



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

Spanish

SPAN3

(Specification 2695)

Unit 3: Listening, Reading and Writing

Report on the Examination

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General

As last year, the SPAN3 exam worked well as a discriminator, producing a wide range of performances and yet offering all students material and tasks with which they could work. However, examiners remain concerned at relatively low levels of translation skills and the numbers of students who seem unable to produce a well-planned and well-focussed essay on an appropriate choice of Cultural Topic. The mean mark for the paper was 73.9.

On-screen marking was used for this unit and students should be reminded that they must answer the questions in the spaces provided, as instructed on the front cover of the question paper. It is also very important that the instruction to students to write in black ink or ballpoint pen is adhered to, as answers written in blue ink or pen are very difficult to mark on screen. Unfortunately, a few students were careless in their writing and some of the letters they used in answering the comprehension questions were hard to decipher.

Section A

Listening Section

Question 1

Students seemed to have had no major problems with this question, indeed, about half of them scored full marks and all gained at least some credit. K was often chosen instead of J.

Question 2

This proved to be a good discriminator, with a range of performances on each item. Most were successful with (a), (c) and (e), whilst (d) proved the toughest element, with many giving the answer 60,000 through not listening carefully to the whole sentence.

Question 3

This task was generally well done, most success being achieved with (a) and (b). There were myriad spellings of *cibercafés* but they were almost always acceptable. In (c) a number of students opted to change *futuro*. In (d), the spelling of *avanzados* caused considerable problems but most versions could be awarded a mark. Otherwise most students correctly identified the word to change and offered a correct version; indeed marks of 7 or 8 out of 8 were common.

Question 4

Here students were required to identify and communicate the correct information, and most scored good marks in the question as a whole. Performance was best in items (a), (f) and (g), but in each element more than half of the students gained the mark. In (c), the answer 'CDs' caused a few problems (*cedes, decedes*). Some students failed to gain marks when they included extraneous material, such as inclusion of *barcos gigantescos* in (d). In (g) some missed the double negative in (g); *no tienen nada*.

Reading Section

Question 5

This question proved quite straightforward, with over 1/3 of students scoring full marks and most gaining more than half the available marks. Several gave E instead of O but more correctly selected J than one might have expected.

Question 6

This turned out to be a very accessible question, with most students scoring in most elements, and (f) being the only one which proved problematical to a substantial number.

Question 7

Most answered section (a) well, though (a) (iii) was found difficult by most students, with the *de* of *se dio cuenta de* causing problems. (b) discriminated slightly more, though again most students did well in all but item (b) (iv).

Question 8 and Question 9

Questions 8 and 9 sorted out students well, and there was a slight rise in mean marks for both as compared to last year. Still, the inability to translate accurately is of concern to examiners. Clearly, many students are reproducing prepared and repeatedly practised material in section B, but their true weaknesses are apparent in the translation questions. As far as translation is concerned, teachers need to impress on their students that this means accurate conveying of elements of meaning from one language into another, ensuring that the translation in the 'destination' language conforms to usage in the appropriate context and register.

Question 8

In this translation from Spanish into English, examiners are looking for precision in conveying the meaning of the Spanish accurately. The passage is divided into 20 'boxes', each carrying one mark; the 'box' has to be rendered precisely and accurately to earn the mark. The total is then divided by two to give a mark out of ten; half marks are rounded up so, for instance, 5½ becomes 6/10. Hence, one error means losing the mark for a 'box' even if the rest of the 'box' is translated correctly.

Only sections 3, 4, 9, 14, 16, 19 and 20 were consistently correct. The average score was in the 4-6 range. Very few students knew *abordó* and there was widespread disregard for the correct tense in 12, 13, 15 and 18. There were basic problems right from the start with *Ministerio del Interior*, and *Baleares* continuing with the verb forms *umentara* and *acabase*. There was a fair amount of paraphrasing rather than actual translating phrase by phrase. It was surprising that many did not seem to know or to be able to translate *anteayer*, *cada vez más*, *queja*, and *hasta tal punto*.

Question 9

This translation from English into Spanish is also divided into 20 'boxes', each carrying one mark. As in Question 8 the 'box' has to be rendered precisely and accurately to earn the mark, and the same arithmetical process is used to produce a mark out of 10.

As with Question 8 students struggled to reach half marks, and it was fairly rare for all 4 sections of an answer to be correct. Total accuracy was required for the marks available, and many students were unable to achieve this; there were many totals of 3 or 4. In (a) *nueve* was often made to agree with *años*, and *desde hace* was frequent. The many capital As for *africano* lost marks needlessly. A surprising number did not know *ayuntamiento*, many offering ingenious but inadequate paraphrases. In (b), there were vocabulary problems again, notably with 'drunk' and 'assaulted' and the infinitive after the preposition. Examiners often saw *emborracho*, *asultó*, *gritando*, *racistos*. In (c) *victima* was feminine more often than expected but the major problem was the range of mis-spellings of

'paralysed', notably *paralizado*, and inappropriate translations of 'blow'. In (d) the first 2 sections caused most difficulty ('still' and the gender/article in *en el hospital*). In (e) Section 1 was usually correct. Encouragingly however, many managed to produce the subjunctive in 2. Tense and translation of 'caught' caused big problems in 3, and most missed the personal *a*.

Section B

Writing: Cultural Topic Essays

Many essays only merited a Content mark in Limited or Sufficient because of lack of focus on the exact question asked. A large number of students seem to come to the examination with a preconceived notion of the essay they would like to answer, but fail to adapt their answer sufficiently to the actual question chosen. Too many 'all purpose' essays or teacher's notes were reproduced with little attempt to mould them to the specific requirements of the question. Others mixed elements of option (a) and (b), which proved confusing for examiners. To achieve a high Content mark, a good maxim is 'Answer the question, the whole question and nothing but the question'.

