

Examiners' Report
January 2013

GCE Spanish 6SP02 01

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Introduction

The Understanding and Written Response paper tests the candidate's ability to understand information through listening and reading and also how well he or she can communicate in writing. There are 70 marks available on the paper in total, 20 of these are for the listening tasks, 20 are for reading and 30 are for an essay. Answers are requested in a variety of formats: crosses in boxes, picking words from a list, short English language answers and answers in Spanish.

The questions covered all of the General Topic Areas and included texts on music, school, sport, technology, the environment and drugs.

As in previous series, the paper differentiated well as there were questions that almost every candidate answered well and also some more testing questions, where only the more able scored highly.

The essay at the end of the paper gave all candidates the chance to demonstrate their linguistic capability. It was noticeable that there were many native and near-native speakers among the candidates, as is often the case in January. There were some examples of excellent, fluent and nuanced Spanish, although some candidates lost marks through not accurately reading the rubric of Question 8.

Handwriting was an issue on some scripts. Examiners are tasked with marking positively language that communicates a message from difficult and ambiguous presentations. At times, examiners are able to apply the benefit of the doubt where, for example, a letter might be an 'a' or an 'o', only one of which is accurate. However, more emphasis on neat presentation of written work is essential to ensure that candidates are not disadvantaged.

Clarity is also affected when candidates exceed the amount of writing for the space provided to write the answer. Examples were found of approximately six lines of writing squeezed into the two lines given for an answer. The amount of space given is considered adequate for a correct answer. Candidates should be reminded that they do not need to give a full sentence in their answer, in fact the longer the sentence, the more opportunity for mistakes and ambiguity or contradiction.

Question 1

Question 1 was a listening text that concerned a pop group whose music is composed via the Internet. Most candidates were able to score at least 3 out of 4 marks.

Question 2

Question 2 was a listening text where four true statements had to be selected from a list of eight. It was about changing schools and candidates again scored well here, with a majority gaining all 4 marks.

Question 3 (a)

The third listening question related to pleasurable experiences and combined various aspects of the Lifestyle, Health and Fitness Topic Area. Once again, most candidates were able to score at least 3 out of 4.

Question 4

Question 4 is the most challenging of the listening texts which relates to an interview with a teacher. This question was answered well by the majority of candidates, many scoring 6 out of 8. The greatest difficulties came in Q4c with the words '*étnica*' and '*heterogéneo*'. These words were not always understood or correctly transcribed. There was a level of tolerance for mis-spellings, but where candidates words were too far from the original (e.g. '*eterojenio*', '*madrugez*'), marks could not be awarded.

The concept of some pupils being more mature than others was not always conveyed. For example, a common mistake was candidates' misinterpretation of '*duro*' for '*madurez*', such as "some pupils work harder than others" and even "some pupils are taller than others".

Question 5

Question 5 related to a selection of minority sports. Candidates had to match a statement with the description of the sport and many scored well here. The hardest part of the question seemed to be Q5iv.

Question 6

Question 6 was about the new options available to TV viewers who have a hard disk attached to their television. In this question candidates are expected to read English-based questions and provide answers in English, which was a disadvantage for some of the native-speaker candidates. Unusual vocabulary choices often surfaced, for example: 'minoritary', 'whatch', 'at fix times', 'TV canals', 'programmation', 'what TV emits'. The first three of these were accepted as comprehensible, but 'TV canals' and 'what TV emits' were not awarded marks.

Q6a was probably the hardest of the five elements of this question. The notion that programmes were now being created to appeal to minority tastes was often incorrectly rendered as, "programmes that everyone likes". While the concept may have been clear in candidates' minds, this statement is completely opposite to what was required as an acceptable response.

(a) What type of programmes can now be offered?

(1)

All types of programmes, even those which are liked by less people.



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Examiner Comments

This candidate has managed to convey the idea of minority tastes in their own words.



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Examiner Tip

Make sure that you think carefully before answering to ensure that you really say what you mean.

Compare that example with this one.

(a) What type of programmes can now be offered?

(1)

Ones that can satisfy everyone's preferences and tastes.



