

SPANISH

Paper 8685/01

Speaking

General comments

For the most part, the moderation process ran smoothly. Moderators would like to thank those Centres whose staff followed the instructions in the syllabus and carried out the conduct of the test in a competent and professional manner.

Unfortunately, there appeared to be an increase in the small, but significant, number of Centres this session where lapses in the administration procedure caused disproportionate inconvenience and delays to the moderation of candidates' work. The nature of such lapses has been well documented in earlier reports and, again, the main difficulties were brought about by the failure of some Centres to send the complete set of marks on the working mark sheets. It is necessary to stress once more that all marks awarded must be shown: section totals or overall totals on their own will not suffice and will mean that the original marks cannot be accepted as Moderators have no way of confirming how the Centre's marks were arrived at. Working mark sheets must show a mark for each of the assessment criteria for each section of the test, i.e. thirteen columns: three for Section 1 and five each for Sections 2 and 3.

There were more instances this session of some Centres not acquainting themselves fully with the marking grids – there were a number of cases where, for example, for 'Seeking Information and Opinions', a mark of 7 or 8 was awarded where the maximum is 5.

There were a few problems with recording quality and sometimes candidates were not clearly identified. Please ensure that names and numbers are listed on the cassette or CD cover and also announced at the start of each test. Please avoid turning over the tape in mid test, and re-wind tapes to the start before sending them to CIE.

Topic presentation and discussion

Many candidates offered well-researched and relevant topics relating to the culture of the target-language country, though in some cases there was insufficient focus on, or only implied reference to, the specifically Hispanic perspective. This frequently happened, for example, with subjects such as leisure, the environment, health, drugs, etc. Care must always be taken in both the preparation by the candidate and in the questioning by the teacher/examiner to establish a firm link with the region or country concerned, and to go beyond general knowledge. Facts, figures and other significant data are all helpful indications here. A couple of Centres permitted candidates to present topics which had absolutely no relevance to the syllabus, such as 'my family', 'my education', or a favourite work of English literature.

As the presentation is a formal exercise in communication of information, enunciation, clear delivery and organisation are all important and relevant to the assessment; linguistic register should be appropriate to the task.

The topic conversation should take the form of a discussion. There was a tendency in some cases for the teacher/examiner to ask a series of prepared questions and allow the candidate to give mini-presentations without challenge. This does not allow the candidate to gain high credit for fluency and spontaneity.

Please remember that the candidate should be allowed (and reminded if necessary) to ask the teacher/examiner for opinions or information, though care should be taken for the teacher/examiner not to take over the talking at length, as was occasionally done.

General Conversation

After some initial questions on fairly everyday topics, the conversation should move on to more advanced issues as is appropriate at this level. Topics should allow the candidate to debate, argue, support a point and, importantly, show familiarity and competence with as wide a range of language as possible. There were some instances when candidates – even good ones – were kept at a rather low level and it is important that all candidates are given the opportunity to tackle the unpredictable and to perform at their highest possible level.

As in the topic conversation candidates should be given the opportunity to seek information and opinions, and should be rewarded appropriately for the relevance, spontaneity, and complexity of the questions.

SPANISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8685/02
Reading and Writing

General comments

The examination discriminated well, providing a good challenge across the ability range, and a full range of marks was awarded. There were encouraging signs that candidates had been made well aware of the format of the paper and its requirements, and only a few of the less able candidates appeared to find difficulty in completing within the allocated time.

There were fewer instances of lines of text being lifted from the passage in answer to questions, which is not only an indicator of good understanding of the passages, but is also a measure of candidates' confidence in their linguistic ability. However, on some occasions candidates attempted to answer questions with information from their own experience and not as it appeared in the texts. This could not be awarded any marks.

Candidates should be reminded that the information required to answer questions occurs sequentially throughout the texts. Marks can only be awarded if the answers are relevant to a particular question and not to one which appears earlier or later.

Another thing to be borne in mind is the number of marks attached to each question. A question which is worth 4 marks will be seeking four different points and is unlikely to be answerable in a mere one or two lines.

Comments on specific questions

SECCIÓN PRIMERA

Question 1

Seeking the equivalent expression in the text should by now be a very familiar exercise. It requires careful reading and understanding and, once the phrase has been identified, even greater care in ensuring that the words copied are an exact match to the stimulus phrase. On frequent occasions an otherwise correct answer was invalidated by the inclusion of surplus words either at the beginning or at the end of the answer.

- (a) Sadly, this was a good illustration of the above point. A number of candidates lost the mark by also including *la mayoría de los estudiantes* or *en clase*.
- (b) & (c) These proved to be the most accessible questions in the exercise with the majority of candidates correctly identifying them.
- (d) This was more challenging, with correct responses sometimes invalidated by the addition of *en nuestras relaciones*.
- (e) Correct identification was frequently marred by including *pero* as a prefix.

Question 2

This transformation exercise was a good test of knowledge and application of grammatical structure. In addition, candidates had to be careful to commence their answer with the word given and also to make certain that it would fit seamlessly into the original text.

- (a) Good candidates responded confidently producing several permissible variations. Less able candidates seemed to have little knowledge of the required structure.

- (b) *Hay que* + infinitive was correctly identified as appropriate by many. A few candidates lost marks by omitting *lo*.
- (c) A transformation from active to passive (or vice versa) is a perennial favourite in this exercise. Care must be taken to maintain the same verb tense as in the stimulus, (in this case the perfect), as answers such as *es usado* were rejected.
- (d) There were many correct answers for this transformation.
- (e) Although simple in appearance this manipulation caught out many candidates. Even those who successfully came up with *está preocupado* or *se preocupa* frequently overlooked that it was necessary to add *por*.

Question 3

The text was accessible to candidates with the vast majority readily latching on to the idea that traditional writing by hand is being replaced by new technologies.

- (a) As this was a question worth 4 marks candidates should have realised that to simply answer 'the author reinforces his assertion with a series of rhetorical questions' was unlikely to score the maximum. In fact, such an answer did not score any marks, as what was required was clear reference to the examples given of how the use of new technologies has replaced writing by hand.
- (b) Many candidates picked up both marks for this question. Those who did not often introduced information that did not appear in the text, e.g. *Pueden tomar apuntes de una forma más rápida* or *Pueden tomar apuntes con el ordenador en clase*.
- (c) As PIN numbers are regularly used when visiting the bank or supermarket in person it was essential for candidates to mention the use of the Internet or a 'remote' transaction in their answers.
- (d) This question appeared to capture candidates' imagination and, no matter what the linguistic ability was, produced many good and interesting answers.
- (e) Again, candidates should be reminded that an answer carrying 4 marks merits careful attention. The question referred to *los últimos dos párrafos* and the information required was spread evenly between them. Too many candidates felt that they had done enough by only partially answering the question.

SECCIÓN SEGUNDA

Question 4

This was another text which seemed not to pose too many problems of comprehension and, if anything, produced slightly higher scores than **Question 3**.

- (a) Most candidates scored full marks on this opening question with the majority being of the opinion that the principal motive for reading was relaxation.
- (b) Not so many candidates scored all 3 marks available for this question. The most common omission was *los manuales de instrucciones* and further elaboration was not always forthcoming on what exactly constitutes *una afición*.
- (c) Happily, this was an occasion when many candidates did take full advantage of all the marks on offer, mentioning all the differences between male and female reading habits listed in the third paragraph.
- (d) This was another question where candidates commonly scored well, although some went to elaborate statistical lengths to score 1 mark for saying that 'young people read more than the elderly'. The valid opinions given for why this might appear surprising were usually well-argued and imaginative.

- (e) The full 4 marks were not so easy to come by on this two-part question. Otherwise correct answers which were given to the wrong part-question could not be credited.

Question 5

- (a) What was needed in this summary exercise was an outline of five main points from each text delivered within the confines of approximately one hundred words. Here there were no penalties for failing to paraphrase nor did the level of Spanish necessarily have to be of the highest order to score the 10 marks for Content.

Those candidates who were aware of the required technique scored well. Sadly, there were a number of candidates, whose performance on earlier parts of the paper showed that they had clearly understood the texts, who failed to score many of the easily available marks here.

Introductory statements such as 'the first text talks about the current situation with regard to writing by hand and the second text talks about reading habits' scored no marks and were a needless waste of precious words. Further bland generalisations went equally unrewarded.

To do well in this exercise candidates should single out relevant facts which answer the question and which, in many cases, they will have already highlighted in answers to earlier parts of the paper.

- (b) Although the message does seem to be getting through, the main pitfall in this part of the question is experienced by candidates who disregard the 140 total word count for both parts of **Question 5**. If 140 words have already been used for the summary then no marks will be available for this part of the question.

For the majority of candidates who had retained sufficient words to write two or three sentences giving a few opinions or ideas about the popularity of reading or writing by hand in their countries, the full range of marks was easily available.

The general consensus amongst candidates was that reading still enjoys widespread popularity but the future of writing by hand looks to be a lost cause.

SPANISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8685/03

Essay

General Comments

It is with tremendous satisfaction that Examiners can report once again that the overall standard of performance this year was very good indeed. Most candidates in most Centres (together with most teachers) clearly have a full understanding of the demands of this paper and are consequently able to produce an essay that is relevant to the title set, grammatically secure and with a good blend of factual statement and personal opinion. There were fewer examples this year of essays that had been pre-learnt and reproduced under examination conditions regardless of the actual title chosen by the candidate. Those few candidates who elected to do this, however, lost marks heavily for content. Without doubt, this will always be the response from Examiners when faced with a blatant disregard for the detail of the actual essay title.

A clear sense of structural control allied with the intelligent use of paragraphing in order to make important points were apparent in many essays. Candidates who produced pieces of writing that were detailed, clearly relevant to the chosen topic and title, coherently argued and easy to read will have scored high marks both for language and for content. Essays in which ideas were presented at random and the trail of thought was difficult to discern together with an unstable grasp of the very basic principles of Spanish grammar will have scored far fewer marks for language and content.

As has been the case for several years now, the quality and originality of thought of many essays impressed Examiners. Unexpected angles, unusual interpretations and unpredictable conclusions, provided they manage to address the title, can often score good marks for content. It is worth remembering that there are no right or wrong answers as far as essay writing is concerned. Quality of interpretation, cogent lines of thought and the ability to convey a set of ideas are all important objectives for candidates.

Examiners' reports over the last few years have congratulated the majority of candidates for showing commendable discipline in keeping within the word count stipulated in the rubric (i.e. 250 – 400 words). The same applies this year. It is simply not worth the effort for a candidate to exceed the word limit in an attempt to cram in more ideas, more impressive language, more detailed conclusions and the like. Such attempts will invariably end in disappointment for the candidate given that marks will be lost for rubric infringement.

In terms of language, areas of concern of a similar nature to the last few years were apparent. Spanish accents, despite previous mentions on numerous occasions, continue to cause problems for a small but significant number of candidates. Confusion with the use of the preterite and imperfect tenses was also a feature, even in some very good essays. As is nearly always the case, the correct use of the subjunctive in Spanish evaded many candidates. Examples such as *...pero no creo que es un problema hoy...* [sic.] and *los padres quieren que sus hijos tienen una buena educación* [sic.] were common. Equally, an annoying but increasingly common problem concerns itself with adjectival agreement. Candidates who hedge their bets and produce an adjectival ending which should be, for example, feminine plural but which looks like it could be masculine plural because of a lack of clarity in the handwriting (i.e. the 'a' could be an 'o') will generally not get the benefit of doubt from an Examiner.

Comments on individual questions

Question 1 *La barrera generacional*

A popular choice for many candidates. Most agreed that conflict between the generations is inevitable and natural but that clear lines of communication are important.

Question 2 *Los medios de comunicación*

A title avoided by many candidates. Those who attempted it did indeed write with impressive conviction about the nature of free speech in a democratic setting. This combined with a linguistically mature approach to essay writing often resulted in first rate responses.

Question 3 *La enseñanza*

A hugely popular title indeed, perhaps predictably so. There was a clear consensus of opinion that suggested that a good teacher is a vital element in the learning process.

Question 4 *El mundo en vías de desarrollo*

There were very few takers for this particular title.

Question 5 *La vida cultural*

This title was, unexpectedly perhaps, one which many candidates elected to overlook. Most of the responses argued that a charge for entry into a museum or art gallery was a reasonable proposition, provided it was not excessive. There was the occasional plea for all artistic endeavour to be free for all to appreciate.