Students should note that they are not permitted to answer Question 12 (on the work of a Spanish author) with reference to a film director or to answer Question 13 (on a poet/playwright) with reference to an author.

Students should be reminded to make use of the Essay Planning Sheet to write a plan. It should be noted that the Essay Planning Sheet must not be sent for marking with student scripts.

Question 10 – A Spanish-speaking region/community

There was a fairly even spread between 10(a) and 10(b).

Question 10(a): In general, many students wrote little or nothing about geographical characteristics, instead writing about what the region is like and what should be done for tourists, often without referring to specific places or geographical features.

Question 10(b): again, specific detail was often lacking, but some of the answers to the speculative part of the question were quite innovative.

As regards choice of region, Andalucía was the preferred choice but examiners also saw answers on The Basque Country, Mallorca, Menorca, Comunidad de Madrid, Cataluña, Venezuela, Murcia, Chihuahua and other regions in Hispanoamerica. Whilst some students produced excellent answers on their studied region, examiners noted that marks for this choice of Cultural Topic tend to be lower, largely because so many students have not studied their region in sufficient depth or produce largely narrative accounts without the necessary discursive element.

Question 11 – A period of 20th century history from a Spanish-speaking country/community

Unfortunately some candidates mixed facts from different periods in order to answer the question which of course led to weak essays. More students opted for (b) than (a). *La Transición* was the most popular topic, but there were several on Allende's Chile and some on Franco's regime, Castro's Cuba, Argentina, Stroessner's Paraguay and the period of ETA activity in the Basque Country. Ideas, influences and events were often mixed apparently randomly. Some of the best answers were on Chile, whilst many *Transición*

responses did little more than relate the stages of the transition to democracy, with little or no reference to the chosen question.

Question 12 – An author from a Spanish-speaking country/community

Márquez and Esquivel were the most popular authors, and many students displayed a very detailed and intimate knowledge of the books, albeit not always well focussed on the chosen question. Answers to both options were reasonable – most being judged for Content in the upper Sufficient - lower Good range but with a number in the Very Good band. Focus on the question seemed to be less of a problem with this topic, and marks were better as a result. Question 12(a) was slightly more popular than Question 12(b), though students who chose the latter seemed better able to remain on target probably because it allowed for inclusion of a very broad range of aspects of the novels.

Question 13 – A dramatist or poet from a Spanish-speaking country/community

Lorca was as ever far and away the most popular choice, mostly *La Casa de Bernarda Alba*. There were however, a number of very good essays on Tirso de Molina and *El burlador de Sevilla*. The Tirso answers were extremely thorough and well-focused. Although this was the second most popular choice of topic, it was often not done well. This was usually because students mentioned techniques or ideas as relevant, but not the details, especially if they chose to focus on themes without connecting them to the techniques or ideas.

In Question 13(a) techniques described were often simply symbolism; few mentioned stage directions and other elements of dramatic technique.

In Question 13(b) the scope was broad, but this proved tricky to answer. Many students wrote amply about the ideas offered by the works, but without referring to the writer, and why he/she decided to expose these ideas. Others sometimes wrote about the ideas but without referring to specific works, for example writing about Lorca, mentioning ideas of repression, inequality and rebellion, but without referring to *La Casa de Bernarda Alba*, o *Bodas de Sangre* – in other words without specific examples. In many cases the ideas were almost always about repression in society because students thought that Lorca felt this as a homosexual.

Question 14 – A director, architect, musician or painter from a Spanish-speaking country/community

This was by far and away the most popular choice of topic, with most students choosing to study a film director, mostly Almodóvar, though Del Toro (*El laberinto del fauno*) was also popular. *La lengua de las mariposas*, *Criacuervos*, *Amores Perros*, *La otra conquista* and *El Calentito* were other films studied. Dalí was the most frequent choice among Artists though Picasso and *Guernica* had their following. There were few architects and fewer musicians.

Of the two options (b) was the more popular but all too often produced little more than story telling or character studies. In response to Question 14(a) there were one or two good discussions of techniques but many of these responses lacked a clear focus on evaluating their contribution to the popularity of the work. In Question 14(b) examiners often encountered statements such as: '*En mi opinion esto/este personaje es uno de los mejores aspectos de la película*', tacking on this ending in the hope of establishing some relationship to the question. As a result, scores tended to be in the Limited/just Sufficient range. However, others who knew their material well produced good answers, making the most of such an open question and explaining what they liked most about the work.

General

There are still some students who appear not to know how to plan and write an essay. Although examiners do not necessarily expect a conventional essay structure, it does make an essay much clearer and easier to follow the student's ideas, and of course it makes progression to the conclusion much more convincing.

Despite the concerns about the regurgitation of pre-learnt material, there were also students whose answers displayed excellent knowledge, and a high level of discipline in the sense of producing well-planned and well-reasoned essays.

Finally, centres are reminded that AQA now advises students to write essays on every line rather than on alternate lines.

Conclusion

To sum up in a very few words of advice to future students and to teachers preparing them: pay attention to detail in every part of the examination, particularly to spelling and grammar in Questions 8 and 9 and the Cultural Topic essays, and in the latter, learn to write efficient answers which focus on the question and the question alone.

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).

These include the latest version of the specification, past papers, Reports on the Examination and the Teacher Resource Bank (TRB). For SPAN3 the TRB includes for the Writing Section additional specimen questions (to supplement past papers from previous series) and student exemplar work; this is an invaluable resource for preparing candidates for future examinations

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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UMS conversion calculator www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion.