
GCSE

SPANISH

8698/SF Speaking Foundation tier
Report on the Examination

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General Comments

On the whole, the first series of this new specification was successful, with a lot of well-conducted tests in the majority of centres. There are some lessons to be learnt in other centres and this report will highlight the key issues and show how they can be tackled for the benefit of students' marks.

The standard of students' work varied enormously, but even the less able students in Foundation tier were able to communicate something over the three parts of the test. The movement away from controlled assessment caused some problems and, in many centres, students delivered pre-learnt answers to questions in the general conversation.

There was a noticeable improvement in students' pronunciation compared with the last year of the legacy specification. This can probably be attributed to the fact that students are no longer learning questions by heart and they have to think more carefully about what they are trying to convey. This was very encouraging and it is really good to see that teachers are spending considerable time on this very important skill.

Recordings were generally clear, but occasionally they were not. Sometimes this was the result of faulty equipment and, at other times, it was down to poor positioning of the recording device. Teachers are asked to check the quality of any recording devices well in advance of the tests and to replace ones that are poor. Examiners cannot give credit for what they cannot hear.

Timings were usually appropriate for the tier, but in a significant number of centres this was not the case. This will be dealt with later, with reference to the photo card and, especially, to the general conversation.

Students are expected to use repair strategies, if needed, throughout the test. Part of this is to ask for clarification or repetition. Many teachers had taught their students to say things such as *Repíte, por favor* or *¿Cómo?* When students asked for repetition in English, the subsequent reply was credited for communication, but, in the case of the role-play and general conversation, it was something that could contribute to a lower mark for use of language.

The subject content also requires students to ask questions and a question needs to be asked in both the role-play and in the general conversation. It must be in the form of a question and **not** a request for information through an imperative, such as *Describe tu casa*.

In the role-play and photo card sections, if a student gives a complete, although incorrect, answer to a question, the mark given is zero, even if the teacher then repeats the question and a correct answer ensues. Some teachers pursued a correct answer in this way and at times it seemed to affect the student's confidence. However, when a teacher recognised that a student was starting to give a wrong answer and interjected by repeating the question, any subsequent correct answer was rewarded.

Examiners are encouraged to use a Speaking Scoresheet in order to arrive at fair and consistent marks for all students. A copy of this can be found at the back of the mark scheme.

Role-plays

The role-plays tended to be done at least reasonably well, even by students who performed less well on the photo card and/or general conversation. The use of cognates or very accessible vocabulary in the prompts on the Candidate's role usually enabled students to give an answer that was worth at least one of the two marks available for Communication. Clearly, this was not always the case and mention is made below of the tasks which caused the greatest challenge.

Teachers are reminded that they must keep to the script in the Teacher's Role unless the student's response makes it inappropriate. Failure to do so meant that the student's response regularly could not be credited.

The published mark scheme has more detail as to the kind of responses that were worthy of two, one or zero marks per task.

The mark for Knowledge and use of language usually corresponded with the mark for Communication.

Role-play 1

Task a

The teacher's prompt *¿En qué puedo ayudarle?* often confused students and they had to ask for repetition. It is an opening to a transactional role-play which will appear in most years and teachers are advised to ensure that their students understand that it is merely a cue for them to deliver a response to the first prompt.

Task b

This unprepared task was done well, with the majority understanding the key question word *¿cuántas?*

Task c

This caused problems for the vast majority of students who did this role-play. This was either because they merely gave their own name or because their attempt at spelling failed. Any understandable spelling of a first name or surname was accepted for two Communication marks, provided all letters were clearly pronounced.

Task d

Numbers tended to be well known, although a surprisingly high number of students did not answer at all. Something like *No tengo móvil* was credited with two marks.

Task e

This proved quite challenging for many students. *¿Qué es el precio para estudiantes?* was acceptable for two marks, but relatively few knew *¿Cuánto es?*

Role-play 2

Task a

This was done well, although poor pronunciation of *autobús* sometimes meant that only one mark could be awarded for Communication.

Task b

It was pleasing to see that most students understood *asignatura* and were able to give a favourite subject and a reason with a verb.

Task c

The question was frequently misunderstood, resulting in no response or an incorrect one.

Task d

Students often found the question task difficult and that was the case here. Successful attempts were usually straightforward, for example *¿Hay/tienes clubs en el/tu instituto?*

Task e

This was done well.