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Examiner Comments

In this example, the candidate may have understood that a whole range of tastes will now be catered for, but what has been written actually suggests that rather than there being more obscure 'niche' programmes, there will be more mainstream programmes that are popular with everyone.

Question 7

Question 7 is worth 10 marks and is the most challenging of the reading passage requiring answers in Spanish. However most candidates scored well. The text referred to the controversial installation of power lines in an area of natural beauty.

Q7b - The second element of this question was sometimes given with an active form of '*destronar*', rather than the passive. This changed the meaning and could not be awarded a mark.

Q7d - the idea of '*indemnización*' was not always understood as a form of '*compensación*', or it was given without any idea of the amount being too small.

Q7f - Two marks were allocated to this question; one was given for a description of the composition of the group and the second was for the proposals. In many cases, candidates gave two answers to the second part and could only be awarded one mark. The essential idea of the members being local was also sometimes missed.

The rest of the questions were answered well by most candidates, who seemed to be able to cope with the complex content and unfamiliar vocabulary.

(b) ¿Por qué se mencionan 'las vistas idílicas'?

(1)

~~una~~ las vistas han destruido



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Examiner Comments

Q7b - In this example, the verb '*destronar*' has been used actively, as if the views have destroyed something. This answer was not accepted.

(b) ¿Por qué se mencionan 'las vistas idílicas'?

(1)

Se mencionan 'las vistas idílicas' porque han estado destruido



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Examiner Comments

Compare this example. The grammar is not correct, but the meaning is unambiguous and a mark was given.



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Examiner Tip

Make sure you say what you mean. If an answer is ambiguous, it may not be awarded a mark.

Question 8

Question 8 required candidates to write a letter to the parents of a friend suspected of taking drugs. Most candidates scored over half the marks out of a possible 30 marks. Marks are awarded from the published assessment criteria; 15 marks for Content and Response and 15 marks for Quality of Language. As long as the language is not too poorly written so as to obscure the meaning, the content mark is not affected by the language mark and vice versa. Weaker candidates often scored more highly for content than for language, as they may cover and develop the bullet points, albeit with imperfect language.

In this series, candidates often covered all the bullet points, even if the language was not entirely well developed. For the first bullet point, some candidates wrote very close to the stimulus, whilst others used the given information selectively and often expressed ideas in their own words.

The second bullet point was sometimes glossed over or missed, but better responses referred to family tragedies, splits with a boyfriend and school pressures.

The third bullet point was often well covered, even if it only referred to talking to the friend. Some candidates had referred to positive moves, such as going with them to a doctor or trying to get them involved socially.

The last bullet point was the weakest, often because the letter was addressed to the wrong 'parents' brought about by candidates' misinterpretation in this context of '*sus padres*'.

Candidates who did not attempt a letter format lost one mark from the Content and Response criteria.

Few candidates headed and ended the letter properly. In addition, most candidates displayed a poor understanding of the differences between formal and informal ways of addressing people in Spanish. It was not uncommon to read sentences like: *Querido señor y señora Alvarez, Estimado señor García, tengo que decirte, Querido don Miguel, te escribo*. While there was no specific penalty for such inconsistency, candidates should recognise that register is important when they are aiming for a convincing letter.

Many candidates failed to recognise that '*carta a sus padres*' related to their friend's parents and not to their own parents. There was no penalty for this mistake, but many candidates were unable to gain credit for the final bullet point if their response referred to, for example, "can you talk to his parents". Candidates who went on to suggest what the friend's parents could do to help were awarded marks for this bullet mark.

With regard to Quality of Language marks, the same common problems, as seen in previous examination series, of the use of '*gustar*' and 1st and 3rd person preterite endings were apparent. General use of pronouns was very disappointing. If candidates are unable to distinguish between subject pronouns and possessive adjectives, between reflexive and direct/indirect object pronouns, it becomes difficult to make sense of what is trying to be communicated. Most candidates manage to attempt a subjunctive and a 'si clause', but very few know the importance of pronouns.

Following the instructions carefully is most important, even very able candidates lose marks for writing the wrong thing.

A pesar de mis esfuerzos por ayudarle, considero que no es suficiente para que supere su posible adicción. Por eso les pido que, a pesar de la ~~de~~ complicidad del ~~tema~~ ^{punto}, tengan el valor de informar sutilmente sobre este percance a los padres de Juan.



