



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)  
June 2011**

**Spanish**

**SPA2TV**

**(Specification 2695)**

**Unit 2: Speaking Test**

***Report on the Examination***

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## General Comments

The requirements of this test in terms of timings and topic coverage are now familiar to the overwhelming majority of teachers and students. Regrettably however, a few students are losing marks because of the failure of some teacher-examiners to adhere to the procedures described in the booklet *Instructions for the Conduct of the Examinations*. Omitting one of the topics or failing to allocate sufficient time to one or more of them were again the most common errors by which students lost marks through no fault of their own. Students 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 student’s nominated topic: 3 minutes 20 seconds
- Discussion of second topic: 3 minutes 20 seconds
- Discussion of third topic: 3 minutes 20 seconds.

Where tests were conducted well, the level of performance of students was generally high with a good number of non-native speakers achieving full marks.

## Administration

Visiting examiners this series recorded the tests as MP3 files using a hand-held voice recorder. As a result, the administration of the tests ran more smoothly than in previous series and the quality of recording was substantially improved. Teacher-examiners using voice recorders should be aware that they are very sensitive and pick up unwanted sounds such as papers being shuffled. Centre conducted tests varied enormously in sound quality, the poorest being those on audio cassette but in some cases those on CD or memory sticks were not sufficiently loud. Teachers are reminded that they should check the sound quality and ensure that the microphone is placed near enough to the student. Markers also sometimes encountered difficulties where files and CDs were not labelled appropriately or occasionally poorly packaged.

### Part 1: Discussion of the Stimulus Card

The level of achievement in this part of the test was again very high and most students have acquired the skill of developing relevant points in response to the printed questions. Students are advised to read through the five questions carefully and plan their answers so as to ensure that the relevant material is applied to each question and that the same points are not repeated several times. Teacher-examiners are reminded that the more general discussion of the stimulus card must stay within the subtopic of the card.

It is common (and acceptable) for students to write out their answers to the five printed questions and read them out in the test. Most students 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 students 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 student says and so encourage spontaneity

### **Tarjeta A - ¿Quién cuida en el hogar?**

Relationships within the family is usually a very popular topic, but this card, based on a graph, attracted fewer students because perhaps it was perceived as difficult. Not many students gave convincing reasons why it is often women who assume the caring roles in the family. Answers were often vague and referred to *tradicción* or poorly expressed ideas about women being more *sensibles* and *cariñosas*. Question 3 elicited the stereotypical jobs that men do at home e.g. *trabajar en el jardín, lavar el coche, cortar el césped* but there were many who said that men go out to work, ignoring the fact that the question specified *en el hogar*. Answers to the two final questions were often superficial, many in favour of domestic equality but unable to elaborate on what this would entail in practice. Many examiners developed the topic well with questions such as *¿Qué tareas deben hacer los niños en la casa?, ¿Qué te parece más fácil, cuidar de los niños o de los ancianos?* Some of the best discussions were about “house-husbands” and how some tasks required more physical strength. *Cuidar* was frequently mispronounced, and even sometimes *mujeres*. Common language errors included *igualdad* (despite the fact that it was on the card), *un grafo* and numbers.

### **Tarjeta B - Telenovelas: ¿cultura o telebasura?**

This was perhaps the most popular card. Many students said they did not watch *telenovelas*, but answered well nevertheless. Good reasons were given why young children should not watch soaps. Answers to question 4 often lacked detail and mostly referred to *drogas, violencia* and *sexo* but specific examples were lacking. Few students noticed that question 5 referred to *jóvenes* and went on to repeat ideas already expressed about *niños*. Development of the card by examiners ranged from the GCSE level *¿Cuál es tu programa favorito?* to more mature discussions based on *¿cultura o telebasura?* which had often been neglected by students in their answers to the printed questions. Able students expressed interesting ideas about the influence of television on behaviour and the distinction between *fantasía* and *realidad*. Anglicisms such as *documentarios* and *sutable* were common, and valuable time was often wasted over the pronunciation of *específicamente*.

### **Tarjeta C - ¿Cuánta cafeína consumes?**

In answer to question one students often omitted to explain that the central issue was the negative effect of excessive consumption of caffeine, preferring instead to give lengthy details about the amount of caffeine contained in the drinks illustrated. Surprisingly no-one referred to the amount of sugar also contained in cola and energy drinks although it is clear that such drinks have an important role in combating their sedentary lifestyle. Most thought that caffeine was a drug because it was addictive but few went on to compare it with other hard drugs or everyday drugs such as alcohol and tobacco. There were some good developments on the issues of coping with stress, government campaigns to promote healthy lifestyles, television cookery

programmes and parental responsibility for children's diet. Teacher-examiners are reminded that the subtopic of this card is Health and well-being and the wider discussion should not stray therefore into the subtopic of Sport/exercise. There were many instances of poor pronunciation of *caféina*, *energéticas*, *sanguínea* and *ansiedad*. As in previous series, *serioso* and *peligrosos* instead of *peligros* were frequently heard.

#### **Tarjeta D - Excusas para no hacer ejercicio**

This was a very popular card and the printed questions were all well answered. It was not uncommon for students to say that these were lame excuses but go on to cite them later to justify their own inactivity, especially *no tengo tiempo*. Answers to question 4 varied, some very thoughtful, others merely mentioning the sports they liked themselves. Some students were able to answer using the correct form of the subjunctive. It was generally acknowledged that today's young people are lazy and that technology is to blame. A small number of students did not know *perezoso* and some confused it with *peligroso*. Good discussions dealt with the forthcoming Olympic Games and whether young people were inspired by top athletes to engage in more sporting activities; students' preferences for team games or individual sports and whether physical education should be compulsory in schools. The pronunciation of *ejercicio* presented a problem for many.

#### **Tarjeta E - Las películas aptas para los menores**

This was a popular card, but many students took the term *clasificación* to refer to the type of film rather than its suitability for a particular audience. Many said that films were readily available on the Internet so that parents had little control over what their children watched. However, it was generally agreed that some system of classification was necessary and that children were likely to copy what they saw in the cinema. Unfortunately, the more general discussion on this card was often more at GCSE level, with questions like *¿Vas mucho al cine?* and *¿Qué tipo de película te gusta más?* with no attempt to develop the answers. Students showed much enthusiasm for *palomitas* and *la pantalla grande*. The word *aptas* in the title was invariably ignored and often replaced with *sutable*. Pronunciation errors included *proteger*, *violencia* and sometimes *película*.

There was, on the other hand, some impressive language used to describe films they had enjoyed, including many Spanish films.

#### **Tarjeta F - La música ambiental está por todas partes**

This card was not often chosen but it was usually answered well. It was noticeable that students had studied cards from previous series on *los músicos callejeros* and *la música en vivo* and were able to adapt answers to respond to this particular card. Most students like to hear pop music in shops and seem to prefer any kind of noise in preference to silence. More able students were able to express their frustration at the music played while they were left "on hold" and to suggest places in which music would not be appropriate such as hospitals and schools. The wider discussion often started with questions about the student's own listening habits frequently developed well by examiners but sometimes remaining at the GCSE level.

### **Part 2: Conversation**

The first topic of the Conversation, nominated by the student and delineated by the points of the cue card, is intended to give the student a confident start to this part of the test. It is not, however, either a presentation or an invitation to deliver long, pre-learnt speeches. Nor should it receive longer treatment than the other topics. In some cases it was allowed to go on for up to 5 minutes, leaving only just enough time for the two remaining topics. Each of the three topics in the conversation should be discussed for 3 to 3½ minutes. Where less than two minutes is spent on any topic the mark for Interaction will be reduced by one band.

Where marks are lost in the Conversation it is most often for Interaction. Students who are over-prepared and teacher-examiners who work through a list of set questions without responding to their students' answers are unlikely to achieve a mark in the higher bands for Interaction. On the positive side, some markers reporting hearing good, spontaneous and genuinely interesting conversations. Nevertheless, it was disappointing to note that the quality of some Conversations was not beyond GCSE. This was particularly so in the case of Family and Holidays where only personal information was elicited. An appreciation of and ability to discuss and evaluate social issues are what is meant by a "meaningful exchange" at AS.

### **Pronunciation/Intonation**

This series saw many more adverse comments than previously from markers about poor pronunciation. 5 marks are available for Good pronunciation, which is defined in terms of this test as correct vowels and consonants, appropriate stress and coherent phrasing. Many students are unable to discriminate between the hard/soft consonants s/c/z and g/j and it was not uncommon to hear *televisión* and *zuidar*. Some students are advised to pay more attention to their pronunciation, especially of longer words and sounds that are specific to Spanish.

### **Knowledge of Grammar**

It is good to note that most students demonstrate a competent level of Spanish and a range of vocabulary appropriate to the prescribed topics. The usual weaknesses were again noted:

- Genders especially *problema, tema, programa*
- *ser/estar*
- *tener/haber*
- *gustar*
- Radical changing verbs especially *pensar, empezar, jugar, demostrar*
- Personal pronouns especially in verbal constructions such as *me gusta relajarse*
- Imperfectly learnt vocabulary leading to confusion: *creer/crear, social/sociable, salud/sana, fomentar/animar, llevar/lavar, variedad/variada*.
- Anglicisms/gallicisms: *improvar, ameliorar, providar, prevenir*
- Prepositions *responsable para, depender en*

Some examiners, however, reported an improvement in the complexity of grammar used successfully by a number of students, notably the imperfect subjunctive in conditional sentences and the present subjunctive after *es importante que, es importante que, es difícil que, quiero que* and *para que*. Equally impressive is the awareness of where not to use the subjunctive, e.g. after *es evidente que* and *es obvio que*.

It still needs to be stressed that students should avoid using expressions that are not appropriate to the spoken register. Students should be advised that they would be better off learning how to use *gustar* properly, rather than using expressions, sometimes even out of context, that native speakers would never use in a normal conversation.

### **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 2011 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](http://www.aqa.org.uk)) in due course.

## **Web Pages**

Centres are reminded that a wealth of support documents can be found on our web pages ([http://web.aqa.org.uk/qual/gce/languages/spanish\\_materials.php?id=09&prev=09](http://web.aqa.org.uk/qual/gce/languages/spanish_materials.php?id=09&prev=09)). These include the latest version of the specification, past papers, Reports on the Examination, Instructions for the Conduct of the Examinations and the Teacher Resource Bank (TRB). The TRB includes advice to teachers conducting your own tests and the materials from the most recent set of Teacher Support Meetings for the Conduct of the Speaking Tests; this is an invaluable resource for preparing students for future examinations.

## **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

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

## **Converting Marks into UMS marks**

Convert raw or scaled marks into marks on the Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) by using the link below.

**UMS conversion calculator** [www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion](http://www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion).