



General Certificate of Education

Spanish 2696
Specification

SPA4V/T 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 has been followed in the majority of centres. It is pleasing to note that teacher-examiners are now much more familiar with the topics and their sub-topics: consequently good coverage 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.

Part 1 Discussion of Stimulus Cards

On the whole teachers and candidates responded positively to the challenge of this new task, but success was uneven. Teachers who have not managed to attend the Training Meetings are advised to study carefully the pink booklet **Instructions for the conduct of the examinations** and also **the Guidance notes for teachers conducting their own tests**, both available at www.aqa.org.uk. A training pack is also available with sample material. Teachers should also refer to the mark scheme and be aware that poor timing of this section and a failure to offer direct challenges can impact negatively on the mark awarded.

Candidates have two choices to make during their 20 minute preparation time. First they must choose which of the two cards, each on a different topic, they wish to discuss. Second, they must decide which of the two opinions printed on the card they wish to defend. They are advised to think carefully about the title of the card as this will encapsulate the main issue to be debated. Visiting examiners in their initial briefing to candidates have stressed that they will not be marked on the political correctness of the opinions they choose to express. It might be helpful therefore to think of this exercise as a role play in which they may adopt a posture that does not necessarily reflect their personal beliefs. Some candidates in this series were held back by a well-intentioned desire to show “balance” and a respect for the opposite point of view. Marks are awarded for the ability to take a more robust and single-minded approach.

Examiners should begin the test by asking which is the chosen card and which is the chosen opinion. They should then invite the candidate to outline their point of view and start the timer. There was an understandable degree of nervousness among both teacher-examiners and candidates in this first series and it was not always clear when the one minute had begun or which opinion the candidate was defending. Teacher-examiners need to make it quite clear how they intend to start Part 1 and remove any element of uncertainty which may unsettle the candidate at the start of their test.

Response to the stimulus material (1 minute - 5 marks)

To gain the full 5 marks in the first minute candidates must make separate points relevant to the title on the card and develop them by giving examples or some brief form of elaboration. This is the candidate's opportunity to determine the direction of the ensuing discussion by introducing appropriate ideas that the examiner will pick up on later. Marks were most frequently lost by candidates who began by reading out what was in the speech bubble and by filling their minute with unnecessarily complex expressions that gave no information but wasted valuable time. The best performances were achieved by candidates who had been trained to be clear, concise and succinct. It is not a skill that comes naturally to most students and as such requires regular practice. Some candidates were not aware that they had a minute to access 5 marks and only gave a 15-20 second outline, resulting in a mark of 2.

Response to challenges by the examiner (4 minutes – 10 marks)

There were some lively and interesting debates between the more confident examiners and candidates who evidently enjoyed the task. Some teacher-examiners made good use of the **Notes for Examiners** and challenged their candidates appropriately. Others used them too literally as in Tarjeta A Opinión 2: *¿Y qué piensas del cambio climático?*

Markers highlighted a number of teacher-examiner practices that disadvantaged the candidates:

- failing to listen and respond to specific points made by the candidate
- using set questions to elicit rehearsed answers
- departing from the issue presented on the card
- conducting a discussion of the wider topic area
- excessive “heckling”, preventing candidates from developing their ideas
- asking questions that were too lengthy, unclear and confusing

Tarjeta A ¿Qué futuro tiene el planeta?

This card was a popular choice, but it was not always understood that the two opinions represented the pessimistic and the optimistic view of the future of the planet. Most candidates were able to talk about recycling, alternative energy, public transport and some referred to current problems such as the oil leak in the Gulf of Mexico. Few, however, were able to link these issues convincingly with the planet's future, revealing a superficial and uncritical appreciation of the issues.

Tarjeta B ¿Es posible una sociedad multicultural?

This was a very popular card, with candidates more often opting for Opinion 2. There were some very thoughtful responses from candidates who lived in cities with a large multicultural population or who were themselves from an ethnic minority group. They spoke with great passion and understanding of the issues. Other candidates gave stereotyped responses and failed to respond well to challenges. Many candidates saw ethnic food and music as the chief benefits of a multicultural society and made light of cultural and religious tension.

Tarjeta C ¿Podemos eliminar la pobreza?

Both points of view were extremely popular, but Opinion 1 was without doubt the more clinically and ruthlessly argued. Arguments tended to focus on poorer countries abroad rather than poverty at home. Some candidates were able to bring in historical evidence and talk about Third World debt but there was little discussion of what poverty actually meant and some candidates revealed their political naiveté. For some candidates the solution was *dar dinero* but some more sophisticated candidates talked about *microeconomías*.

Tarjeta D Proteger el medio ambiente - ¿Está de moda?

The basic question posed by this card was whether environmental issues should be a compulsory subject in schools or whether concern for the planet is simply a fashionable posture. Candidates defending Opinion 1 therefore needed to explain precisely what they thought children should be taught and why. The relevant issues were touched on by most candidates – again recycling, alternative energy etc. – but arguments were woolly and unconvincing. Not many candidates were willing to defend Opinion 2 which casts doubt on the current orthodoxy.

Tarjeta E ¿Hay que limitar la inmigración?

Perhaps due to the coverage of the General Election, candidates were in general familiar with the issues relating to immigration – pressure on jobs, housing and services versus the benefits of multiculturalism – but most failed to take up a clear position in relation to the task. Those who defended Opinion 1 were happy to acknowledge the need for controls on immigration while those who defended Opinion 2 were ready to accept that many immigrants make a positive contribution. While such harmonious exchanges may promise well for human evolution, they are less likely to score a high mark for SPA4.

Tarjeta F ¿Qué causa la delincuencia?

This was the least popular card. It appears that the Environment and the Multicultural Society have been the preferred topics of study in most centres. Unfortunately many failed to address the question itself, which was about the **causes** of crime, focussing instead on the treatment of criminals. Many of the discussions heard were clearly based on the Specimen card on this topic, *¿Encarcelar o reeducar?*

Part 2 Conversation on Cultural Topics

The variety of Cultural topics studied, sometimes within one centre, was huge. Visiting examiners found themselves researching unfamiliar topics and broadening their horizons considerably. It is reasonable therefore that they should be informed in advance of the topics they will have to examine. Centres can help by supplying the relevant information as soon as possible and indicating clearly on the Speaking Test Marking Schedule (STMS) what the candidates have studied. It is not helpful to write simply *Almodóvar*, *Lorca* or *Gaudí* on the STMS. The specification makes it clear that questions can be answered with reference to a single work. It should therefore be made clear to the Visiting examiner which film, play or building the candidates have studied.

Centres' expectations of the type of questions that would be asked in this part varied a great deal. Some candidates have been given the impression that this would be a much easier section after the challenges of Part 1. The pink booklet, **Instructions for the Conduct of the Examinations**, states:

"Not only is it entirely appropriate at A2 for the examiner to challenge a point of view or ask for further clarification of an opinion, but this is a practice to be encouraged as it will provide opportunities for the candidates to access the top band marks for Interaction." [Section on SPA4T Speaking Tests, paragraph 19].

Attention should also be paid to the descriptors for Interaction in the Mark Scheme which refer specifically to the requirement to "counter views" in order to access the top two bands. The Mark Scheme also makes it clear that the candidate who gives only factual knowledge will be limiting his/her Interaction mark to a maximum of 6.

The suggested starter questions provided are of necessity non-specific, since the range of possible Cultural topics available to centres is enormous. It should not be supposed that they are a sufficient basis on which to conduct the Conversation. There were some examples of excessive or inappropriate use of the suggested questions. It was surprising, for example, to hear a candidate whose chosen topic was *el bombardeo de Guernica* asked *¿Te hubiera gustado vivir durante esta época?* To achieve the "meaningful exchange" required for a mark in the top band, examiners should explore specific elements or themes suggested by the topics and give candidates regular opportunities to "develop ideas and counter views". Certain Cultural topics lend themselves more readily to this approach than others and teachers should bear this in mind when choosing and teaching these topics.

Teacher-examiners must remain vigilant about the allocation of time to these two topics: there should be an even allocation of five minutes per topic. In a number of cases, after an over-run in Part 1 and too lengthy a discussion of the first Cultural Topic, there was only a three minute discussion of the second topic and so the deduction of 2 Interaction marks had to be applied (see *Instructions for the Conduct of the Examinations: June 2010*).

A region: a number of regions in Spain were studied – Cataluña and Andalucía being the most popular. Others included countries like Cuba. Examiners reported that candidates' knowledge was often patchy and sometimes sounded like a tourist brochure. Many candidates who had studied a region had not been prepared to answer questions about their views on the future of the region and could not counter views when challenged.

A period of 20th century history: *la República 1931-36, la Guerra Civil, la dictadura, la Transición*, were all popular and candidates were able to express opinions and views on many issues, in particular women's rights, and political figures namely King Juan Carlos, Adolfo Suárez and Antonio Tejero. Centres should however consider narrowing the focus of topics such as *la dictadura* so that Visiting examiners can avoid straying into unfamiliar territory.

An author: this was not as popular as in the previous specifications but Laura Esquivel, García Márquez, Isabel Allende and Sender were all studied. Candidates generally spoke in detail about the novels, expressed views and opinions with ease and dealt confidently with challenges.

A dramatist or poet: Lorca was again the most popular, especially *La Casa de Bernarda Alba* though *Bodas de Sangre* and *Yerma* had also been studied. Original interpretations of *Bernarda Alba* continue to emerge and so too the unfortunate misconception that the play is a critique of Franco.

A director, architect, musician, or painter: Almodóvar was very popular, in particular *Volver*, *Todo sobre mi Madre* and *Hable con Ella*. Many candidates showed a keen interest in the director's techniques and could express informed views and opinions. Other directors studied include Guillermo del Toro, Carlos Saura and Alejandro Amenábar and it is clear that film is a medium that appeals to many candidates. Painters, especially Dalí, Picasso, Goya, Velázquez and Frida Kahlo were studied, though not all with equal success. Gaudí was almost the only architect represented and few musicians were chosen. The most successful discussions were those in which the candidate had a detailed knowledge of a particular work, e.g. Picasso's *Guernica* or Gaudí's *Sagrada Familia*. Some candidates could only talk in generalities and were unable to respond to questions asking for examples or evidence to illustrate their statements.

Pronunciation

The pronunciation and intonation was, for the most part, at least fairly good (3/5) but it is a pity that this aspect of performance does not always receive the attention it requires to earn the full 5 marks.

Grammar

The overall impression of grammatical competence was generally positive: examiners commented on the wide range of vocabulary, tenses and constructions used. However, only in a minority of tests did this result in a mark in the 13-15 band because the effect was mitigated by recurrent, familiar errors. Examiners noted the following:

- *ser/estar*
- *haber* in impersonal expressions
- unnecessary use of the subjunctive, e.g. in present tense *si* clauses
- agreements of all kinds: noun/adjective, subject/verb, noun/pronoun
- *gustar*
- radical-changing verbs in all tenses
- incorrect use of preterite/imperfect tenses
- inconsistency in tense sequencing

Candidates are still fond of memorising complex expressions and inserting idiomatic phrases in an attempt to impress. Such expressions are no substitute for simpler, spontaneously generated language that conveys real substance. The Part 1 task in particular has inspired the use of such phrases as *tu argumento no tiene ni pies ni cabeza*, *eso es harina de otro costal* and *¡a otro perro con ese hueso!*, often used when not much real argument has been heard.

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.