



General Certificate of Education

Spanish 1696 *Specification*

SPA2T/V Speaking

Report on the Examination

2010 examination - June series

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Administration

There were few problems in the administration of the tests this series. It is clear that advice given in the Autumn Training Meetings and feedback on last year's tests have been followed in the majority of centres. It is pleasing to note that teacher-examiners are now much more familiar with the four topics and their sub-topics: consequently coverage of all four topics was achieved in almost all tests. The level of technical support available to Visiting examiners when recording speaking tests was uneven. Visiting examiners were very appreciative of the highly competent and friendly technicians who assisted them in many centres, enabling them to focus on the task of helping the candidates to perform at their best.

Most of the centre-conducted tests were recorded on cassettes and the quality of some of these was poor. Recordings on CD or memory stick were generally much better, but centres are reminded that the quality of the recordings should be checked carefully. Some tests were almost inaudible simply because the candidate was too far away from the microphone.

Although they are now significantly fewer, there are still centres where teacher-examiners do not keep to the correct timings of the different parts of the test. However the mis-timings occur they will have a negative impact on the candidate's marks. Candidates who are allowed to speak for four minutes in response to the printed questions in Part 1, for example, and who are then limited to one minute in the general discussion of the sub-topic will not match a descriptor in that one minute above a mark of 2 out of 5. If they are allowed to go on for longer with the general discussion in Part 1 then the extra time there will potentially mean lost marks for Interaction because the third topic in Part 2 will have been dealt with inadequately.

The test itself should last a total of 15 minutes and examiners stop marking at the end of 15 minutes. Within this time the "very best practice" test will have kept to the following timings:

Part 1 Discussion of the Stimulus Card

5 minutes (approximate split 2½ for printed questions and 2½ minutes for discussion)

Part 2 Conversation

- Discussion of candidate's nominated topic: 3 minutes 20 seconds
- Discussion of second topic: 3 minutes 20 seconds
- Discussion of third topic: 3 minutes 20 seconds.

Examiners using timing devices are generally very accurate at allocating time across the different parts but there should be no need to set and reset the device at the beginning and end of each topic under discussion. Again this is very distracting for candidates particularly when there are repeated "beeps" as different attempts to get the device to work properly are made.

Centres are asked to pay particular attention to the following matters:

- Clear recordings with no background hissing and with candidates well-positioned in relation to the microphone so that their responses are audible
- Accurate time-keeping and the correct allocation of time to the relevant sections of tests as set out in the *Instructions for the Conduct of the Examinations* booklet
- Accurate completion of AQA documentation with all information provided
- Responsive questioning that ensures natural interaction and engages the candidate in some degree of spontaneous exchanges rather than questions picked off from a set list with little or no follow-up on what a candidate actually says
- Differentiated questioning according to levels of ability so that less able candidates are not left struggling to respond to questions that are clearly beyond their level of proficiency
- Discouraging candidates from giving detailed descriptions of what is on a stimulus card.

Part 1 Discussion of Stimulus Cards

It is important that the discussion in the second part of Part 1 remains without the sub-topic stated on the card. This is happening across all topics and teacher-examiners in centres are urged to familiarise themselves fully with the sub-topic divisions. There is an argument that “drifting” from, for example, advertising *per se* to advertising on television is a logical direction for a discussion to take but the risk is that in the quite pressured situation of the test – for the teacher-examiner, that is – the switch back to advertising does not happen and a discussion about television ensues. The advice is therefore not to venture beyond the sub-topic in the first place however tempting it might be so to do.

It is common (and acceptable) for candidates to write out their answers to the five printed questions and read them out in the test. Most candidates have perfected the skill of answering these questions in approximately two and a half minutes, leaving the remaining two and a half minutes for the wider discussion. Unfortunately some candidates were not made aware of the importance of timing in this part of the test and therefore failed to access all the available marks. Teacher-examiners are reminded that they should

- use all the stimulus cards where possible
- refrain from asking any supplementary questions between the printed ones
- ensure that the wider discussion remains within the sub-topic of the card
- discourage long pre-learnt speeches
- limit their use of “suggested” and rehearsed questions
- listen and respond to what the candidate says and so encourage spontaneity

The performance of many candidates in this section was impressive and it was not unusual for those who had been thoroughly prepared for the task to be awarded the full 10 marks for Part 1.

