



General Certificate of Education

Spanish 1696
Specification

SPA2T Speaking

Report on the Examination
2010 examination - January series

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General Comments

The overwhelming majority of the tests were conducted according to the guidelines and avoided most of the shortcomings noted in the 2009 series. It is clear that many teachers attended the Training meetings in the autumn and have given serious attention to the guidelines in the pink booklet “Instructions for the Conduct of the Examinations.” In most cases, the four prescribed topics were covered appropriately.

The issue of timing, however, is still a problem in some cases. In Part 1, a number of teachers allowed their candidates to spend too long on the printed questions, leaving a shorter time for the wider discussion and therefore potentially depriving the candidate of access to the full 5 marks for this section. In Part 2, each of the three remaining topics should be allocated 3 to 3½ minutes. There were tests in which the chosen topic was allowed to take 5 minutes or more. It should be borne in mind that if 14 minutes have already elapsed before the final topic is started, the candidate cannot fulfil the requirement to spend a **minimum** of 2 minutes on each topic and can therefore cause the Interaction mark to be reduced by 2 marks.

For those centres who did not adhere to the prescribed timings, the following guidance is provided as a reminder.

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 candidate’s nominated topic: 3 minutes 20 seconds
- Discussion of second topic: 3 minutes 20 seconds
- Discussion of third topic: 3 minutes 20 seconds.

Obviously it is difficult to achieve exactly this allocation of time and so, for example, a Part 2 that was divided 4 minutes, 3 minutes and 3 minutes across the 3 topics would be perfectly acceptable. However, if any of the Part 2 topics is discussed for less than two minutes, the Interaction mark is reduced by one band. This is why it is important to keep the Part 1 discussion to only 5 minutes since any over-run at this stage can have an adverse effect on the time spent on the last topic before the total 15 minutes are over and marking stops.

Most centres seemed to prefer to use cassettes or CDs rather than the newer technologies for their recording medium, although there is no doubt that the quality of tests recorded on PCs or lap-tops as sound files is far superior.

All centres should pay particular attention to the quality of recordings submitted for marking to ensure that candidates are not disadvantaged. Examiners can only mark what they can hear. It is essential that the equipment for recording the tests is tested in advance of the tests to ensure both candidate **and** teacher-examiner can be heard clearly and there is no background hissing or hum.

Centres are reminded that AQA has produced the AQA Audio Recorder based on *Audacity* to assist them in making recordings of speaking tests as sound files. The AQA Audio

Recorder and a comprehensive User Guide can be downloaded from AQA's website using the following link: http://web.aqa.org.uk/mfl_audio_recorder

Please note there is an underscore (_) between *audio* and *recorder*

Centres are asked to pay particular attention to the following matters:

- Clear recordings with no background hissing and with candidates well-positioned in relation to the microphone so that their responses are audible
- Accurate time-keeping and the correct allocation of time to the relevant sections of tests as set out in the Instructions for the Conduct of the Examinations booklet
- Accurate completion of official documentation with all information provided
- Responsive questioning that ensures natural interaction and engages the candidate in some degree of spontaneous exchanges rather than questions picked off from a set list with little or no follow-up on what a candidate actually says
- Differentiated questioning according to levels of ability so that less able candidates are not left struggling to respond to questions that are clearly beyond their level of proficiency
- Discouraging candidates from giving detailed descriptions of what is on a stimulus card.

Part 1: Discussion of stimulus card

In this new specification, only the first of the 2 stimulus cards to be offered to the candidate is prescribed, leaving the choice of the second card to the discretion of the teacher. This gives a clearer impression of which of the 6 stimulus cards are more popular. Although the relative popularity of the cards varies from one centre to another, the overall impression was that cards D (Holidays) and E (Family) were the most popular and Card F (Fashion) was the least popular. It was observed that the response to cards D and E was often superficial and the quality of the ideas expressed was more appropriate to GCSE than to AS. Card F often inspired more original thoughts and tended to attract higher marks for development of ideas.