Role-play 3**Task a**

This caused problems, often because the word *talla* was not known.

Task b

This was done very well.

Task c

A surprising number of students did not know the word *quién*. Those who did usually got two marks for Communication.

Task d

Rebajas was not well known, but two marks for Communication were given for quite simple questions such as *¿Le/te gusta(n) (las) rebajas?*

Task e

This, along with other tasks which asked for an opinion, was done well by the majority.

Role-play 4**Task a**

Students are advised to read the rubric in English on the Candidate's role because this can make them aware of they are expected to do. This is especially true of the transactional role-plays. Here, the scene was a mobile phone shop in Spain. This would make students more aware of the fact that the first task was to ask for a certain model or make of mobile.

Task b

This was done very well.

Task c

The prompt seemed to be understood well, but sometimes the attempt at giving a use of a mobile was not successful.

Task d

As in task e in Role-play 1, relatively few knew *¿Cuánto es?*

Task e

This was done well.

Role-play 5

Task a

Most students could give two clear details about their uniform. This could be in the form of an opinion or a description.

Task b

Sports were well known.

Task c

This caused problems of comprehension for many and a good number said what they did in games lessons.

Task d

This was another opinion-giving task that was done well.

Task e

This was very mixed as far as quality of response went, but the usual successful attempts were along the lines of *¿Hay/tienes muchas/buenas instalaciones en el/tu colegio?*

Role-play 6

Task a

¿En qué puedo ayudarle? often confused students again. Many did not get two marks for Communication because the language used was too unclear to fully convey the message. Statements such as *Quisiera ir/voy a Madrid* gained two marks for Communication.

Task b

The prompt was usually understood by the student, but the pronunciation of the day of the week often meant that one or zero marks had to be given for Communication.

Task c

A surprisingly high number of students either did not understand the question or could not convey a time successfully.

Task d

This was done very badly. Very few students knew terms such as *Un billete de ida/primera clase*.

Task e

Some students got two marks for Communication by asking *¿Qué es la duración del viaje?*, but otherwise this was badly done. Very few students indeed knew *¿Cuánto tiempo?*

Role-play 7

Task a

Very often, students seemed not to understand *cuándo* and would give an inappropriate response, such as what they did at the gym.

Task b

This was done well.

Task c

This was done very well.

Task d

Comida was not known by many students.

Task e

As with most question-asking tasks, this caused problems. The most successful correct questions were *¿Fumas?* and *¿Te gusta fumar?*

Role-play 8

Task a

Novio/novia was often not known and many students did not attempt this task.

Task b

This tended to be done well. Sometimes *matrimonio* was interpreted as *boda*, but this was acceptable.

Task c

This was done well by a relatively small number of students.

Task d

Most students scored two marks through the use of a first person singular verb or the use of *me gusta* with an infinitive.

Task e

It appeared that some students did not know what to ask. Others scored two marks for Communication by asking questions such as *¿Tienes familia/hermanos?*

Role-play 9

Task a

This was done quite well, although some scored zero marks because they ignored *dónde* in the prompt on the Candidate's Role.

Task b

This was done well.

Task c

This was done very badly. Students seemed not to understand the question.

Task d

If the job was pronounced well, students usually scored two marks.

Task e

This was done very badly. Most students did not attempt it.

Photo cards

The two-minute maximum time for the photo card was adhered to for the most part and most students did not need more than a minute and a half to answer all five questions. The vast majority of teachers followed the guidance and asked the questions as printed in the Teacher's Booklet, or made minor changes but kept the same meaning. However, some changed or added to the questions significantly, which meant that the student's response could not be credited. By way of example, in the last question on photo card F, it was fine to change *en otro país* to *en el extranjero* because the same meaning was maintained. However, the addition of *por ejemplo, España* was not allowed because it gave an unfair advantage as far as comprehension was concerned.

In order to score in the top band, students needed to answer all questions clearly and develop three ('most') answers by using several clauses. There was no extra credit given in this question, which is marked for Communication only, for complex language. While accuracy and pronunciation are important factors, in order to achieve clarity, the range of language is not.

