

Spanish (continuers)

2014 Chief Assessor’s Report

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Overview

Chief Assessors’ reports give an overview of how students performed in their school and external assessments in relation to the learning requirements, assessment design criteria, and performance standards set out in the relevant subject outline. They provide information and advice regarding the assessment types, the application of the performance standards in school and external assessments, the quality of student performance, and any relevant statistical information.

School Assessment

Assessment Type 1: Folio

Most folios submitted for moderation complied with the assessment format prescribed in the subject outline. Overall, tasks were appropriately designed for the purpose of assessing students’ level of skill in Spanish. Although the extent and complexity of responses varied greatly, most students were able to successfully produce relevant and appropriate responses in Spanish with a good level of accuracy. Most students showed a fluent command of spoken Spanish and an ability to extract information and interpret intention from both written and oral texts. Overall, students were quite able to express their insights on cultural differences, language features, and their own learning.

Moderators noticed a tendency by some teachers to ask closed questions during oral interaction task with students, even when students demonstrated some ability to initiate and maintain the conversation. Teachers are reminded that the student’s elaboration of ideas and capacity to interact in Spanish are essential elements of the assessment design criteria, and that open-ended questions give students the best opportunity to demonstrate their level of skill.

Teachers are also reminded to describe the performance of students according to the grades described in the performance standards.

Assessment Type 2: In-Depth Study

Most students showed a good overall level of skill in Spanish in the in-depth study, particularly in conveying clear ideas in a consistent and organised manner.

Students are advised that just slightly adapting an English version of the facts and presenting it in Spanish may not address the specific feature IR3 (reflection). Some tasks were suitably designed to provide opportunities for student reflection, but it would seem that, in general, students required more guidance from teachers. Moderators noted a tendency of a range of students to read their entire presentation in Spanish. Students may have notes for their presentation but should not read the script of the in-depth study presentation.

The more successful in-depth studies included not only a vast array of information about the topic of choice using a high standard of Spanish, but also showed a sound understanding of the influence, importance, and/or nature of the topic. The best in-depth studies detailed selected aspects of the topic. It is recommended that students avoid generic, superficial treatment of well-known topics (e.g. Frida Kahlo’s biography, descriptions of La Alhambra, celebrations for Mexican Día de los Muertos) and focus on a selection of particular relevant aspects (e.g. Frida Kahlo’s painful experiences, La Alhambra’s significance in Hispanic–Muslim art, the connections of Día de los Muertos to Aztec tradition). Moderators and examiners identified the topic of ‘My Family’ as particularly unsuitable for this assessment type.

External Assessment

Assessment Type 3: Examination

**Oral Examination**

The overall performance of most students was very good. Most students managed the interaction well, displayed good manners, and used conventional greetings. It was obvious to examiners that most students had been well advised how to prepare for the examination and most of them were adequately prepared.

The most successful discussions were original in their treatment of the topic or reflected a personal interest in it. Discussion topics included social issues in Hispanic countries (e.g. Spain’s financial crisis, immigration), celebrations (e.g. El Rocío, Fallas), and contemporary artists and institutions (e.g. Antonio Gaudi, Picasso, Dali, Isabel Allende).

Students are encouraged to bring to the oral examination, whenever possible, any suitable graphic materials to support their discussion. These materials may help maintain and extend the discussion.

Practise for the oral examination is essential and students are encouraged to participate in as many opportunities as possible to speak Spanish. It is also important to remember that there are many different and distinctive Spanish accents and it is most advisable for schools to try to expose students to these different styles of speech.

**Section 1: Conversation**

Generally, all students were able to maintain a conversation in Spanish with the examiners. Answers ranged from very basic and formulaic responses to excellent, well-considered responses. Most students maintained natural conversations in Spanish even when the examiners moved away from the rehearsed questions, and showed a good level of understanding in Spanish that required only minor rephrasing.

Students are reminded that, in this section of the examination, the examiners take into account fluency and the natural flow of the conversation, as well as accuracy. Therefore, hesitations and requests for clarification are not necessarily considered to be evidence of lack of skill, but just a regular part of a natural conversation.

As in previous years, a large proportion of students made a conscious effort to interact positively with the examiners and posed their own questions, where this was appropriate in a formal examination setting.

Students are reminded that any sample questions available on the SACE website are not prescriptive and that they should not expect such questions to be asked in this same format in the course of the examination. Some students experienced difficulties when examiners phrased the questions differently or when examiners rephrased the student’s own response.

Most students had clear expression, with many demonstrating fluency in Spanish. Students are reminded to speak slowly and clearly, in order to minimise any potentially negative impact of an accent. Students should be particularly careful when pronouncing vowels and some distinctive sounds such as *h* (silent), *que*, /t/, /r/, or /ñ/.

Accuracy was usually very good and in some cases it was outstanding. Some common mistakes included the incorrect use of preterite and imperfect conjugation endings when talking about the past, and incorrect use of *por*, *para*, *ser*, *estar*, etc. Students are encouraged to use structures and expressions like *gustar*, *encantar*,and *molestar*,which are favoured in Spanish over typical expressions in English, such as passive voice.

In general, students performed very well, using a wide range of vocabulary and sentence structures, especially when talking about the present, past, and future. Some students found it more challenging to deal with hypothetical situations, which require use of conditional tenses, and to express accurate opinions, which often require the use of subjunctive tenses.

Successful students had prepared for the examination and demonstrated the capacity to go beyond minimal responses, making use of different linguistic resources (e.g. a variety of structures, tenses, expressions) and avoiding very simple responses such as ‘I like it’, ‘It’s good’, ‘It’s interesting’.

It is acknowledged that students tend to address their teachers and classmates in a casual way in the classroom, therefore preferring the forms with *tú* over *usted*. Some examiners also prefer to be addressed using casual forms, as this can create a relaxed atmosphere during the examination and is consistent with students’ practice in the classroom. This poses a dilemma for some schools since an examination is, by nature, a formal setting in which students usually meet the examiners for the first time, and courtesy and politeness are expected from all participants. It is advisable to start any conversation in a polite, formal manner and perhaps shift to a more casual register if appropriate, after being prompted to do so (*tutéame*; *puedes tutearme*; *trátame de tú, por favor*), or after checking with the other speaker (e.g. *¿puedo tutearla/o?*, *¿está bien si uso ‘tú’?*).

**Section 2: Discussion**

Most students performed well in this section. As in previous years, the nature of the chosen topic and the approach of each student to it played a big part in each student’s success in this section.

Students who prepared well for this section gave appropriate answers to examiners’ questions on their topic, and offered their own opinions. Students are reminded to be prepared to expand on their chosen topic when answering the examiners’ questions.

Examiners noted that most topics for discussion were varied and well planned. Depending on the topic chosen for discussion, some students may have benefited from bringing relevant support materials such as maps, photographs, or charts.

Some students demonstrated an adequate capacity to convey information accurately and appropriately, and many students showed a very high level of proficiency. It is important, however, for students to check the pronunciation of new, long, or difficult words that they encounter in their research.

As in the conversation, the overall command of grammar was adequate and in some cases outstanding. The usual problems, such as the use of *ser* versus *estar*, or the use of *por* versus *para*, had an expected and minor presence, but were not an issue.

It was good to note that most students chose relevant topics for discussion and that they prepared appropriately. Most topics chosen lent themselves to interpretation and reflection, which is one of the assessment design criteria assessed through the discussion. Students are reminded to choose a topic that fits with the themes ‘The Spanish-speaking Communities’ or ‘The Changing World’.

Students are advised to prepare a thorough in-depth study and refrain from relying solely on their oral skills to do well in the discussion section of the examination. Students are reminded that they may start with a brief introduction to the subject; for example, what is it or who is the person selected, the relevance of their choice, and the reasons for having chosen the topic.

Students are reminded that expressing opinion plays a part in the assessment for this section, and that students are expected to be able to analyse and summarise information, rather than just reproduce it.

Students are reminded to bring the In-depth Study Outline for Oral Examination form to the oral examination, as this helps examiners to organise the order and flow of their questions.

Students should keep in mind that they need to demonstrate some ability in handling abstract topics, mainly by expressing opinions with some degree of elaboration. Teachers may help students to prepare for this aspect of the discussion by practising relevant structures in Spanish that are common in this kind of language (e.g. *es importante (porque …)*, *en consecuencia, por otro lado, de manera similar, me interesa (que)*).

**Written Examination**

Overall students performed well in the written examination. As in previous years, there were some outstanding performances and a few insufficient responses, but most students managed to successfully extract information, relate concepts, and summarise content in Spanish.

It is important for students to be familiar not only with essential features in different text types, but also with all kinds of discourse markers in Spanish.

Although most students demonstrated a good understanding of texts, they did not always provide sufficient relevant evidence in their responses. Students should remember that, when requested, justifying their responses with evidence from the text is an essential part of many questions in order to obtain full marks. The best answers are generally not word for word as in the text provided, but rather they provide an appropriate response to the question, demonstrating comprehensive understanding.

**Section 1: Listening and Responding**

There were five texts in Spanish, all of them varying in length and nature. At least four questions asked about the purpose or tone of the verbal exchanges included in the texts, a task that required interpretative rather than translation skills. As in past years, most students answered in general terms, but a minority demonstrated that they understood the specific information. More importantly, the most successful responses addressed what each specific question required, and provided not only relevant supporting evidence from the texts, but also some degree of elaboration and synthesis.

Some questions required more thorough elaboration from the students; that is, a more exhaustive scanning of both the content and language features in each text. This section of the examination includes a variety of spoken texts and teachers should ensure that students are exposed to a wide range of spoken Spanish during the teaching and learning program.

Students demonstrated a coherent organisation of information and ideas.

*Question 1*

The interpretation of meaning and the analysis of the language in this text was generally appropriate. In order to gain full marks for this question, students had to identify that Jorge’s application for work experience in a hospital had been approved and then explain that he had to contact head office to arrange a meeting to organise his trip.

*Question 2*

Part (c), ‘What message does Professor Escalante wish to convey?’, presented some confusion to some students. Some students interpreted the text as conveying the idea that, if whales are not cared for and protected, they will become extinct. Professor Escalante wished to convey, however, that we must continue to protect the whales and remember how close the whales came to becoming extinct.

*Question 3*

For part (a), ‘What made Joanna change her holiday plans?’, a small number of students interpreted that Joanna changed her holiday plans because a family friend asked her to learn the Mayan language, but they failed to understand that the main reason Joanna changed her plans is to go on a dig at the pyramids in Mexico. For part (b), students had to correctly identify that learning Mayan enabled her to study archaeology and write an article about pyramids.

*Question 4*

The interpretation of meaning and the analysis of the language in this text was generally appropriate. Most students were able to identify lightning as the danger discussed in the text . Some students were able to identify that swimmers should leave the water and car drivers should get into the car and close the door. In order to gain full marks for part (c), at least two examples of relevant information had to be identified. This included not making phone calls, avoiding tall structures, and not allowing children to play outside.

*Question 5*

Most students were able to correctly identify that it might be difficult to visit the location because of the lack of accessibility. Some students were able to demonstrate comprehensive understanding of the text by identifying the community as a traditional southern community and including supporting evidence such as mountain water to drink, traditional buildings, and local specialty foods (e.g. tortillas, meatballs, hams, rabbit paella).

**Section 2: Reading and Responding**

**Part A**

This section consisted of two texts. The interpretation of meaning and the analysis of the language in the texts was generally appropriate.

*Question 6*

Many students gained full marks for this question and were correctly able to identify the virtual language learning program and the presenter’s surprise that many children were not receiving the education they deserved. In part (c), most responses gained full marks, by identifying at least two groups who would benefit most from the project; the groups included students with disabilities, remote students, and international students. Some students did not gain full marks for part (d) because they were unable to support their answer with direct evidence from the text, such as the program being interactive, having live activities which allowed for engagement with peer groups so that learning could occur in a social way.

*Question 7*

Responses to this question were generally done very well. To gain full marks, students had to fully describe the flower festival, which includes some reference to the flowers being in full bloom, many people celebrating, a parade, and the chairs being carried by local men. Most students were able to demonstrate comprehensive understanding of the text by identifying the flowers as symbolising Medellin culture, customs, and life, and explaining the meaning of ‘*se viste*’ as the town being covered or ‘dressed’ in flowers for the special event. Responses to part (c) were done less well, as many students were able to identify that the author enjoyed the fair, but they did not provide comprehensive evidence from the text. Students needed to make reference to the positive vocabulary choices, such as‘beautiful’, ‘paradise’, ‘pleasant’, ‘brilliance’, and ‘amazing’.

**Part B**

This is a reading and responding task which requires students to base their arguments on information included in the text.

*Question 8*

The text managed to prompt many personal responses, which varied greatly in nature, style, and complexity. There were, overall, a large number of appropriate responses, with a high number of students achieving high grades, although the task proved to be challenging for some students.

Most students showed a good understanding of the text features required for the task, such as use of an informal register and inclusion of a greeting and farewell.

As in previous years, successful responses showed a good command of syntax, verb conjugation, and the use of pronouns and prepositions. Common mistakes included inappropriate use of *por* and *para*; the use of *ser* instead of *estar*; improper choice of adjective or adverb (e.g. *bueno* instead of *bien*); incorrect choice of the prepositions *pero* and *sino*; and the use of the indicative mood when the subjunctive was required. Examiners are aware that it is usually impossible to avoid all these mistakes (and others); however, students lost marks when their mistakes, especially consistent mistakes, hindered the natural flow of the text or affected the meaning of the message. Students are reminded that, in order to produce successful texts, a sound command of verb conjugation is essential.

Students with some access to Spanish-speaking communities should be especially careful when transcribing language they have acquired orally (e.g. *catha* for the correct *caza*, *deberdá* for *de verdad*, or *mi iho* for *me dijo*).

**Section 3: Writing in Spanish**

Three topics of varying nature were available for the students to choose from, and they were chosen in approximately equal numbers.

*Questions 9, 10, and 11*

Markers were satisfied with the overall ability of this year’s students to produce written texts and awarded many high marks for this section.

Most students, with only a few exceptions, managed to produce well-structured texts that showed relevant and coherent ideas, if sometimes lacking a little in detail and sophistication. Markers noted that there was generally a good ability demonstrated to cope with the demands of the task.

Many responses showed a good command of syntax and a sound knowledge of the conventions for each text type. Independently of their level of skill, some students showed some degree of inconsistency in register or tone. Overall, there was a good capacity to convey information accurately by using different structures, such as subjunctives, comparatives, and connectors.

Some common mistakes included: absence of appropriate accents and other punctuation signs, use of present continuous after a preposition, improper choice of adjective versus adverb, inappropriate verb regime, incorrect construction of ‘back-to-front’ verbs, lack of correspondence for gender or number, wrong verb ending or conjugation, improper use of Spanglish, improper choice of past tense in narrations, absence of definitive article, and incorrect choice of indicative or subjunctive. It was noted that some paragraphs and sentences were not organised in sequence.

Students are reminded to take some time to check punctuation, spelling, and syntax after completing their responses. It is also very important for students to have a basic but solid command of the use of the subjunctive, since this conjugation is constantly needed in Spanish for the expression of ideas and opinions.

Operational Advice

School assessment tasks are set and marked by teachers. Teachers’ assessment decisions are reviewed by moderators. Teacher grades/marks should be evident on all student school assessment work.

In general, materials for moderation provided by schools were adequately packaged and organised. However, not all schools included clearly identifiable learning and assessment plans, and the addendum (if applicable). Occasionally, a school did not include all assessment tasks for moderation or provide an explanation for this absence using the Variations — Moderation Materials form. Schools are reminded to organise students’ work by assessment type.

To ensure the consistency and fairness of the assessment across schools, it is essential that all student materials are easily accessible, clearly organised, and correctly labelled. Most importantly, all care should be taken when recording and processing students’ grades for each particular assessment type, to prevent clerical errors.

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