

Examiners' Report/ Principal Examiner Feedback

June 2011

GCSE Spanish (5SP04) Paper 1

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June 2011

Publications Code UG028802

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Unit 4: Writing

The new specification has changed significantly from the legacy GCSE Spanish 1246 specification and this is the first full award when compared with the small candidature of the June 2010 and January 2011 series.

Candidates have up to two weeks and/or 6 hours to prepare each task. Candidates have to prepare two tasks, set by the centre, both of which are produced under controlled conditions and are externally marked by Edexcel examiners. Unlike the legacy equivalent, this unit is not moderated. The marks are awarded following the same new specification assessment grids and the results are by outcome. The tasks are taken at any time during the course and can be submitted for assessment in the summer or January series of examinations.

Candidates aiming at Grade C and above are expected to write over 200 words per task and it is anticipated that all candidates will write at least 100 words for each task in the two assessment sessions. In some cases it would be more appropriate for certain candidates (Grade G-D) if the tasks were broken down into a maximum of four shorter tasks to make up the word count.

As in the past, writing tasks are positively marked and the assessment grids are similar in weighting to the Higher Tier grids in the legacy GCSE terminal exam although the wording of the criteria has changed in places.

Candidates can choose to write within any of the four theme areas suggested by Edexcel in the new Specification:

- media and culture
- sport and leisure
- travel and tourism
- business work and employment

or can choose to complete a centre-devised option outside these themes. In all cases, teachers can adopt/adapt Edexcel-produced stimuli (to be found under 'controlled assessment – tasks' on the Edexcel Spanish home page) or create their own.

June 2011 was the third time for assessment. In general, candidates seemed well-prepared for the new tests and seemed encouraged by the opportunity to take ownership of the tasks in the sense that they could choose their own topic areas. In the main, tasks were generally sound and accessible to the full range of candidates. They showed evidence of good planning overall although examiners noticed a trend in many centres towards a writing template which often produced similar pieces of work with little creative manipulation of language in evidence. A more individual response should be encouraged which is consistent with candidates' ability as opposed to slight variations on a theme taught to whole groups within a pre-constructed framework. Examiners also reported that many candidates had memorised a few important constructions but were unable to join them up in any meaningful way. The use of subjunctive constructions varied from

pre-learned (almost 'set' phrases), to be inserted at all costs, to a more considered approach which showed real understanding and a comfortable flow to the language used. Many examiners commented that the highest scoring candidates produced pieces of work which were fluent and very interesting to read.

The majority of scripts were of a suitable length although examiners reported very short pieces on occasions which could not be awarded high marks. The one-hour time limit seems to have discouraged overlong scripts but some candidates still managed to produce 400 to 500 words in each piece and although an excessive word count will not be penalised per se, it should be noted that more does not always mean better. Edexcel guidelines re word count should help to reassure teachers and candidates that excellent marks can be gained without writing excessively long pieces of work.

Use of the dictionary was of variable quality with mistakes like "*yo sierra mi amigo*" in frequent evidence.

Common language mistakes were largely as expected. The following list of items is not exhaustive but indicates some areas of difficulty:

- the confused use of *me, mi, mí* and *yo*
- the correct use of *gustar* once candidates try to move away from *me gusta...*
- confusion over tense usage
- vital accents
- confusion between *a* and *de*
- the use of *hay*
- the use of *mucho* and *muy*
- correct basic usage of *ser* and *estar*
- the use of the infinitive after finite verbs, e.g., *quiero voy* for *quiero ir* etc.
- the failure to insert *que* in simple linkage
- poor spelling (even with the use of a dictionary, presumably)

Most centres submitted tasks similar to those found in the legacy coursework repertoire, e.g., Holidays, Work Experience, Letters of Complaint to Hotels, Local Area, Interviews, Healthy Living, School, a Job Application letter and Film/Book/TV Programme Reviews. Tasks were generally accessible to the full range of ability although some weaker candidates struggled with film/book/TV programme reviews in that they were clearly enthusiastic in what they wanted to say but often just did not have the linguistic ability to convey their thoughts when narrating and/or analysing aspects of the chosen items. The latter led to some passages where it was not really clear what exactly candidates were trying to say.

Presentation of candidates' work was once again an issue and centres should note that candidates must realise that illegible handwriting can have a detrimental effect on the final result.

Administration

Correct documentation was provided by the majority of centres although a significant number of centres failed to do so in full. Centres should note that the Controlled assessment authenticity record sheet –Writing which appears in the Specification has now been replaced by a new Candidate Mark Sheet for Unit 4: Writing which includes authentication statements and space for both candidates' and teachers' signatures. This new document also includes space for task titles as well as space for examiners to insert marks. It would be very helpful if centres could use this new document from now on as the latter will help to streamline the overall administration process for both teachers and examiners.

A small number of centres sent only one piece of work for certain candidates and a few centres failed to provide stimulus material or even a title. A number of centres sent documentation to do with speaking controlled assessment tasks to the examiner for the writing tasks.

It would be very helpful if centres could collate both tasks for this unit in the order in which they appear on the updated candidate mark sheet, clearly marked as Task/Unit 1 and 2 with a clear title/heading for each piece in English or in Spanish which corresponds with what is described under the task titles.

The administrative Support Guide (instructions for the Conduct of the Examination and Controlled Assessments) 2011 gives details of what centres are required to send to their examiner and copies of the new forms to be used are held within the appendix. The Administrative Support Guide is available on the Edexcel website at <http://www.edexcel.com/quals/gcse/gcse09/mfl/spanish/Pages/default.aspx> under 'Exam Materials'.

Below is a checklist of materials to be sent to the examiner.

For every candidate:

- Stimuli/tasks
- Form CA4 (Candidates Notes Form
- Candidate work – TWO pieces of writing
- Updated Candidate Mark Sheet for Unit 4: Writing – signed by both candidate and the centre-assessor
- An attendance register

N. B. Any candidate unable to provide an authentication statement will receive zero credit for this component.

Grade Boundaries

The modern foreign languages specifications share a common design, but the assessments in different languages are not identical. Grade boundaries at unit level reflect these differences in assessments, ensuring that candidate outcomes across these specifications are comparable at specification level.

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link: <http://www.edexcel.com/iwantto/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx>

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Order Code UG028802 June 2011

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