimension to the film.

Despite its age *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios* still proves popular and there were some fine essays under both headings. Likewise *María, llena eres de gracia*, with the best essays tackling 18. *Las trece rosas* still proved popular and most candidates preferred the first option.

AO3

The foregoing addressed how the AO4 marks were accessed by candidates. I now want to address AO3 where I have some advice for improvements in language usage. My aim is to assist teachers to think about where they might target their remedial work in the classroom. The examples are taken from easily identified texts but were not restricted to them. First of all, too many candidates were unable to conjugate irregular verbs like *decir* and *morir*. The attempts at writing Adela or Ofelia *muere* or *murió* were astonishing with *muerto* / *muertó* / *more* / *morío* very common. Another verb that requires remedial work is *querer*: *María querío* / *quero* / *querer* (the infinitive instead of the conjugated verb) were too frequent. The same thing happened in the speaking Component 1, especially during the card discussion. Some candidates seem to think about it and then just opt for the infinitive but this does not help their AO3 marks.

Another tendency is just to invent a verb, a noun or an adverb. Instead of *cada vez más* examiners often heard or read a concoction based on *crecimiento* or *incremento*, for example, *crecimente* or *incrementamente*. The worst errors involved made-up words based on English and this tendency appeared both in written and oral Spanish. Here are some examples: *preventir*, *preveneter*, *preveneter*, *improver*, *improvar* for *mejorar*, *reliar en* for 'rely on'.

There is also a growing tendency to confuse 's' and 'c' in writing as in *obceción*, *cresimiento* *aserca de*, *mecanicmo*. The same level of failure to appreciate word structure affects verbs as in *La madre de Ofelia está morir* (is dying?) or *Las rosas estaban afectar por la cárcel* (being affected by?).

Too many candidates were totally confused by the demonstrative pronouns and adjectives *este*, *esta*, *éste*, *ésta*, *esto*, *eso* etc. and used them at random: *esto hombre*, *este (sic)* for *esto*, *este (sic)* *mujer*. Furthermore, there is widespread confusion in the use of *esta* and *está* as in *Bernarda esta (sic) enfadada*. Finally, it will not come as a surprise to learn that only the best candidates remember to use 'the personal *a*' for a direct object.



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