

Advice and guidance to candidates

Paper 1 Speaking

Please bear in mind, in both Parts, that the Examiner is not trying to catch the candidate out. S/he is only interested in finding out what level each candidate has reached, in terms both of language and knowledge of subject.

Part I Discussion of an article and related themes

The task of reading and discussing a text is not one about which candidates need be apprehensive. The texts themselves are there to serve as a springboard, and are chosen to avoid excessive difficulty in structure or vocabulary. In choosing which text to prepare for the examination, candidates are recommended to consider whether they have something to say about the topic, rather than worrying whether they will be able to understand the text. Familiarity with the format of this part of the test is important: candidates may prepare by practising short spoken summaries and spontaneous speaking, and by acquiring the language used to express opinions about relevant topics.

In the test itself, candidates should:

- use the preparation time fully
- plan a short overview of the text content
- consider the issue in question and their own reaction(s) to it
- be prepared to take the lead in the discussion
- give their reactions to the ideas and information in the text
- be prepared for discussion of broader issues relating to the general heading on the card.

Part II Prepared oral topic

In Part 2, the choice of topic is very important. It should be neither too broad (which can make it hard to cover the topic or to say anything concrete) nor too narrow (there may not be enough to say).

The best conversations often occur when an element of controversy or debate is brought into the presentation. This could be implicit in the title (e.g. *Was Dalí a great artist or a charlatan?*), or it might be introduced under one of the sub-headings (e.g. *The battle of Verdun: [point iv] the tragic aftermath of a great victory*). Candidates who go beyond the purely descriptive and who express personal views can expect to be rewarded, as long as they are able to support their opinions in the discussion.

In preparation for this section, candidates are recommended to:

- avoid trying to find an 'impressive' obscure topic
- choose a subject which genuinely interests them
- be clear about which aspects of it they wish to discuss
- focus in depth on a few aspects of the topic rather than try to cover it all.

In this Part, candidates should:

- fill in the oral form correctly
- present their introduction 'naturally', even if pre-learned
- be ready to lead the discussion and talk freely about their topic
- show interest in, and personal engagement with, their topic
- show evidence of research
- support opinions with evidence.

They should also expect to:

- be interrupted
- be asked to support, clarify and justify statements
- answer unexpected questions
- give examples
- be stretched to their linguistic 'ceiling'.



Advice and guidance to candidates

Paper 2 Listening and Reading Comprehension

What skills are required?

- inference – candidates have to work out the answers from what is read or heard
- manipulation – candidates may be expected to change language so the answer makes sense
- explanation – candidates may need to give reasons for their answers
- synthesis – points of information may need to be combined in an answer
- writing with accuracy and sophistication: quality of language in answers should be high.

Answering target language questions (Reading and Listening Exercise 1)

Candidates are advised to:

- remember that full sentences are not required – although all the required information must be given
- highlight the key words in the question, so that it is clear what information is needed
- note how many marks are awarded for each question (e.g. if 2 marks are available, two separate points are required)
- try to use their own words and avoid reproducing the language of the texts word for word
- practise building a wide vocabulary in the target language, so that they are at ease with finding synonyms for words in the passages
- remember that their answers must make sense.

Answering English questions (Reading and Listening Exercise 2)

Candidates should:

- write their answers in correct English and check spelling
- beware false friends (words that look alike in the target language and English, but have different meanings)
- realise that some target language words can have more than one meaning. They should choose the correct meaning (e.g. in Spanish *local* can mean 'local' or 'place', depending on the context)
- find the appropriate English word, not necessarily one that looks similar to the target language word (e.g.: *velocidad* in Spanish or *vélocité* in French is usually translated as 'speed' in English, not 'velocity')
- make sure the answer sounds like real English and makes sense
- make sure that they give all that is required, while taking care not to omit any essential points.



Advice and guidance to candidates

Paper 2 Listening and Reading Comprehension

Reading Exercise 3 Translation from English to the target language

Translation involves moving material from one language to another. Good translation is a real art that needs much practice, which is often neglected. The ideal is a translation that reads well and that conveys accurately the sense of the original.

In this exercise, candidates are recommended to:

- study the original text in Reading Exercise 2 carefully: it gives vocabulary and structures that can be used and re-worked
- read the English passage carefully to understand what is required
- study the setting, context and tone of the extracts
- use sensible and intelligent guesses where vocabulary is not known
- avoid leaving gaps
- think carefully about the grammar of the sentence being translated. (candidates often encounter problems in translating tenses correctly, spotting adjectival agreements and linking pronouns with the nouns to which they refer.)
- beware literal translation: the result can easily be a meaningless text
- beware paraphrasing, and not stray too far away from the original (but, on the other hand, not be afraid to change word order, parts of speech, etc.)
- remember that accuracy is more important than creativity.

Listening Exercise 3 Summary skills

Writing a good summary is a matter of regular practice and also of acquiring the correct technique. An unsuccessful attempt at a summary may be due to lack of understanding of the original text but, more often than not, it is the way the exercise has been tackled that is at fault.

To write a good summary, candidates should:

- listen to the passage carefully until they have a good idea of what the whole text is about
- not start summarising (or even translating) every sentence. (They will not discard the less significant details, and will quickly run out of words.)
- make rough notes rather than a full draft on the question paper. There may not be time to write out a full draft version of the summary and then write out a clean copy.
- remember that it is not necessary to know the meaning of every word in the text
- remember that this is a summary – an exercise in selection – it is impossible to include every piece of information
- make sure that all the bullet points are covered
- spread the words: it is a common error to say too much about the first half of a passage and too little (or nothing at all) about the second half
- ‘prune’ written summaries, removing unnecessary words without deleting the main points that must be conveyed
- stay within the word limit – 100 words must not be exceeded.

Finally, candidates should check that:

- all the bullet points have been covered
- the gist of the passage has been understood
- there is detail and it is well selected
- the material is expressed concisely
- the summary reads well and is informative
- there is no incorrect information.

Advice and guidance to candidates

Paper 3 Writing and Usage

Part I Writing

When choosing a title in the examination, candidates should:

- spend some time reading all the titles
- think carefully about what each topic is and what is being asked in the title
- think about whether they have something to say in response
- consider whether they possess vocabulary in the topic area
- make a very rough plan before choosing a title
- decide what they think and write an essay plan.

When writing the essay, candidates are advised to:

- use the plan to construct a real argument
- write an introduction, discussion and a conclusion
- keep the essay title in mind throughout
- check whether the points made are relevant
- avoid repetition
- write in paragraphs, making a clear, relevant point in each one
- try to use a variety of language and demonstrate linguistic ability
- write complex sentences when appropriate, but without losing the thread of the argument
- remember to try to interest and/or persuade the reader.

Part II Usage

In this Part, the three tests of verbal knowledge, structural manipulation and other aspects of usage cover a wide range of structures, but should not present major difficulty to candidates who have broad experience of the language and an awareness of the need for accuracy in writing. It is useful to be familiar with the format of the tests: this will help candidates to be aware of the type of knowledge required. Intelligent, careful reading of texts in the target language, attention to personal linguistic development in terms of structures, and experience of working through similar tasks can all help in preparation for this section.

In this Part of the examination candidates are recommended to:

- read each question carefully and make sure they understand the sense of the sentence
- avoid leaving any questions unanswered
- use their experience of and 'feel for' the language as well as their knowledge when deciding on an answer (e.g. ask themselves 'Have I heard or seen a similar sentence?')
- proofread carefully their answers to Exercises 1 and 2.

Advice and guidance to candidates

Paper 4 Topics and Texts

In both Parts, candidates should:

- read the question with care, and think about what they are asked to do
- plan their answer and organise their material with close relation to the question
- define the terms of the question in the introduction
- keep the question in mind throughout
- support any assertions with close references to the text and/or film
- make sure quotations, if used, support the argument
- make sure all quotations are accurate
- use paraphrasing and allusion as an alternative to overlong quotations
- take care to include analysis and argument, and avoid narrative
- demonstrate knowledge by using it as supporting evidence for the argument
- exclude information that is irrelevant to the question.

Part I: Cultural Topics

Candidates should:

- make sure that they learn the necessary vocabulary to write about their topic, when preparing for this Part
- remember that the rubric requires reference to only two of the works. Writing about all three may lead to a lack of depth
- try to demonstrate their knowledge of underlying themes, and mention comparisons and links between the two works
- proofread carefully after writing, paying special attention to verb forms and agreements.

Part II: Literary Texts

In context questions candidates should:

- make sure they analyse the extract showing how its content is related to the rest of the work
- avoid using the passage as a springboard for a general essay
- be careful to analyse, rather than re-tell the story of the extract.

SPANISH – PRINCIPAL COURSE

Paper 9781/01

Speaking

General comments

The Examiners were very pleased with the general level of spoken Spanish exhibited by the candidates. The majority could communicate in language that was sufficiently fluent and accurate to sustain the conversation, in spite of some common errors, listed in another section of this report.

Before the first part of the test (newspaper article discussion), candidates used their preparation time well, considering the issue in question and other issues that might arise in conversation. Most candidates were able to sustain an interesting discussion and follow their language of argument well. The Examiners asked candidates to express opinions and to substantiate, elaborate, clarify or qualify them. Many of the performances were highly satisfactory and some were excellent.

Regarding the second part of the test (prepared topic discussion), most candidates had prepared their topics very thoroughly. Examiners found evidence of detailed research using different sources, and rewarded candidates for the quality of their content. When detailed and extensive factual knowledge was combined with clear analysis and well-founded opinion, candidates achieved high marks. There were, however, a few cases of candidates who appeared underprepared, notably among those who were native or semi-native speakers of Spanish.