Tarjeta A - Encuesta sobre la publicidad en la televisión

MEDIA: Television

Answers given to the 5 printed questions were mostly relevant if sometimes superficial, suggesting that candidates had paid only cursory attention to the details on the card. Many candidates failed to appreciate that the graph expressed people's **opinions**, and some seemed to think that the information referred to the frequency of certain types of television adverts. Most candidates said they agreed with the opinions expressed on the card, and surprisingly few were worried about the dangers of adverts *que incitan a la delgadez*, possibly because they did not realise what it meant.

The quality of the wider discussion varied enormously, but the majority of teachers kept within the sub-topic of Advertising. A very small number went on to talk about Television, which is not in accordance with the correct conduct of this part of the test. The wider discussion was often based on the candidate's own personal reactions to advertising and descriptions of adverts they considered amusing, irritating or effective. Much topic-specific vocabulary was in evidence among well-prepared candidates, e.g. *llamativo, vallas publicitarias* and *lenguaje soez*.

Tarjeta B - La pirámide de los alimentos

HEALTHY LIVING: Health and well-being

It was disappointing that, in answering question 1, candidates generally ignored the opportunity to talk about food groups and the proportion of each of these groups needed to make up a healthy diet. It was as if the mere pronunciation of the word *pirámide* constituted more of a challenge than actually explaining the significance of the shape itself. Most candidates were able to say that *pescado* and *pollo* should be consumed daily, but only the most able candidates developed their answer by explaining that they were a source of lean protein. Answers to question 3 were also lacking in specific detail: while many were able to mention *grasa*, few could also remember *azúcar*, and meaningful explanations as to why their consumption should be limited were even fewer.

Question 5 invited comments on today's lifestyle, and gave rise to some very good discussions about diet and health. Less able candidates mostly talked about *comida basura*. Unfortunately the wider discussion sometimes strayed into the separate sub-topic of Sport/exercise, and while this may seem to be a logical extension of the stimulus, teachers should be aware when preparing their cards that they are required to restrict the discussion to the sub-topic printed at the top of the card.

Tarjeta C - La evolución de las audiencias de cine

POPULAR CULTURE: Cinema

A number of candidates who chose this card did not understand it sufficiently well to develop their answers correctly. The relevance of the dates was often not understood and many had not studied the graphic sufficiently before they began preparing their answers. The candidates who did, however, produced well-developed factual responses and drew appropriate conclusions. A small number of candidates pointed out that the cinema's *Edad de Oro* coincided with the ending of the Second World War but did not go on to explain what this might have meant. Candidates in general are still unable to refer to numbers and dates correctly in Spanish.

Many teachers relied too heavily in the wider discussion on the suggested starter questions, prompting rehearsed answers. Where it is evident that candidates are invited to deliver long, pre-learned answers to prepared questions in the wider discussion, there is a ceiling of 2 marks out of 5. Wherever possible teachers should seek to develop points suggested by candidates' answers to earlier questions as a basis for the discussion. There were, nevertheless, some interesting conversations about both Spanish and English language films, in particular *El laberinto del fauno* and *Volver*, and the growing use of special effects and computer graphics.

Tarjeta D - Lo más importante en las vacaciones

HEALTHY LIVING: Holidays

Too often this card was seized on by less able candidates who saw in it an opportunity to recycle GCSE language and ideas. Answers to the printed questions were generally superficial and unimaginative. In answer to question 3 the most widely perceived danger while on holiday was that of theft or other crime, while dangers to health such as sunstroke, food poisoning, hangovers or infections caused little anxiety. Expectations of finding love on holiday were generally low. An escape from the stresses of everyday life was the priority of most candidates who felt that this was best achieved by setting aside health considerations and enjoying the pleasures of over-indulgence.

There were some good discussions about the impact of tourism on a country, but though environmental threats were often mentioned, they were rarely explained in detail.

Tarjeta E - El nuevo fenómeno “DINK”

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS Marriage/Partnerships

This card was popular with candidates of all abilities. While there was a tendency among less able candidates to rely on GCSE style answers, there were occasionally some refreshingly thoughtful answers to the printed questions. Question 2 invited a comparison between life before children and life after, but few candidates gave really satisfactory answers, focussing instead on the financial cost of raising children and sometimes suggesting that children could damage a couple’s relationship by coming between them. Question 3 was not always fully understood, and many candidates talked in general terms about having children and failed to answer the simple question of why some couples decided not to have children. Virtually all candidates said they would like to have children in the future, as long as they found the right partner and had a steady job.

The wider discussion of this card was often disappointing. Very many teachers relied on the suggested starter questions, allowing long, pre-learnt answers with no attempt to develop any of the points made by the candidate.

Tarjeta F - Productos de belleza masculinos

POPULAR CULTURE: Fashion/trends

The vocabulary on this card was intended as a support to candidates who may not have looked at this aspect of the sub-topic, but it seems to have deterred many of them. The ideas suggested were straightforward enough, and those candidates who attempted it responded well and in some cases with humour. Question 3 was not well answered and it may be that the word *vanidosos* was not known. Question 4 perhaps also revealed a lack of appropriate vocabulary. Developments of the stimulus covered differences between masculine and feminine ideas about personal grooming, time spent getting ready to go out, the amount of money spent on beauty products and personal tastes regarding the appearance of a girlfriend/boyfriend.

Part 2: Conversation

Part 2 in total should cover as even an allocation of time as possible across the three topic areas that remain after the end of the stimulus card discussion, ie approximately 3 minutes on each topic.

Nominated topic

There are still some teachers who refer to the nominated topic as a Presentation and others who see it as an opportunity for the candidate to give long, rehearsed answers to pre-prepared questions. The purpose of the nominated topic is to give the candidate a confident start to the conversation and the purpose of the cue card is to focus precisely on the aspects of the topic that are of interest to the candidate. Apart from these differences, the nominated topic should be treated in exactly the same way as the remaining two topics. Opening the conversation with *Háblame de...* is not recommended. Teachers should ask specific questions and then listen carefully to the candidate’s response for any points that they may subsequently exploit further.

The most popular nominated topics were Television, Cinema and Advertising. Candidates who chose these topics were often well-equipped to discuss individual programmes, films or adverts. It is often the case that the chosen topic allows the candidate to demonstrate a higher level of language and content than the remaining topics. However, this must not be

achieved at the expense of a genuine exchange in which candidates can demonstrate the ability to respond spontaneously in developing ideas.

The remaining two topics

Teachers are also advised to avoid moving from one topic to another with no clear indication of a change of topic. This practice creates difficulties for markers who need to be aware of the time spent on each of the topics. More importantly, it is confusing for candidates and deprives them of the brief respite afforded to them by the examiner's introducing a new topic.

In the Conversation section, examiners are free to discuss any or all of the three sub-topics belonging to each topic. In the majority of cases, however, the tendency was to deal with only one of the sub-topics. This usually results in a more in-depth exchange. However, teachers are advised not to cover the same sub-topics with all candidates at the centre to avoid creating the impression that the tests are over-rehearsed.

Examiners noted that where candidates were not concentrating on trying to remember pre-learnt answers to questions, Fluency and Pronunciation were often improved.

Knowledge of Grammar

No improvement in grammatical accuracy was reported by examiners in this series. The following weaknesses were commonly mentioned:

Poor command of verb forms, especially radical changing verbs and irregular verbs

Lack of variety of tenses

Ser/estar

Gustar

Gender: *la problema, el madre, las programas* etc.

Adjectival endings – *las drogas peligrosos, unas vacaciones estupendo*

Es necesito

No creo que / no pienso que without subjunctive

Personal pronouns

Numbers

There were, however, some positive comments about candidates' ability to express value judgements using *es importante que, es un escándalo que* with a subjunctive. There was evidence that *si* clauses had been thoroughly studied and many candidates were anxious to display their command of the imperfect subjunctive in such phrases as *si tuviera la oportunidad...* Many candidates were commended on their range of vocabulary.

In terms of style, candidates are advised to aim for coherent and well-structured sentences and to avoid inserting sophisticated sounding expressions which can sound artificial and unnatural if used out of place.

In general, both teachers and candidates seem comfortable with the new AS Speaking test and have prepared themselves with confidence. The negative comments in this report are intended to help teachers and candidates avoid pitfalls and to improve their performances in the future. It must be stressed that the overall impression of these January tests is a highly positive one and credit must be given to the many skilled teachers and talented pupils whose hard work was evident in so many cases.

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.