

SPANISH

GCE Advanced Level and GCE Advanced Subsidiary Level

Papers 8685/01 and 9719/01

Speaking

General comments

In general, Centres had taken the trouble to familiarise themselves thoroughly with the requirements of the syllabus. With minor exceptions, those conducting the examinations had evidently studied the instructions and the marking schemes carefully and the Moderators thank those Teachers concerned for their efforts in helping the moderation process run smoothly.

Centres are, however, reminded of some basic procedures to assist in the process. Obviously, it is necessary that the candidates' voices on the tapes sent for moderation should be clearly audible. In a few cases, nevertheless, background noise or mechanical noise from the recorder were obtrusive and, more importantly, candidates were sitting further from the microphone than the Teacher/Examiner, so that responses were very faintly recorded. It is also important that the candidates' names and numbers should be listed on the tape box and also stated clearly on the tape itself. In one or two Centres this was not done and Moderators had to try to work out which candidate was which. Please also make sure that the working mark sheets with the breakdown of the marks for each section are enclosed, not just the copy of form MS1 with the overall total.

Comments on specific questions

Presentation and topic conversation

It is worth stressing the importance candidates and Centres should give to the choice of topic. This must be clearly and not just coincidentally related to an aspect of culture or life of a Spanish-speaking country. The topic is not intended merely to be a subject for a general and unstructured ramble through something the candidate may or may not have experienced, but should have a clear focus and show evidence of study, preparation and personal reaction. A topic such as sport, for instance, or leisure, demands more than a catalogue of the candidate's own leisure-time activities. Candidates should make quite clear in the three-minute speech what precisely is the point of the speech and how it relates to the requirements of the examination. At AS and A level, the Examiners are looking for an element of appropriate academic depth and a level clearly beyond O level or IGCSE. Evidence of real knowledge, perhaps statistics, real examples, concrete events all help to give depth to the subject.

There were many examples of good practice this session: in many cases candidates in their speeches stated clearly those areas they were keen to discuss, gave sufficient evidence of knowledge and introduced a personal dimension. In the following topic discussion they were able to deal with a range of questions, from the general to the more specific, and coped with personal opinions, possible solutions or developments according to the choice of topic. At the weaker level, candidates were hard pressed to go beyond a restatement of material given in the speech, with few facts or figures or with an inability or unwillingness to give opinions or evaluations.

General conversation

This part of the examination is often a good discriminator among candidates and, perhaps surprisingly, where a number of candidates can lose marks through carelessness or failure to extend their thoughts or control of language. This section may well include a discussion of the candidate's particular interests, studies or plans for the future, but, at this level, should also include discussion of more mature topics, perhaps world events, politics, regional problems, etc. Above all what is looked for is a candidate's ability to have something to say, some opinions, some awareness of what is going on in the world and in his or her life, and using an appropriate range and register of language. Whereas the majority of candidates coped well with the everyday factual areas, weaker candidates found some difficulty in expressing opinions and even otherwise good candidates in some cases had to be pushed to develop thoughts and ideas beyond the everyday.

Pronunciation, intonation and register

It is evident that many Centres are based in areas where Spanish is either a principal or common language. Even in other areas, the standard of pronunciation was generally high. Regional variations in pronunciation are perfectly acceptable; sloppy or mumbled speaking is not. There was a tendency among some more 'fluent' candidates to treat, perhaps, the examination as an informal chat, but although Examiners naturally seek to encourage a natural flow and exchange, it has to be pointed out in the candidates' own interests that an examination is not just an everyday conversation, but is by definition a formal occasion. Just as some candidates may feel perfectly at ease giving their speech without due preparation (and perhaps failing to gain credit as a result), so also it is important that candidates give themselves the opportunity to demonstrate their command of the language by extending their vocabulary, structures and register beyond the merely colloquial. In addition, lack of attention to the requirements of the examination meant that some candidates (especially the apparently fluent) overlooked the need to ask questions of the Examiner, and lost potential credit.

Language

Candidates were required to show ability to talk about present, past and future situations and most were able to do this; there were some inaccuracies with verb forms (particularly past tenses such as *fui/fue*, confusion of *-ar* and *-er/-ir* verbs). *Ser* and *estar* were frequently confused and even otherwise good candidates continue to find the use of *gustar* a formidable challenge. Vocabulary, however, was generally at least adequate and most candidates had sufficient range to present the message without ambiguity. Overall lack of accuracy in basic grammar was the main weakness linguistically.

Papers 8665/02, 8685/02 and 9719/02

Reading and Writing

General comments

The overall standard of performance this year was satisfactory. The texts presented in the examination paper were considered to be accessible to the vast majority of candidates. The time allocated to this paper (1 hour 45 minutes) proved to be perfectly acceptable to all but the very weakest candidates.

However, far too many candidates lost marks because they failed to follow the rubric with regard to lifting from the text in comprehension questions: '*...sin copiar frases completas del texto*'. Those candidates who responded by paraphrasing the original text or indeed by reworking the original in their own particular way in order to answer the question were fully rewarded by the mark scheme. Too many candidates simply copied out their answers from the original texts and consequently no marks were scored. It is perfectly acceptable, even inevitable, that some words and even the occasional phrase cannot be paraphrased or reshaped for use in answers by candidates, but it has to be accepted that word for word lifting fails to show understanding of the question to any reasonable degree. This rubric needs to be heeded in future by all candidates.

It is also worth pointing out that there is little to be gained by exceeding the word limit set in **Question 5**. If the rubric calls for candidates to write a maximum of 140 words, then that is what they need to do. Some responses to this question this year were well in excess of 300 words and candidates lost marks accordingly. It may be helpful to candidates to think in terms of approximately 100 words for **Question 5 (a)** and approximately 40 words in **Question 5 (b)**. To go way beyond the 140 word limit will result in a loss of marks.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Generally well answered although there were a few problems with item **(d)** *está proscrito* being interpreted as *está sancionado* by a number of candidates.

Question 2

It should be noted here that the rubric asked for the use of '*...la forma exacta*' of the word or phrase given in brackets. Even slight alterations in candidates' responses failed to score here.

Question 3

There was major rubric infringement in this question: too many candidates simply lifted whole chunks of text in an attempt to respond to the questions.

- (a) Failure to mention the low level of water in reservoirs in Seville was a common problem here.
- (b) There was some misinterpretation of Evangelina Naranjo's actions. Many thought that she had introduced immediate restrictions on the use of water. The opposite was indeed the case.
- (c) Much lifting from the text took place in response to this question and only the very best candidates managed to score full marks. Some answers actually came incorrectly from other parts of the text, despite the question making reference to the second paragraph only.
- (d) Dealt with well by most candidates although *un bando* was not known by many.
- (e) Hardly any attempt made by the majority of candidates to rephrase the original text.

Question 4

Again, too many candidates did not adhere to the rubric and lost marks because they copied extensively from the original text.

- (a) *la sequía es consustancial* was misunderstood by most candidates
- (b) Only a small number of candidates achieved full marks in this question. The fact that there were some fatalities caused by the extreme weather conditions was missed by many.
- (c) This question caused problems for many candidates. Simple lifting once again occurred and scored no marks. The word *muro* was taken in its literal sense and consequently the question was badly answered by many. The fault in the design of the *paseo marítimo* was missed by the majority of candidates.
- (d) Again, very few completely correct answers to this question. The reference to *el vecino país* (i.e. Spain) caused trouble in many answers.
- (e) A poorly answered question. Many candidates simply failed to read the text carefully enough and thus offered answers that made very little sense. Too many candidates only made reference to one or two points despite the fact that there were three marks available.

Question 5

Whilst there were many good responses to this question, Examiners felt that on far too many occasions in (a) candidates failed to summarise the key points of content with regard to the consequences of extreme weather conditions in both texts. Some even resorted to writing a mini-essay on the environment full of interesting, but largely irrelevant facts as far as the actual two texts were concerned. As already mentioned, a worrying number of candidates wrote far too much and lost marks as a result. The differences between *ser/estar* and *tener/haber* were an issue for many candidates in this question. In (b) there were a good number of well written, concise and well structured personal responses. However, a lot of candidates wrote at length about the general weaknesses of the authorities in their own particular country with little or no reference to environmental issues and, accordingly, lost marks. It is vital to read instructions very carefully indeed before setting out a personal response in this part of the examination.

Candidates who demonstrate clearly that they can summarise the texts succinctly and offer their own personal response to a given issue will score highly in this particular question. Those who cannot demonstrate this skill are unlikely to score many marks.

General comments

The essay titles proved to be accessible to the overwhelming majority of candidates this year. Some titles proved more popular than others, but on the whole candidates seemed well prepared to deal with their chosen title. The overall standard of performance was good with a pleasing number of essays showing imagination, linguistic poise and a keen sense of style and structure. Whilst there was some evidence of candidates resorting to the regurgitation of pre-learnt material in order to support their line of thought, this was, on the whole, not an issue for the majority of candidates.

It is pleasing to report that very few essays this year exceeded the stated length (250-400 words) and that as a consequence many essays were tightly structured and dealt well with the issues raised by the title. Such essays were rewarded using the full range of marks available.

A number of essays, however, failed to score high marks as a direct consequence of their content being thin. A good example of this was the title set on *La Guerra y la Paz* where many candidates simply produced a critique of war in modern society without relating their thoughts to the title. It is important to note that essays are marked both for language and content. Ideas presented vaguely and at random will not attract high marks for content.

It is also pleasing to note that there were hardly any essays this year that were impossible to read. Examiners are sympathetic to the wide range of styles of handwriting, but an essay that is impossible to decipher cannot score high marks.

Comments on specific questions

Existen más diferencias que semejanzas entre los países del mundo hispánico

The least popular title this year. Those that did respond to this essay title performed well and were able to produce coherently argued and well structured pieces.

Una buena carrera escolar es el ingrediente más importante de la vida

A very popular title this year. Many candidates wrote with a degree of passion about the importance of education as a basis for career success. The very best essays, however, tended to be those that took issue with the title as opposed to agreeing with it.

Dentro de poco los científicos podrán controlar todo con las nuevas tecnologías. ¿Deberíamos preocuparnos por esto?

This essay was reasonably popular and attracted a good number of candidates who were able to present carefully supported views on the risks/advantages of modern technological advances. The title called for some knowledge of topic-specific vocabulary and the weaker essays were those that failed to understand this.

La raza humana siempre recurre a la guerra para resolver sus problemas

As mentioned earlier, too many candidates tackled this essay in too vague a manner without focussing on the actual title. The best essays on this title were a joy to read with candidates backing up their views with appropriate examples from recent history.

El individuo feliz es, sin duda alguna, el individuo que trabaja

Another popular title this year. There were many different points of view expressed here, many of which were convincingly supported with relevant examples. Nevertheless, a small number of candidates used this title to waffle aimlessly about the nature of personal happiness with no mention of the world of work in any recognisable form or shape. Accordingly, they lost marks.

Los jóvenes no aceptan la responsabilidad de sus acciones. ¿Estás de acuerdo?

A very popular title this year. It produced a good number of first class essays on the pressures faced by today's youth. The fact that there are often many personal references in essays of this nature is perfectly acceptable provided that candidates do not then lapse into self-induced streams of consciousness and write in such an introspective way that they lose sight of the title.

Papers 8665/04, 8673/04 and 9719/04

Texts

General comments

This was the first session of a new syllabus. Examiners found that Centres had prepared candidates well for the Texts component. There was much evidence of good teaching and enthusiasm for the chosen texts. The format of the Paper seems to suit the candidature and there were virtually no cases of rubric infringement. Candidates were able to complete the question paper within the time limit.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1

If candidates choose to answer Option (a), which has an extract from the text, they will be expected to use the material given to answer part of the task, but the final part of the question usually requires a broader overview of the text as a whole in order to be able to give an adequate response.

Question 1

García Márquez

- (a) There were some very good essays here, with evidence of a subtle analysis of the relationship between the colonel and his wife. The *'mala situación'* was generally better examined than the *'mentiras'*, although the best candidates looked at the lies evident within the life of the village and beyond to the corrupt government. Part (iii) was the weakest, with some candidates confining their response to the domestic duties carried out by the wife rather than the literary role.
- (b) This elicited thoughtful responses, often multi-faceted. Some considered the irony in that the statement was made by Sabas. The statement was challenged successfully by those who pointed out the positive aspects to be found in the village, particularly with reference to the doctor and other supportive friends.

Question 2

García Lorca

- (a) There were some excellent detailed answers with candidates showing thorough preparation of the text. Others were too perfunctory and did not make sufficient use of the extract. The weakest responses were for part (iii).
- (b) This was a less popular option and answers tended to be over general. Candidates must refer to specific poems and give examples of themes or approaches they wish to present.

Question 3

Esquivel

- (a) This was a very popular choice, but it was often only partially answered. There is sufficient material in the text to avoid repetition in responding to parts (i) and (ii) as some excellent answers showed. Part (iii) tended to be tackled either very well indeed or rather perfunctorily with little in the middle. The best responses compared Pedro's actions with those of Gertrudis and her lover as well as John, and sought examples of his cowardice or bravery in other parts of the text.

- (b) This was generally well answered and the better answers included discussion of the 'point' of the magical element within the novel. Weaker candidates still showed knowledge of the text and were able to give a list of examples.

Both options gave rise to overwhelmingly enthusiastic responses to the text.

Question 4

Buero Vallejo

- (a) Some excellent answers which revealed detailed understanding and knowledge of the text. The extract was analysed well and many candidates showed empathy with the characters and their situation, expressing their ideas with sensitivity and compassion.
- (b) There were two distinct types of answer to this question – candidates either analysed the play with reference to the tenets of classical tragedy or considered the 'sad' aspects of the text. Both worked well.

This text seemed to appeal particularly to candidates and had been well prepared.

Section 2

Question 5

Martín Gaité

Answers to this text fell into the 'good' or 'weak' bands with few in between. Some answers were very general with little reference to the novel – clearly there was a strong temptation to respond with reference to individual experience as the themes of family and gossip are universal.

Question 6

Lope de Vega

It was most pleasing to note how well candidates responded to this Golden Age text, and this must be a tribute to careful and enthusiastic teaching. Option (a) gave scope for candidates of all abilities to tackle Tello's role. Option (b) was also well answered although some essays revealed some uncertainty over the meaning of 'engaño'. In both cases, candidates showed good understanding of the issues and quoted effectively from the text.

Question 7

Allende

This was a very popular choice and gave much scope for candidates to respond at their own level. In answers to (a), there was a tendency to focus overmuch on Chilean history and the narrative, but there was good analysis also. Option (b) elicited detailed responses which examined the literary purpose of magical realism and also gave candidates the opportunity to show their awareness of the fantastic elements even if they were not able to analyse them. Candidates often expressed enjoyment of the text in their answers.

Question 8

Neruda

Some Centres had prepared this text very thoroughly indeed and candidates tackled the questions confidently, quoting fully. In other cases there was less awareness of how to approach poetry. The themes discussed in the collection are very relevant to the candidates and many showed sensitivity and empathy in their answers. In responding to option (a), there were more examples of the melancholy than the happy, but some good attempts were made to give a balanced answer. Option (b) tended to result in unspecific answers with little reference to the text. There was an opportunity here for candidates to explore a theme which had spoken to them as individuals and illustrate the poet's skill.