The discussions mostly flowed naturally without the candidates giving the impression of simply reciting pre-learned material. They tended to respond readily to the Examiners' questions with appropriate replies. Moreover, most did not appear taken aback by unexpected questions and tackled them confidently and honestly. Candidates were rewarded for their ability to engage in a natural and spontaneous conversation.

Most candidates also displayed an excellent ability to keep calm and collected or, at least, not to allow nerves to interfere significantly with their performance.

Comments on specific parts of the examination

Part I: Discussion of a newspaper article and related topics

This is, in principle, the most challenging part of the Speaking test, in that it is to some degree unpredictable. The candidates need to choose one of four newspaper articles which they have not seen before, and have only twenty minutes to prepare: they must read through and understand the text, and organise their own reactions and opinions. They must also give thought to the issues that might arise from the content of the article, and to possible areas of discussion under the general heading.

Once the examination begins, after a minute's summary of the article and three or four minutes' talking about their opinions on it, candidates must participate in a conversation which broadens according to the general heading on the card. The headings this year were: Conservation, Medical Advances, Human Relationships and Equality of Opportunity. They were all equally popular overall, but some centres seemed to lean more towards a particular topic.

Candidates were naturally more nervous during this part of the test, but curiously, this did not result in significantly poorer performances than in the second part. In some cases, candidates rose admirably to the challenge and relaxed into a spontaneous and natural exchange with the examiner. Having to improvise did stump some of the candidates, but a surprisingly high proportion of them fared better than, or at least as well as, they did in section B.

The weakest candidates (a minority) found it hard to support their views with arguments after an initial yes/no answer, and appeared nonplussed by why/how questions. They took refuge in simple statements and

repetitive ideas. The very best candidates played an active role in the conversation and even introduced new topics themselves. Between these two extremes, the majority of performances showed good discussion skills and considerable resourcefulness.

Part II: Prepared topic discussion

The total number of candidates was 73. The most popular group of topics concerned politics, with 15 entries (ETA the most frequent), followed by art, with 13 (Gaudí had the most fans). Ten candidates chose social and/or ethical issues (*el narcotráfico en Colombia* was chosen by three) and ten more opted for general cultural themes (*las fiestas de España* was also chosen by three). Cinema (seven), history (eight) and music (six) were also strongly represented. Some presentations belonged to two or three groups of topics at once, which is perfectly acceptable. Other areas proved far less popular: the environment (three), sport (two), literature (two) and the economy (one). The scarcity of literary topics was, perhaps, the most surprising aspect.

Most candidates chose familiar topics, but it was pleasing to note that a few explored more widely and produced well-researched presentations on more unusual subjects. Such topics usually indicated a high degree of personal interest and enthusiasm. Care should be taken to avoid topics not directly related to the culture, current affairs and history of Hispanic countries. There is always the danger that the discussion might become too general, disconnected from the Spanish speaking countries, or even overlap with the topic of the newspaper article in **Part I** of this test.

All topics were interesting, but some lent themselves better to the 8–10 minute discussion required. The most successful topics were neither too broad nor too narrow. For example, if the candidate was talking about a famous artist or historical figure, the presentation worked best when it clearly concentrated on particular works or aspects of that figure's career, while perhaps touching more lightly on other points.

Presentations also produced the best conversations when an element of controversy or debate was brought in. The contentious element could be implicit in the title, or it might be introduced under one of the sub-headings. Candidates who went beyond the purely descriptive and had a personal view or an unusual angle on the topic were highly rewarded, as long as they supported their opinions appropriately.

Quality of Language

Pronunciation was good overall and did not impede comprehensibility on the whole. The most common errors were:

- faulty stress causing confusion in the person and tense of the verb and in words ending in *-ía*
- unclear vowels, sometimes causing gender confusion
- interference from English pronunciation in words like *religión, Europa, sociedad, idea*
- anglicized or French-sounding *r*.

Grammatically, the most common errors were:

- gender choice: *la problema, el madre*
- inaccurate gender/number agreement between noun and adjective: *las obras más reciente, la opinión político*
- conjugation errors, specially in radical changing verbs. Wrong person ending (*su padre dije*) was as common a mistake as wrong tense choice (*cuando fue pequeño*).
- use of infinitive for finite verbs: *el pueblo dar su apoyo a...*
- failure to place the negative in the correct place: *es no bueno, tengo no tiempo*
- inability to distinguish between *ser, estar* and *haber*
- confusion of adjectives and adverbs: *es muy calor, es muy violencia, mucho famosa*
- inability to use *gustar*: *la gente no gusta la nueva situación*
- failure to recognise the need for the subjunctive mood: *no pienso que es un problema*.

SPANISH – PRINCIPAL COURSE

Paper 9781/02 Reading and Listening
--

General comments

This is a mixed-skills paper which allows candidates to show their Spanish-language skills in Reading and Listening. Candidates have 2 hours 15 minutes to complete the paper. They are advised to spend 1 hour 15 minutes on the Reading exercises and 1 hour on the Listening exercises. They may choose the order in which they prefer to tackle the exercises.

Comments on specific questions

Part I: Reading

There are two passages with a combined limit of 600 words. The first one has reading comprehension questions in Spanish requiring answers in Spanish. Although these answers are not assessed for quality of language, candidates must not lift phrases from the passage. The second passage has questions in English that require answers in English. The third exercise is a retranslation from English into Spanish of a paragraph of about 75 words based on the stimulus of the earlier second reading passage.

Reading Text 1 was a passage about the *mileuristas*, the common phenomenon of young Spaniards who have one thousand euros a month, or less, to live on. The test is marked positively and the objective is to communicate the correct response, but not to reproduce the original text word for word. It is important for candidates to use their own words. Full sentences are not required in the answers but the correct information must be conveyed successfully. Accent errors are only penalised if they affect meaning and slight spelling errors are accepted if the word is recognisable, but not if the spelling error leads to another word.

For **Question 1** candidates had to choose two points of explanation. A surprising number of candidates thought that Belén was a man, rather than a woman, but this error did not necessarily invalidate the answer. Most candidates gained the two marks. Occasionally for **Question 2** there were some attempts at guesswork, such as *no tienen casa* or *no tienen dinero*. The answer referred to the long hours that the couple worked. *No tiene tiempo* was sufficient for one mark, but a reference to the long hours they both worked was necessary to be awarded the two marks. Most candidates gave a successful explanation of the phrase *la época de las vacas gordas* for **Question 3**, although a few confused it with the English term ‘fat cats’. Both **Questions 4** and **5** produced good answers, whereas **Question 6** was probably the one where candidates were least successful in using their own words. There was too much ‘lifting’ of phrases from the original text. Also, there was some misunderstanding of the reference to female university candidates. It was not that women were first allowed to attend Spanish universities in the nineteen-eighties, rather that the number of women candidates increased dramatically. Most candidates identified the correct information for **Question 7**. This type of exercise can be demanding in places and overall the Examiners were pleased to see how the majority of candidates displayed a good understanding of the Spanish material and were able to write their answers with a good standard of Spanish language.

Reading Text 2 was an extract from a newspaper article about an incident in Barcelona when an attacker threw a molotov cocktail at the house where the daughter of the King of Spain and her family live and the subsequent police operation. 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. Many candidates scored full or very high marks on this exercise. Most provided the correct information for **Questions 8** and **9**, but some failed to gain the two marks available for **Question 10** by omitting to mention that the security guard tried to chase the attacker ‘on foot’. Both **Questions 11** and **12** were answered well. Generally, this test produced some highly competent answers from candidates.

Reading Text 3 was a paragraph in English, based on the material in **Reading Text 2**, which candidates had to translate into Spanish. The previous text contained words and phrases that could help them, but generally some manipulation of language was required. For marking purposes, the text is divided into 30 boxes and these are each awarded one mark or zero. The total mark is converted to a final mark out of 10. The correct information should be communicated and suitable alternative renderings can be accepted. Slight spelling errors are disregarded, but not if the meaning of the word is altered. Similarly, slight errors involving adjectival agreements or capital/small-case letters may be accepted.

Most candidates performed well in this exercise and there were some excellent translations. Although slight errors are permitted, there were several common errors which are worth highlighting. These include lack of accents (*difícil, catalán*); inability to use the correct adjectival agreements referring to a region (*catalanas*); errors with finite verbs (*han rechazado, ha tenido lugar*); missed subjunctives (*sea, tenga, cometan, puedan comer*); inability to use the passive voice (*fueron condenados*); confusion between *cualquier, algún* and *ningún*, etc.

Part II: Listening

Candidates have control of their own individual listening equipment. They may stop, rewind and replay the recording at will, and they may make notes and write their answers at any point. There are three passages with a combined limit of 700 to 800 words. The first has listening comprehension questions in Spanish requiring answers in Spanish, whereas questions for the second passage are in English and require answers in English. Answers in the target language are not assessed for quality of language. Candidates then listen to a third recording of about 250 words and summarise it in English using bullet points for guidance (maximum of 100 words).

Listening Text 1

The extract was an interview with the president of *Médicos Sin Fronteras* in Spain, discussing the role of the organisation and her personal situation. The test is marked positively and the objective is to communicate the correct response, but not to reproduce the original text word for word. It is important for candidates to use their own words. Vocabulary items need to be understood but they should be conveyed in an answer that is a logical response to the question. Full sentences are not required in the answers but the correct information must be conveyed successfully. Accent errors are only penalised if they affect meaning and slight spelling errors are accepted if the word is recognisable, but not if the spelling error leads to another word. It would appear that candidates found this exercise the most difficult on the paper and some of the lowest scores were seen here. Most candidates answered **Question 14** correctly, but some misunderstanding of the verb *impedir* led to incorrect responses to **Question 15**. Most candidates understood that the NGO had to take a neutral stance for **Question 16** and the Examiners accepted a wide variety of alternative explanations for the Spanish phrase *no te lo planteas*, although some candidates were not aware of this expression. The information required to answer **Question 18** was correctly identified by most candidates, whereas some found it difficult to give a full enough explanation of the *contrapartida* in **Question 19**. *Hay un riesgo* was not seen as a sufficient amount of information to gain the two marks available. Most candidates understood Paula's personal plans and were able to answer **Question 20**.

Listening Text 2

Candidates heard an interview with the Spanish pop star Xabi San Martín, as he explained how the group *La Oreja de Van Gogh* set about finding a new female lead singer after their original singer left them. The tone of the extract was quite colloquial, but the material certainly seemed 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 lost marks because of awkward English expression that did not convey the information correctly. Some candidates did not know the word *gira* for **Question 21** and guessed at 'gig', 'album' or 'concert', rather than 'tour'. The group's reaction when Amaia left the group was very strong, so, an answer such as 'they were surprised' for **Question 22** was not considered to be sufficient. An expression such as 'stunned', 'turned to stone', etc. was needed. **Questions 23, 24** and **25** all produced very good answers. There were several possible answers for **Question 26** and, although most understood the material well, there were some who believed that *en directo* meant 'directly', rather than 'live' and a wide variety of musical instruments were suggested for *teclado*. Although a few candidates correctly identified the 11-M terrorist attack as the Madrid bombings for **Question 27**, a surprising number confused it with the September 11th attack. Although cultural knowledge is not specifically tested on this paper, the Examiners would expect candidates to be aware of the Spanish name for such an important recent event. The final response for **Question 28** was generally understood well by the candidates.



Listening Text 3

This involved an interview with a Spanish lawyer discussing the present situation of divorce in Spain. The test required a summary of her views in no more than 100 words in English. There were five bullet points of information to be covered. The full gist of the passage needs to be understood, there has to be detail and it needs to be well selected. The material should be expressed concisely, read well and be informative. The 10 marks available are awarded positively according to these criteria. Length is important. A summary with fewer than 80 words is likely to be self-penalising, as all the above criteria are unlikely to be met. On the other hand, candidates should beware writing over-long summaries. It should be stressed that the Examiners operate a cut-off point and any material written beyond that point cannot be assessed, even if it is correct. Candidates clearly appeared to find the material accessible and there were some very high marks awarded in this exercise. Most candidates appeared to be familiar with the vocabulary and concepts in the extract. In general, the Examiners were impressed by the number of candidates who produced very good summaries that demonstrated a good understanding of the gist and detail of the original Spanish extract. They were able to infer ideas and showed an ability to select key facts and to communicate this information concisely.

Quality of Language

A knowledge of essential Spanish grammar is required, and candidates should always aim to respond in accurate language. They need to be confident in the use of all Spanish tenses, and in particular the present, preterite, imperfect and conditional, both regular and irregular. The ability to use tenses confidently with all persons is important, and particularly so in switching between the first and third persons, as this is very often required in answering comprehension questions. Likewise it is highly advantageous for candidates to make correct use of pronouns, in particular *le* and *se*, and to switch from first person to third person pronouns and adjectives with ease (e.g. *mi* to *su* and *mío* to *suyo*, etc.).

At this level *gustar* and similar verbs should be used properly in all tenses. Candidates need to be strict when applying the correct articles and adjectival endings (e.g. *un problema*, *cinco rosas rojas*, etc.), and also to be aware when accents are important (e.g. *trabajo* or *trabajó*? *esta*, *esta* or *ésta*?). Lastly, familiarity with the subjunctive mood is vital for any candidate who wishes to perform well: he or she must know when and how to use it successfully.

SPANISH – PRINCIPAL COURSE

Paper 9781/03
Writing and Usage

General comments

It was pleasing to note that the majority of candidates were well prepared, both in terms of essay writing and the understanding of the grammatical requirements of this paper. There were some excellent answers to the essay questions which used a wide range of lexis and syntax, although often the writing suffered from a degree of inaccuracy. Candidates should be reminded that a broad and fluent command of the language is highly commendable. That said, the majority of candidates coped well with both parts of the paper, a number scoring nearly full marks.

On an administrative note; the vast majority of scripts were well and neatly presented and this was much appreciated by the Examiners. However, there were a number of cases of poor presentation with messy and unclear handwriting. Candidates should be reminded that, while Examiners will always try to be tolerant, illegibility and ambiguous writing cannot be credited.

Comments on specific questions

Part I: Discursive essay

Candidates are given a choice of five essay titles and have to write a response of 350–450 words in Spanish. The response is marked following the published marking grids. The essay is marked for accuracy and linguistic range out of 24 marks. The development and organisation of ideas are then assessed out of 16 marks. Candidates are expected to use a variety of lexis and structures to convey ideas and arguments which are effectively organised and illustrated with relevant examples. Candidates should show they possess a wide range of vocabulary and a good sense of idiom.

Candidates should spend time choosing the essay title they are going to write about. They need to consider if they have fully grasped the implications of the question, and whether they possess enough vocabulary associated with the topic; and also, above all, whether they have anything to say about it.

The writing was frequently handled very competently, and many candidates showed confident use of the necessary vocabulary, as well as a variety of appropriate structures. Most candidates, but by no means all, had something to say about the chosen topic and used complex syntax to do so – use of infinitive constructions, past participles and the subjunctive, for example. Not all candidates managed tense usage successfully and there was frequent confusion between the Imperfect and the Preterite. The Subjunctive was not always handled correctly, either not being used when it was required, or, more rarely, being constantly used without justification. Minor common errors were confusion over gender agreement and the use of prepositions such as *en* and *a*, and *por* and *para*.

Part II: Usage

Exercise 1 Questions 2–6

This initial exercise tested candidates' verbal knowledge. The question type was a gapfill, with the verbs which needed to be manipulated offered in brackets, and a wide range of tenses and moods was tested. Candidates coped well with the exercise: if problems occurred, they tended to occur on **Questions 2 and 3**, where the correct use of the Subjunctive was tested.

A surprising number of candidates also struggled with the correct form in **Question 4**, while, also somewhat surprisingly, **Questions 5 and 6** proved to be unproblematic for the majority.

Exercise 2 Questions 7–11

This exercise proved to be the most demanding, both in terms of grammatical difficulty and the language manipulation needed.

Question 7 proved difficult to a number of candidates. Although the preposition was given in the sentence *llegamos al colegio*, some candidates changed it to *en* in their answers. Candidates are advised to pay close attention to the grammar which is actually provided in the question.

Question 10 elicited a range of spellings for *la nieve*, some of which were barely comprehensible. Candidates had to change the Preterite verb into a passive structure in **Question 11**. Some of them managed to use the correct tense of *ser*, but forgot the agreement of the adjective

Exercise 3 Questions 12–32

This exercise comprises a short article about the danger of ecological light bulbs. Candidates had to choose the right answer from a choice of four options. All the options provided are correct Spanish, as this exercise is testing the passive grammatical knowledge of the candidates. Most candidates scored high marks on this multiple choice exercise. Almost all candidates who attempted the exercise managed to score adequately, and; some candidates did very well. Where mistakes were made, they usually occurred on **Questions 17, 18, 25, 27 and 31**.

SPANISH – PRINCIPAL COURSE

Paper 9781/04 Topics and Texts
--

General comments

The Examiners were pleased to note that all of the candidates had managed to develop a certain insight into the culture and civilisation of Spanish-speaking countries. Scripts were obviously variable in terms of quality but, in many cases, it was evident that there had been an excellent level of learning and personal engagement in preparation for the examination.

In **Part I**, as many as four (out of five available) different topics were chosen: *República española y guerra civil*, *El cine de Pedro Almodóvar*, *La cuestión indígena en América Latina* and *Mujer hispana y tradición*. The emphasis on this part of the paper is on the acquisition of a broad cultural knowledge of Hispanic issues through two texts and/or films. While mentioning a third text or film was possible, it was generally felt that concentrating on two led to better answers containing a more profound level of analysis. The best essays were comprehensive in their approach, showed good understanding of underlying themes and were written in highly accurate Spanish showing a certain sophistication and even a sense of idiom. Less successful answers tended to be more narrative in their approach and the language used was less accurate and sophisticated, even if communication never broke down.

Candidates tackled four of the eight authors available in **Part II**: Pedro Calderón de la Barca, Pablo Neruda, Ernesto Sábato and Gabriel García Márquez. The nature of this part of the paper differs from the previous section in that answers are written in English and, therefore, a higher degree of literary appreciation and more detailed textual analysis are expected. The best candidates clearly displayed detailed knowledge and sustained analysis of the texts in question, and they managed to structure their essays coherently and also to include a comprehensive introduction and conclusion. At the bottom end, scripts showed some limitations of insight, omitted important information or included irrelevant material with the result that some essays deviated unnecessarily from the question title. This was particularly the case in some answers to the context questions, which at times lacked focus on the extract and went on to explore general themes of the works studied, bearing little relation to the passage in the examination paper.

Comments on specific questions

Part I: Cultural Topics

Question 1

- A** Answers were based on *¡Ay, Carmela!* and either *La plaza del Diamante* or *Réquiem por un campesino español*. The best candidates concluded that there was a lot of violence in these works but that it was not gratuitous as it tried to reflect the political and social turmoil at the time of the Civil War. There was a good discussion of examples taken from the texts/film, including anarchist actions and public executions in Rodoreda, Carmela's death in Saura or Paco's tragic end in Sender. At times, the word *nacionalista* was misused, as the Spanish for the nationalist side of the Civil War is *el bando nacional*. One candidate misunderstood the question to mean whether violence was gratuitous in real life during the Spanish Civil War.
- B** This was a more popular question attracting many answers based on two of the three works. Many essays were thoughtful and well argued, even if at times there was more emphasis on one of the texts. In the case of Rodoreda, Colometa's attempt to kill her two children and herself out of desperation could have been better discussed by some candidates, while the distinction between Paulino and Carmela's attitude in the film was often well tackled. Paco's altruism and political engagement in Sender's novel paved the way for very interesting scripts. It was noticed that love for the family was not always the prime motive for action, as social concerns have an important role too.



Question 3

- A** There were excellent discussions of the feminist elements present in Almodóvar's films, which were interpreted as a reaction against the sexism and general lack of freedom suffered by Spain during Franco's dictatorship. Many examples of this were given, from the importance of female solidarity in *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios* or *Todo sobre mi madre* to the horrors of sexual abuse in *Volver*. Men in these films are often either absent or a source of trouble. On the other hand, there was little analysis of the possible sexist elements in the films, from the depiction of certain women as ridiculous or hysterical to the rather patriarchal defence of traditional self-sacrificing mothers.
- B** There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.

Question 4

- A** An important number of candidates tackled this question successfully. Answers centred on *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* and *Los ríos profundos*. Essays analysed the centrality of nature in the Indian worldview, which is prevalent in Rigoberta Menchú's society, given that the earth is considered to be the mother of all human beings, who show high respect for it and ask permission before sowing the land. In the case of Arguedas, it was noted that Ernesto exemplifies the connection between man and the natural order, and the importance of Pachachaca was also discussed, but the meaning of the title was not always analysed in this context.
- B** Answers were generally full and even passionate at times, as they reflected the continuous oppression suffered by the indigenous populations of Central and South American since the time of the Spanish conquest. Many examples were cited, from cases of torture affecting Rigoberta Menchú and her immediate family to the fragmentation of the Indian voice through different languages. The case of *la opa Marcelina* was also often mentioned and the best scripts discussed the symbolic status of Añuco and Lleras as opposed to *el indio Palacios*. Ernesto's internal conflict could have been dealt with more productively. Some of the scripts lacked enough focus on the question, and could have discussed whether the main characters win their personal battle against oppression more fully.

Question 5

- A** This was the most popular question in this section, often producing excellent answers based on *La casa de Bernarda Alba* and *Como agua para chocolate* (both the novel and the film were acceptable for Esquivel's work). Candidates noticed the assumption of a patriarchal role by both widows, Bernarda and Mamá Elena, and the fact that these mothers are more concerned with *honra* and *el qué dirán* than with the actual happiness of their children (Adela, Tita, Gertrudis). It was noted that relationships were only positive when established with daughters who also accept patriarchy and tradition (Angustias or Rosaura). Weaker answers were too narrative in their approach or inexplicably failed to discuss crucial characters such as Adela.
- B** An important number of candidates tackled this question successfully. There was no right or wrong answer as to whether the deaths of Adela and Tita represent some sort of triumph for these two characters, but the best scripts made a distinction between them. For many, Adela's suicide led to her personal liberation from Bernarda's tyranny but did not break the cyclical nature of Lorca's oppressive world, as her mother proclaims that she has died a virgin. On the other hand, Tita might have died childless and not being able to achieve total happiness in this life, but her battle against tradition is victorious in relation to the next generation, as represented by Esperanza and Alex Brown. Poorer scripts displayed some internal contradictions or were relatively weak on one of the two texts.

Part II: Literary Texts

Question 6

- A** There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.
- B** This question was tackled well by a number of candidates, who stressed the fact that the play could be described as an intense psychological drama dealing with themes such as honour, love, power, identity, revenge, despair, instincts, sexuality and father-son relationships. Calderón ensured that the play was 'in touch with flesh-and-blood life' precisely because he wanted his audience to be able to relate to the characters and their problems. The discussion of theological elements such as fate and predestination was also present in answers, but there was little attempt to relate these to Reformation or Counter-Reformation religious dogma.
- C** Several candidates answered the question on the ultimate aim of *La vida es sueño*. The best candidates found examples to show that the play gives equal importance to *enseñanza* and *deleite*, and that it could not function properly without one of these two aspects typical of the *comedia* tradition. Concepts such as predestination (*mirad que vais a morir si está de Dios que muráis*), morality (*aun en sueños no se pierde el hacer bien*) or life as a dream were discussed alongside more entertaining elements such as the presence of humour through the figure of Clarín, the fast-moving plot, classical references, suspense, the fascination exerted by characters such as Rosaura and Segismundo, or certain stylistic techniques enhancing the beauty and elegance of dialogues. Weaker scripts did not engage with the text of the play so directly, they developed their ideas less cogently, or they simply quoted in English.

Question 8

- A** Not surprisingly, many candidates turned to the poem, as it gave plenty of opportunity to write a detailed commentary on it and relate it to the main themes in the collection. Interpretations varied, but there was pertinent analysis of the nautical imagery used, the sexual nature of the relationship described, the conflict represented by a series of antithetical pairings, the difficulty of establishing real communication, as well as relevant cross-references to other poems. It was crucial to comment closely on the form and content of the poem while not forgetting the overall picture of the message it conveys. There were a few problems of misinterpretation (for example, thinking that the masculine singular adjective *pálido* can refer to the female lover) and some answers did not directly address the question of how the poet views the nature of love and/or the act of loving.
- B** There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate, but in one case there was repeated paraphrasing of poems in English to the detriment of quotations in the Spanish original.
- C** This proved to be a popular question answered by a number of candidates. Essays were particularly strong, as they discussed the objectification of women by the lyrical first person, who is possessive of the lover for his own sexual gratification. Some candidates argued that, rather than patriarchal sexism, the poet's attitude suggests a lack of understanding of women and their sexuality. He silences the lover (*me gustas cuando callas*) and at times uses militaristic language to describe her (*te forjé como a un arma*), which suggests that he has absolute power over her (even to create her). At the same time, the poet shows himself to be dependent on her and totally vulnerable in her absence. Quotations from a range of poems were often used pertinently to illustrate certain points.

Question 10

- A** The context question gave rise to a number of highly successful commentaries which stayed close to the text. Candidates mentioned the insight which the extract gives us into Castel's analytical and forensic mind, his personal isolation and disdain for society, his progressive psychological disintegration, and the use of animal imagery. This is his nadir, when the perceived similarity between the prostitute and María Iribarne starts pointing in the direction of self-destruction and murder.

- B** This question also produced many interesting answers discussing to what extent real communication was established between Castel and María. Some candidates argued that there was a certain degree of communication in that María became for him not only a lover but also some sort of maternal figure. On the other hand, a profound emotional relationship was impossible as a result of his deep mistrust of humanity (*siempre detestable*). Art is not enough to redeem him. His constant accusations, based not on concrete evidence of María's infidelity but on his rather perverse logic, make it impossible for him to shatter the barriers separating him from his lover and the rest of the world. He is and will always be in the tunnel he has built for himself. In this context, some scripts contained insightful interpretations of Castel's second dream (having turned into a bird).
- C** There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.

Question 12

- A** This was the most popular question in the whole examination, and it produced a whole range of valid answers. The best among them analysed the text closely, and what it says about the obsessive feeling of collective guilt after Santiago Nasar's brutal murder, the role of fate as perceived by the local inhabitants, as well as the importance of the honour code. Some candidates discussed the apparent journalistic style of the passage and the use of hyperbole, even if very few scripts mentioned the presence of magic realism. As stated in some scripts, this extract helps us come to terms with the full impact of Santiago's death. On the other hand, less successful answers lacked focus on the passage and contained some material which was interesting but not altogether relevant to the question being asked.
- B** Several candidates concentrated on this question with variable success. At the top end, there were interesting answers analysing a number of episodes which involve animals, from the gutting of rabbits in the kitchen (foreshadowing Santiago's horrible death) to the preparation of cockerels' crest soup (indicating the bishop's wastefulness and the general iniquity of the Church), Plácida's misinterpretation of the dream about birds, and the twins as pig-farmers using rusty knives for the murder. Santiago's killing constitutes a ritualistic act, as the young man becomes a sacrificial victim on the altar of honour. Some essays also discussed the symbolic relationship of the male members of the Nasar family with falconry.
- C** An important number of candidates answered this question. Some scripts discussed the journalistic style of what pretends to be a chronicle, which might make us think at first sight that we are dealing with a faithful account of the events, even if some of the detail is explained through the distorting lens of magic realism. Other scripts emphasised the fact that we cannot trust an unnamed narrator who was emotionally and perhaps even personally involved in the tragic story of Nasar's death, a man who is always so mysterious about dates and places. The townspeople give contradictory information about what the weather was like on the day, as memory is a kind of broken mirror which needs to be reconstructed by putting together the pieces very patiently. This question was not about whether the events described are a faithful account of the real-life murder on which they are based, but rather on the internal reliability of the narrator within the story itself.