

SPANISH

Paper 1344/01
Speaking

General comments

The general level of spoken Spanish was higher than last year. The vast majority of candidates were fluent enough to sustain a conversation easily, in spite of some common errors which are listed in the next section.

Most candidates had prepared their topics very thoroughly using a variety of sources. Examiners rewarded candidates highly for the quality of their research. When sound factual knowledge was combined with clear analysis and well-founded opinion, much higher marks were achieved. In many cases, candidates managed to convey a genuine interest in their chosen topic.

The discussions mostly flowed naturally, without an excessive use of recited, pre-learned material. Candidates tended to respond readily to the Examiners' questions with suitable replies. Not only that, but they often tackled unexpected questions with great aplomb and honesty. Examiners rewarded highly this ability to engage in spontaneous conversation.

The very weakest performances, a small minority, did show a constricting reliance on recitation with a consequent lack of flexibility in discussion, and in these cases the candidates achieved lower marks even if they had researched their topics extensively.

Nervousness was evident in many candidates, but it only detracted significantly from performance in a small number of cases. Most candidates managed to relax after the first couple of minutes and were very keen to show their knowledge and express their opinions.

Specific comments

Topics

Most topics were well-suited to an 8-10 minute discussion, being neither too broad nor too narrow. Social issues, popular culture and the arts had the lion's share of the topics. These were mostly familiar topics, for example bullfighting or drugs in Latin America, but many candidates had chosen to approach them in an original or personal way. All those who went beyond the purely descriptive in order to provide some analysis or personal view were highly rewarded, as long as they supported their insights convincingly.

Similarly, presentations tended to produce excellent conversations when an element of controversy or debate was brought into it. The contentious aspect could be implicit in the title, or else introduced under one of the sub-headings.

Pronunciation

This was good overall and on the whole did not impair communication. Among the most frequent errors were:

- Pronunciation of *u* in words like *ataque*, *Velázquez*, *guerra*.
- Anglicized initial vowels in words like *unidad*, *Europa*, *euro*, *usar*, *Uruguay*.
- Anglicized *g* in words like *religión* or *legislar*.

Grammar

- Failure to conform to gender and number agreements between noun and adjective.
- Wrong gender. Words like *problema*, *tema*, *país*, *situación* and *solución* suffered more than others.
- Confusion between *ser/estar/haber*.

- Conjugation errors: missed subjunctives, preterite for imperfect, wrong person ending, unconjugated infinitives and some invented participles, such as **hacido*, **ponido*, **vido*.
- Incorrect use of *gustar*.
- Inability to distinguish between certain pairs of words: *nada/ningún*, *este/esto*, *bueno/bien*, *para/por*.
- Omission of s in the hundreds: **noveciento*, **cuatrociento*.
- Use of cardinal instead of ordinal for kings and queens: *Carlos *tres*, *Fernando *ocho* instead of *tercero*, *octavo*.

Vocabulary

Some pairs of words were often confused:

- *Policía/política*
- *Peligroso/peligro*
- *Tiempo/hora*
- *Derechos/derechas*
- *Nombre/número*

Invented words were also used, one of the most frequent being *resultado*.

Candidates with a more sophisticated and specific vocabulary achieved higher marks in Range and Accuracy than those using the more general and common words, for example *llevar a cabo/realizar actividades nocivas/perjudiciales*, as against *hacer cosas malas*.

Advice and guidance to candidates

Candidates should aim to:

- present their introduction “naturally”, even if pre-learnt.
- demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the topic.
- provide evidence of research.
- show interest in and personal engagement with the topic.
- support opinions with evidence.
- avoid sweeping statements.

Candidates should also expect to:

- be interrupted.
- be asked to support statements.
- be asked unexpected questions.
- give examples.
- be stretched linguistically to their personal ceiling of performance.

SPANISH

Paper 1344/02
Reading, Listening and Writing

General comments

This is the third year of the Cambridge Pre-U Spanish Short Course examination. The entry for this session was small, but it is hoped that the numbers will grow in the future. This report will, therefore, look at the performance in this year, but will also concentrate on giving advice and guidance for future examinations.

This is a mixed-skills paper which allows candidates to show their Spanish-language skills in Listening, Reading and Writing.

Part I – Listening (45 minutes)

In this section there are three recordings with listening comprehension questions in Spanish and in English. Language accuracy is not taken into account as long as it does not impede communication. Candidates hear the recordings three times and there are pauses both between and within the sections.

Listening Text 1 was an item about a police operation in Spain. Candidates were given a printed summary of the extract with five gaps left blank. Below the summary, they were offered a choice of three words to complete the sentences and had to underline the most appropriate option. The material was understood well by candidates and generally the correct options were chosen, although some candidates chose *modesta* rather than *considerable* for **Question 2**, *escogido* rather than *escondido*, for **Question 4** or *buscó* rather than *averiguó* for **Question 5**. During the preparation for this type of question, it is recommended that candidates should become confident in finding and using Spanish synonyms.

In the extract for **Listening Text 2**, the Spanish writer Javier Reverte described his first encounter with the sea. The exercise, involving straightforward Spanish questions to be answered in Spanish, was generally done well. The test is marked positively and the objective is to communicate the correct response. All the relevant information must be given but candidates are not required to answer in full sentences, and the Examiners only mark what is correct. All irrelevant and superfluous information is disregarded, unless it adversely affects the correct target information. Nevertheless, there was some evidence of candidates attempting to transcribe the material without really understanding it. Most of the questions were understood and candidates wrote appropriate replies. For **Question 7**, the answer *Madrid* was not sufficient; candidates needed to specifically identify *300 kilómetros de la costa*. Some candidates misunderstood the information for **Question 8** as *le gustaban las fotografías y películas*. **Question 9** required a first to third-person adjectival change from *unos tíos míos* to *sus tíos* or *unos tíos suyos* and for **Question 10** *comemos mariscos* was considered to be a wrong verb form that did not answer the question set. Some candidates found the concept of animals travelling in the bus difficult to understand for **Question 11** and made an incorrect guess, such as *era viejo*. Whilst most candidates answered **Question 12** correctly, some answers were imprecise, such as *en las montañas*. **Question 13** led to some pronoun confusion with *le levantó* rather than *se levantó* and there was evidence of some guesswork with *se puso de puntillas*, where candidates occasionally offered phrases such as *se puso las gafas*. Most candidates responded correctly to **Question 14**.

In **Listening Text 3** candidates heard an interview with Gema Hassen-Bey, a Spanish paraplegic athlete, winner of several Olympic medals for fencing. The material certainly appeared to be accessible and candidates made a good attempt at answering the English questions set on it. Sometimes, however, rather than weak comprehension of the Spanish material, a candidate might have failed to gain marks because of awkward English expression that did not convey the information correctly. Some of the questions required two pieces of information and candidates are urged to ensure that they have given all the information needed to gain the two marks. There did not appear to be any serious cases of misunderstanding the Spanish material, although the phrase *de ojos claros, tez blanca* led to some misunderstandings, such as “blue eyes”, “clear eyes”, “white hair”, etc. Another word that caused problems was *deletrear*, with some candidates offering such versions as “no one thought she was Spanish” or “no one could pronounce her name”.

Questions 18 to 22 were answered well, as were **Questions 24 to 26**, but the adjective *decepcionada* in **Question 23** was often rendered as “disillusioned” or “deceived”, rather than “disappointed”.

Part II – Reading (45 minutes)

There were three passages, with reading comprehension questions in Spanish and in English. Language accuracy is not taken into account as long as it does not impede communication.

Reading Text 1 was a short article about a protest by agricultural workers. The material was understood by the candidates and the exercise, involving Spanish questions to be answered in Spanish, was generally well done. A common error for **Question 7**, however, was where candidates were asked to explain the reference to a figure of 100 000, they wrote *el nombre de los agricultores*, instead of *el número de agricultores*. This also happened in **Question 30**, but candidates were not penalised twice for the same error. Most candidates succeeded in using their own words in the answers. It is important to stress that, when answering these questions, candidates should aim to communicate a correct response, but should not reproduce the original text word for word.

The passage used for **Reading Text 2** was a longer article about climate change in the Bolivian Andes and its effects on the life of the communities there. The text had Spanish-language questions and answers set on it. Generally, the material was understood well, although some candidates had difficulty with *contándoles chistes, pelada* and *regar*. As for the first Reading task, it is essential that candidates should use their own words rather than attempt to reproduce the original text word for word. They must also ensure that they give the full information required to gain the marks available.

Reading Text 3 was an article about people who had left the Spanish region of Galicia in the past in search of a better life but who are now returning to their roots. The material was generally well understood by the candidates, who succeeded in answering the English questions set on the passage in a fluent, comprehensible way. Most candidates succeeded in identifying the region of Spain involved and the specific involvement of the journalist quoted. **Questions 44, 45 and 47** were each worth 3 marks and candidates had to give full answers to gain all the marks. There was some confusion about the expression *jubilación acomodada*. This has nothing to do with “accommodation”, but means “comfortable retirement”. There was also some confusion seen in candidates’ responses where it was not clear whether they were referring to the parents or to their children. For **Question 46** it was necessary to state that the financial/economic circumstances were difficult and some candidates confused the various meanings of *seguridad*. Here it clearly meant “safety” and had nothing to do with “insurance” or even “security”. Overall, however, most candidates succeeded in understanding the material, although some failed to gain marks through awkward or incorrect English versions.

Part III – Guided Writing (45 minutes)

Candidates were given a choice of two texts and had to write a response of 200-250 words in Spanish, based on a series of five bullet points. The material contained in the two extracts was clearly accessible to candidates and candidates succeeded in writing appropriate responses in a good level of fluent Spanish. The two options were equally popular and a variety of interesting essays were seen.