Tarjeta A Un mundo interconectado

This card was very popular and gave rise to some interesting and informed discussions about social networking and wider uses of the Internet. Question 3 *¿Para qué sirven estas redes sociales?* was not always fully understood and many candidates repeated the information already given in Question 2. The final question was well-exploited, the majority of candidates focussing on the ease of keeping in touch with friends and family in other parts of the world. Some good topic-specific vocabulary was in evidence - *colgar fotos, estafa, banda ancha* – but *peligros* and *peligrosos* were frequently confused.

Tarjeta B Los músicos callejeros

Candidates who chose this card were able to describe the photograph but few referred to the law mentioned in the caption. The opportunity to return to this in the wider discussion was not exploited by many examiners. The overwhelming majority of candidates were happy to hear street musicians as long as their music was good. The final question tended to elicit accounts of candidates' personal musical preferences rather than discussions of music in a wider social context, resulting in some cases in a performance more typical of GCSE. *Callejeros* was often mispronounced and there was some confusion of *la música* and *los músicos*.

Tarjeta C ¿Cuántas calorías por hora queman tus actividades?

The apparently familiar topic of this card appealed to many candidates, but few really appreciated its specific slant and very few were able to discuss effectively the calories burnt because their grasp of numbers in Spanish was so poor. In answer to Question 2, most candidates said that they practised some kind of sport but underestimated the calories consumed during their activities. Many candidates ignored the *otros* in Question 4 and talked in general terms about the health benefits of exercising and only the more able candidates gave details of the social and psychological benefits. Question 5 elicited some good discussions of compulsory sport in schools, the provision of sporting facilities and government campaigns to encourage physical activities. *La sana* instead of *la salud* was a common mistake, and the verb *jugar* was often conjugated incorrectly.

Tarjeta D ¿Cómo son los amigos?

Response to this card varied enormously from centre to centre. For some candidates it was an opportunity to remain within the comfort zone of GCSE vocabulary. Many candidates, on the other hand, responded to the printed questions with original ideas and mature opinions. Question 4 proved difficult for a few candidates who appeared not to understand the word *motivos*, but the majority cited *novios/novias* as the most frequent cause of conflict. Overwhelmingly it was felt that friendship with a member of the opposite sex is possible and many were able to elaborate on the benefits of such friendships. There were some interesting ideas expressed about the relative importance of friends and family and frequent mentions of *la sangre llama*. Common grammatical errors involved *ser/estar*, *saber/conocer* and the use of *confidencia* for *confianza*.

Tarjeta E ¿La publicidad siempre nos dice la verdad?

Few candidates realised that this was an advert for mascara so their response to Question 2 had less to do with advertising and more to do with whether actresses in general should wear false eyelashes. Answers to Question 3 were sometimes disappointing, given that candidates had had 20 minutes to think of an annoying advert. Some talked in general terms without giving a specific example; many mentioned a certain comparison website but without really explaining what was irritating about it. Few

candidates were concerned about the truthfulness of adverts or seemed aware of the cost of producing them. In the wider discussion it was surprising that not many had given any thought to an advert that they liked and some wasted time in the test trying to think of one. The card revealed a widespread inability to use the verb *mentir* correctly and there were candidates who failed to recognise the verb in its stem-changed form.

Tarjeta F ¿Quieres pasar unas vacaciones diferentes?

This card was generally well done, although some examiners reported that responses to Questions 2 and 3 were unimaginative or stereotypical. It was generally felt that such voluntary work was not beyond the capacity of older people, even, as one candidate said, those aged 40. Question 5 confused some candidates who (as in Card A) did not understand *¿Para qué sirven...?* Many who did understand did not realise that the question was about holidays in general, not just the kind shown in the picture. The ensuing discussions focussed on ideal holidays, accounts of past holidays good and bad and the impact of tourism on a country. Examiners noted a careless attitude to the gender of *vacaciones* and *actividades* and also to personal pronouns in constructions such as *me gusta relajarse*.

Part 2 Conversation

Visiting examiners were able to rely for the most part on clear, legible cue cards on which to conduct the discussion of the candidates' chosen topics. In a few cases, the cue card had to be rewritten because they contained full sentences, conjugated verbs or even entire questions. Some centres are still under the impression that the chosen topic is a presentation and allow their candidates to speak uninterrupted for a minute or even longer. The chosen topic is to be treated in the same way as the other two conversation topics: the examiner asks specific questions and develops the candidates' answers by responding to what they have said. There were examples of teacher-examiners starting this section with *Háblame de...* or simply inviting the candidate to begin their "presentation". Such practices will have a negative impact on the mark for Interaction. There were some excellent exchanges in which teachers gave their candidates the opportunity to react spontaneously in developing ideas and to demonstrate their ability to generate language in a natural way. Unfortunately, some centres tended to rely on a set of pre-prepared questions and seemed not to listen to candidates' responses, thus depriving them of the opportunity to demonstrate spontaneity and restricting their mark for Interaction.

Examiners noted that there was often little difference in the performance of candidates on their chosen topics and that of the remaining two topics. It would have been expected that, having designated the topic, candidates would have their ideas and vocabulary ready and would therefore be able to give a more confident performance. It was also noted that some teacher examiners allowed longer on the chosen topic, up to 5 minutes in some cases, leaving insufficient time to do justice to the remaining topics. The ten minute conversation should be divided equally between the three topics. If at the end of 15 minutes less than two minutes have been spent on any of the three topics examiners are instructed to lower the Interaction mark by one band (2 marks). It is important that examiners give clear indications of each change of topic to enable the marker to time the sections accurately, by saying, for example, *Y ahora vamos a hablar del tema de...*

It was disappointing to hear tests in which candidates were not encouraged to raise their level above GCSE. Questions beginning *¿Te gusta...? ¿Qué tipo de ... prefieres? ¿Adónde fuiste de vacaciones el año pasado?* are useful openers, but it is expected that at AS the discussion will develop beyond the personal and that candidates will be able to discuss issues such as the family, television and tourism in the wider social context.

Pronunciation

The majority of candidates were awarded 'Good' or 'Fairly good' for pronunciation. The usual common errors were heard: wrongly stressed words such as *difícil*, *familia*, *industria*; careless vowels in *sociedad*, *dieta*, *gobierno*, *causar*; the mispronunciation of soft 'g' and 'j'; the pronunciation of 'h' in *hijos*, *horrible*, *humo*.

Grammar

Examiners once again pointed to the discrepancy between the use of complex structures using various tenses of the subjunctive by many candidates and their lack of basic grammatical accuracy. One native speaker examiner commented that candidates who had learned phrases such as *digan lo que digan*, *que yo sepa*, *dicho sea de paso* should understand that, though they may impress the first time they are inserted, when repeated 5 or 6 times and often incorrectly they have the opposite effect. Candidates who use phrases such as *la sangre llama* may be asked to explain what they mean and should therefore be aware of the potential pitfalls of learning a list of idiomatic expressions in preference to the correct conjugation of common regular verbs. Other weaknesses noted by examiners include:

- Radical changing verbs especially *jugar*, *poder*, *mentir*
- *Gustar*
- Personal pronouns of all kinds *en el futuro me gustaría casarte*
- Relative clauses: *un amigo que puedo hablar con...*
- Past tenses: preterite, imperfect, pluperfect
- *Ser/estar*
- Agreement of adjectives
- *Si* clauses and impersonal phrases that do not require a subjunctive
- Recurrent favourites: *La problema*, *los turísticos*, *los factos*, *las ropas*, *anoche* (for at night) *porque de*, *no es sobre* (for *no se trata de*), *es necesito*.

Annual Teacher Support Meetings

Centres are reminded that language-specific Teacher Support Meetings for the Conduct of the Speaking Tests will be held in Autumn 2010 covering both Unit 2 and Unit 4. These meetings will be full day meetings and free of charge. Further details can be obtained from the Events page of the AQA website (www.aqa.org.uk) in due course.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.