

A-level Spanish

Unit 4 Speaking
Report on the Examination

SPA4T/V
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Administration

Schools and teachers are to be congratulated on the administration of the 2014 Speaking tests. This year's tests were administered efficiently, on the whole, although there was the occasional blank CD or memory stick. However, these were quickly replaced by schools where teachers had conducted their own tests. Ideally, the top copy of the Mark and Attendance lists should be posted along with the recordings. Candidate numbers on the STMSs should be checked against this list and any absentees marked. Care must be taken to label recording media clearly and package them securely.

Part 1

Visiting examiners commented very favourably on students' responses to the task in Part 1 and noted improvements in a number of skills:

- well-structured one-minute outlines to the initial question, often using *primero, segundo, también, por último* to identify separate points
- good development of points with exemplification or elaboration
- a clear stance taken on one side of the debate
- helpful written notes
- awareness of the time restrictions

It was not always the less able students who were unable to demonstrate these skills. Some native speakers were either not fully briefed about the requirements of this part of the test or did not feel they needed to plan their arguments and write them down. As a result, they often did not make full use of the one minute available and failed to “develop a wide range of relevant points”.

Many teacher examiners now approach this task with confidence and encourage some excellent debates. Unfortunately, there were some who either allowed their students to exceed the minute or cut them off too soon. It is important to establish a clear understanding prior to the start of the test which of the two opinions is to be defended and to begin timing when the students begin their outline. Teacher examiners are strongly advised, while the student is speaking, to note down any points that can be challenged in the remaining four minutes of Part 1. The purpose of the Notes for Examiners that accompany the test materials is to suggest ideas for the development of the debate. While they are not prescriptive, teacher examiners should give these ideas some consideration prior to conducting the tests and think of ways of adapting them or adding to them as the need arises. It was very disappointing to hear some examiners use them almost verbatim as a set of questions, disregarding any points made by the student. To gain the highest marks in this second part of Part 1, the student must respond to opportunities to develop views and defend opinions. Their ability to gain these marks will be limited when the examiner fails to offer such opportunities.

The choice of cards this year confirms the preference of most students for the topic of Multicultural Society, followed by Environment. Contemporary Social Issues, Wealth and Poverty, Law and order and Impact of Scientific and Technological Progress were again noticeably less popular.

Tarjeta A El cambio climático, ¿un problema que podemos solucionar?

Many students chose this card and the majority opted for Opinión 1. They talked about the effects of climate change such as melting ice caps, rising sea levels and extreme weather events. There was plenty of evidence of topic specific vocabulary: *el calentamiento global, el efecto invernadero, el agujero en la capa de ozono, huracanes, terremotos* etc. There were frequent appeals to *poner su granito de arena* by recycling, reducing energy consumption and switching to renewable energy.

The reluctance to question the existing orthodoxy meant that very few were able to respond effectively to challenges, insisting that the scientific evidence was overwhelming.

Tarjeta B ¿Estamos todos a favor de una sociedad multicultural?

This was also a popular card and many chose Opinión 2, although both sides of the argument were well defended. Many students felt people from different ethnic backgrounds were welcome in Britain, but others felt there was some hostility towards immigrants. At this point, the discussion sometimes drifted into the advantages and disadvantages (mostly economic) of immigration rather than integration. Overall, there was insufficient focus on the central question *¿Estamos todos a favor de...?* and more on expressing personal views. *La diversidad de culturas* was usually understood in terms of the availability of Indian, Italian and Chinese food, Latin American music and Caribbean festivals with disappointingly little mention of more fundamental aspects of multiculturalism such as cultural attitudes to social relationships and religious values.

Tarjeta C Las cámaras de seguridad, ¿positivas o negativas?

This was one of the least popular cards, and almost all of those who chose it supported Opinion 1. They argued fluently and confidently in favour of security cameras, many saying that their presence made them feel protected, deterred crime and aided the police in identifying and catching offenders. Surprisingly few thought there was any problem at all with privacy and little sympathy was expressed for motorists caught speeding.

Tarjeta D Las energías renovables, ¿son el futuro?

Energy is often the least popular of the Environment topics, but this card attracted a good number of students perhaps because it asked a relatively straightforward for or against question. They were overwhelmingly in favour of renewable energies and were usually able to produce a wide range of topic-specific vocabulary to describe the various options. Some students included nuclear energy in their list of renewables, while others did not. Although many agreed that renewables at present did not produce sufficient energy, there was general optimism about their future development. Some were also confident that the developing countries that depended largely on fossil fuels could be persuaded to abandon them in favour of cleaner energy.

Tarjeta E El racismo, ¿es un problema del pasado?

This was a popular card and both sides were well represented in some genuinely interesting debates. Many students talked about their own experiences in schools and colleges. Opinion was divided as to whether the antiracist legislation introduced in recent years had been effective. Some thought that we live in a fairly tolerant society while others thought that much harsher sanctions for racist behaviour were needed. Recent media reports about a banana having been thrown at Dani Alves during a football game between Villarreal and Barcelona was often given as evidence that racism still exists.

Tarjeta F La investigación espacial, ¿vale la pena?

This was not generally popular but there were a few individuals who made a passionate plea for space exploration, citing technological advances and possible encounters with other forms of life. The majority, however, went for Opinion 2 but found they had little to say once they had talked about the need to tackle poverty and hunger in the world. They were unimpressed by the inventions of laser and Teflon as by-products of space exploration and felt that we should do more to protect our own planet rather than contemplating moving to another one.

Part 2

Visiting examiners were also impressed by students' ability to discuss their Cultural topics fluently with appropriate use of examples and justification of their views. There were also many teacher-conducted tests of the same high quality. Some students, unfortunately, were disadvantaged by the relatively poor conduct of the test by their teachers. The same deficiencies as in previous years were noted:

- Asking mainly factual questions (particularly in discussions of regions or periods of history)
- Working through a pre-prepared set of questions
- Failing to develop students' answers
- Not challenging students' views
- Allowing long, pre-learnt answers
- Uneven coverage of topics

All of the above can contribute to fewer marks being awarded to students. Teachers conducting their own tests are very strongly advised to ensure that they have read the Instructions for the conduct of the Examinations and the Guidance Notes for teachers conducting their own tests at www.aqa.org.uk.

Favourite Cultural Topics this year included:

Region/community

Andalucía
Cataluña
Galicia
Mallorca
Las Islas Canarias

Author

Esquivel: *Como agua para chocolate*
García Márquez: *Cien años de soledad*,
Crónica de una muerte anunciada
Sender: *Réquiem por un campesino español*
Allende: *Eva Luna*

Period of history

La Guerra Civil
La transición a la democracia
El golpe de estado en Chile
El sendero luminoso en Perú
La revolución cubana
La guerra sucia en Argentina
La guerra de las Malvinas

Dramatist/poet

Lorca: *Bernarda Alba*, *Bodas de sangre*
Neruda: *Odas sentimentales*

Director/architect/musician/painter

Almodóvar: *Volver*, *Todo sobre mi madre*
del Toro: *El laberinto del fauno*,
El espinazo del diablo
Amenábar: *Mar Adentro*
José Luis Cuerda: *La lengua de las mariposas*
Diego Luna: *Abel*

Frida Kahlo
Diego de Rivera
Dalí
Picasso (*Guernica*)
Gaudí
Manuel de Falla

Pronunciation/Intonation

There were hardly any examples of poor pronunciation and very few scored below 4 marks. Many students now benefit from having native-speaker teachers or language assistants and have acquired very convincing accents.

Grammar

There was no noticeable improvement in grammatical accuracy although it was pleasing to hear a wide range of vocabulary and idiomatic expressions used appropriately. Areas of weakness mentioned in earlier reports still abound:

- *gustar*
- *ser/estar*, especially confusion of *era/fue/estaba/estuvo*
- errors with irregular past participles: *ponido, morido, escrito, resuelto*
- sentences ending with a preposition
- errors of gender: *la tema, la planeta*
- words confused: *ahorrar/salvar, saber/conocer, mixta/mezcla, razas/raciales, pez/pesca/pescado*
- words invented: *promotar, improvar, copar, ameliorar*

It is clear that a lot of work has been done on the subjunctive, both present and imperfect, which was regularly used successfully in all types of subordinate clauses. On occasions, some students have been so keen to demonstrate the use of the subjunctive, that they use it frequently and unnecessarily as in *si tuviera que dar mi opinión... si estuviera en mis manos...* It would be useful to remind students that it is more important that they communicate the key messages to the examiner rather than embellishing their conversations with these sophisticated phrases.

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 marks into Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) marks by using the link below.

[UMS conversion calculator](#)