The first article discussed the findings of a recent survey into Spaniards’ opinions about the quality of television that is on offer in Spain today. Candidates had to write a letter to the newspaper in response to the article, firstly giving their reaction to the article and discussing the importance of television today; then moving on to give their opinions about the effects of television on children and the advantages and disadvantages of advertising in the modern world and, finally, they had to offer a conclusion as to what the future role of the media might be.

The second article discussed the phenomenon of the *botellón*. This is a common event in Spain when masses of young people gather together in public places to drink alcohol. In many parts of Spain this is now illegal. The article referred to what kind of punishment should be given to the young people caught in this illegal activity, as many do not have the means to pay financial fines. The article mentioned the possibility of community work as an alternative to paying fines. Candidates had to write a letter to the newspaper in response to the article, firstly giving their reaction to the article and giving their opinion as to whether community work is a good form of punishment or not; then moving on to describing the situation of young people and alcohol in their own country and discussing the effect of peer-group pressure on young people nowadays; and finally they had to offer a conclusion as to whether there exists a solution to the various social problems that exist in our towns/cities today.

The response is marked according to the published marking grids. Firstly, the essay is marked for Content according to the task set and the bullet points, bearing in mind originality and development of ideas. Then the Quality of Language is assessed, taking into account both accuracy and variety of lexis and structure and to what extent error impedes comprehension. Candidates are expected to use an acceptable formal letter format and to write within the word limits.

Advice and Guidance to candidates

Listening and Reading Comprehension

Answering Spanish questions set on the texts

- Remember that full sentences are not required. However, the full information asked for must be given;
- highlight the question words (¿quién?, ¿cómo?, ¿cuándo?, etc.), so that it is clear what information is needed;
- note how many marks are awarded for each question, so that no essential information is omitted;
- try to use your own words and do not reproduce the language of the texts word for word;
- practise building a wide Spanish vocabulary, so that you are at ease using synonyms for words in the texts;
- remember that your Spanish answers must make sense. If they do not, then there is something wrong.

Answering English questions set on the texts

- Write your answers in good English and check your spelling;
- Beware of “false friends” (words that look alike in Spanish and English but have different meanings); this year, the word *decepcionada* had nothing to do with the English word “deception”. Instead, it meant “disappointed”;
- realise that some Spanish words can often have two meanings; choose the correct one (e.g.: does *claro* here mean “clear” or “light” in the context?);
- find the appropriate English word, not necessarily one that looks similar to the Spanish word (e.g.: *discapacidad* is usually “disability” or “handicap” in English, not “discapacity”);
- make sure your whole answer sounds like real English and makes sense to someone reading it;
- make sure that you give the full information required; do not omit any essential information.

Guided Writing

Covering the content

- Read the two stimulus passages and decide quickly which one you wish to tackle;
- pick the topic that most appeals to you and is most in accordance with your strengths;
- ensure that you have enough knowledge to tackle the question and enough vocabulary associated with the topic;
- read the chosen stimulus text again: analyse it to grasp the aim, content and context of the passage and to note key words and concepts;
- study the bullet points carefully and consider the full implications and scope of the requirements;
- pay attention to the form the response should take: (a letter? a report?);
- adopt the correct linguistic register: (formal? informal?);
- plan carefully and stick to your plan, avoiding digressions, getting carried away, recapitulation, putting in afterthoughts, etc.
- all the bullet point must be covered and developed, but not necessarily given equal weight;
- make sure that ideas follow a logical sequence, both overall and within each paragraph;
- avoid generalisations; make sure that ideas are illustrated and substantiated;
- take care to ensure full coverage of the content within the limits of the word count;
- develop the skill of communicating succinctly but effectively;
- leave enough time at the end to check your writing for accuracy.

The Spanish-language requirements for all the tasks

- Remember that essential basic grammar knowledge is required. You should aim for responding in accurate language;

- be confident in your use of all Spanish tenses, in particular the present, preterite, imperfect and conditional, both regular and irregular;
- be able to use tenses with all persons, not just the first person;
- be able to switch between the first and third persons with confidence, as this is often required in comprehension passages;
- use pronouns with confidence, in particular *le* and *se*, and be able to switch from first person to third person pronouns and adjectives with ease (e.g. *mi* to *su* and *mío* to *suyo*, etc.);
- use *gustar* and similar verbs properly in all tenses;
- be strict when applying the correct articles and adjectival endings (e.g. *un problema*, *cinco rosas rojas*, etc.);
- know when accents are important (e.g. *trabajo* or *trabajó*? *esta*, *está* or *ésta*?);
- be familiar with the subjunctive mood: know when and how to use it successfully;
- develop a bank of suitable phrases for your essay writing: how to begin (*para empezar*), making general statements (*hablando en forma general*), giving opinions (*me parece que*), explaining (*es decir*), disagreeing (*no estoy de acuerdo con*), giving justification (*no cabe duda de que*), expanding ideas (*no sólo ... sino también*), contradicting (*a pesar de que*), suggesting (*es posible que*) and concluding (*en resumen*), etc. (NB. These are only suggestions and candidates should build up their own banks of phrases).