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Examiner Comments

This candidate has used some very sophisticated language in the final paragraph of the essay. Unfortunately, the letter was addressed to the writer's own parents and there is no suggestion of what the friend's parents should do. Unfortunately, this candidate has not responded to one of the bullet points and therefore could score only a maximum of 9 out of 15 for Content and Response. Given the quality of language of the content in the rest of the letter, this candidate would have scored at least 13 for Content and Response if the final paragraph had included the information required.



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Examiner Tip

The instructions are always written as clearly as possible. Make sure you read them carefully and write what you are asked to write!

Desde mi punto de vista, sus padres podrían hablar con ella ~~to~~ por que necesita saber que hay mucha ^{gente} que cuida. Podrían sus padres por ella sus padres podrían permitir que ella volver al hogar para apoya, y estar en un entorno agradable durante este tiempo difícil.



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Examiner Comments

Compare this final paragraph with the previous sample. This letter is also addressed to the wrong parents, but here there are ideas of what the friend's parents should do. This bullet point is, therefore, covered successfully. The language is much poorer than the first sample, but the meaning is still clear and this candidate scored 13 for content.

In order to score highly for Content, candidates must not only mention each bullet point, but develop these points.

Lo que estoy haciendo en este momento ~~estoy~~ es hablar mucho con ella de sus problemas. Ustedes también pueden hablar con ella o ir a un especialista de los problemas de juventud y de las drogas también. Podrías hacer más cosas con ella y crear un relación ~~normal~~ ~~afectiva~~, positiva con ella, porque un otro ~~problema~~ ^{causa} puede ser los problemas en casa.



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Examiner Comments

In this example, the third bullet point, concerning what the writer has done or is doing to help their friend, is very brief. We are told only that the writer is talking to the friend about his/her problems. The fourth point, about what the parents could do, by contrast, is very full: they should talk to her, take her to a specialist (or two), do more things with her and create a positive relationship with her.



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Examiner Tip

Don't stop at one idea! Think of writing two, three or four ideas for each bullet point. These could be separate ideas or additional information about just one.

Accurate and varied language is what examiners are always hoping to read. Error-free basic language (i.e. verb endings that match the subject of the verb and adjectives with the correct ending) is essential with an attempt at more complex structures being desirable.

~~Si~~ ~~verdad~~ descubrieram^s que ~~tu~~ ^{tu} hija ~~era~~ ^{era} una
 drogadicta. ¿Que ~~verdad~~ haria^s?
 Que tu sepas, ~~yo~~ ^{yo} te ~~conozco~~ ^{conozco} muy bien ^{para que sienta que puedo hablar con tu con respecto a todo}. Me
 preocupa que Mercedes tenga un problema
 con las drogas. Su comportamiento ha
~~comien~~ ^{esta} cambiado mucho sea del hecho ^{de} ~~que~~
~~marcada~~ ^{comportando} ~~comportada~~ muy extraño. sea del
 hecho de ^{y enjorjaca} es muy deprimada ^{todo} el tiempo
 o sea del hecho de nunca más pertenecer
 a ~~mi~~ ^{mi} grupo de amigos. (no habla con mi)



ResultsPlus Examiner Comments

This candidate was obviously determined to show the examiner how well s/he understood the subjunctive. The result is a somewhat confusing 'overdose' of subjunctive forms, where the main aim was to pack in as many complex structures as possible, with little regard for clear communication. Using the subjunctive is a valuable aim, but communication is more important.



ResultsPlus Examiner Tip

Get the basics right! Masculine and feminine adjective endings and correct spelling are not nearly as glamorous as the subjunctive, but they are worth spending more time on.

Paper Summary

Based on their performance on this paper, candidates are offered the following advice:

- Read questions carefully
- Check whether there are two parts to a question e.g who? and what? or what? and why? The number of points offered will be a clue.
- Say what you mean (e.g.is something being destroyed or is it destroying something else?)
- In Question 8 cover all bullet points and write more than one idea about each
- Keep to the word limit in Question 8
- Check basic language to avoid errors
- Revise pronouns
- Attempt complex language but not at the expense of clear communication
- Keep presentation neat

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