Students who scored in the top band almost invariably did this by providing clear information in the form of three or more clauses in reply to the prepared questions, for which they had time to write down what they were going to say. The language used tended to be quite simple. When students tried to use more complex language, they often lost clarity and this meant they were unlikely to score higher than 12 marks.

This part of the test discriminated very well and often there was a big difference in quality in the answers to the first three, prepared, questions and the other two, which were unprepared. This was to be expected and, as stated previously, those students who prepared straightforward answers which contained several clauses were the ones who fared the best.

The first question was always *¿Qué hay en la foto?* and students generally described the people in it and/or what they were doing. The photo that caused most problems in that regard was on photo card E. The main error was to use the verb *jugar* instead of *tocar* and this led to some very unclear messages.

Other questions discriminated well, with a wide range in the quality of answers, but there were some that were done noticeably less well than others. These were the ones which students found most challenging:

Photo card A

¿Qué te gustaría hacer en el futuro para no tener estrés?

Although this was a question which students could prepare, it was not answered well overall. However, some did answer well by saying such things as *Me gustaría descansar más. Me gusta ver películas y voy a salir con mis amigos porque es relajante.*

Photo card B

Aparte de sacar fotos, ¿cómo usaste la tecnología la semana pasada?

One of the prepared questions is always designed to elicit an answer referring to an event in the past or future. This one proved particularly difficult and many answers were in the present tense.

Photo card D

¿Qué tipo de regalo prefieres recibir?

Regalo was not well known and the majority of students were unable to reply to this question.

Photo card F

¿Te gusta la idea de trabajar en otro país?

Many students did not understand this question. Some teachers changed *en otro país* to *en el extranjero* and this proved equally difficult.

Photo card G

Aparte de ir a restaurantes, ¿qué te gusta hacer en tu tiempo libre?

Many students did not understand *aparte de* and thought that the question concerned restaurants. This meant that they gave an incorrect answer to the question.

Photo card I

¿Qué haces normalmente para prepararte para los exámenes?

Many students either gave no answer to this question or tried to say things for which they lacked the necessary vocabulary. For example, the verb *repasar* was rendered by the incorrect *revisar* on many occasions.

General conversation

As mentioned previously, this part of the test was far more spontaneous than controlled assessments from the previous specification. Many teachers had conversations that had a natural feel to them, albeit on familiar ground to their students. Sometimes there was an obvious pre-learned feel to answers to questions. If the student managed to maintain reasonable intonation in these answers, then there tended not to be an impact on the mark for Spontaneity and fluency. However, when intonation, pronunciation and accuracy were poor, the mark on all categories was affected.

The teachers who conducted their tests most impressively asked different questions of different students, reflecting their ability and interests. This meant that even the least able students were able to convey something and the experience for them was largely a positive one. On the other hand, there were teachers who had a set list of questions per topic and kept to that list for all students, no matter what their ability. This usually seemed to have a negative effect on the marks, especially for the least able who were unable to answer the more difficult questions.

When moving from one theme to another, most teachers did as requested and referred to the change of theme on the recording. The best way to do this was, at the beginning of the conversation, to announce: *Vamos a empezar con el tema número dos*; and then, when the change of theme was about to happen: *Ahora vamos a pasar al tema número uno*. This was useful for the student and also for the examiner, who had to make a note of the time spent on each theme.

Timings were usually good. The timing of the conversation at Foundation tier is between three and five minutes. However, the time spent on each theme is equally important. If a student spent less than one and a half minutes on one or both themes, there was a reduction of two marks for Communication. This happened frequently.

The other area where a penalty applied was in the asking of a question by the student. If the student did not ask an understandable question of the teacher, there was a penalty of one mark. The question could be on either of the two themes covered in the conversation. The teacher is allowed to prompt the student to ask a question by saying *¿Tienes una pregunta para mí?* Most teachers did this, but others did not. Very often the question was left to the very end of the test. Sometimes it was asked after five minutes and so the one-mark penalty had to be applied.

It is advisable, for future years, to try and get the student to ask a question during the first theme. In this way, if the question makes no coherent sense, the teacher can prompt another question later in the conversation. If the question is asked at the end of the conversation, time may be up and it is therefore too late.

In order to score in the top band for Communication, the student had to occasionally give extended responses; usually give clear information; and give opinions. An open-ended question such as *Háblame de tus vacaciones el año pasado* enabled good students at this tier to give an extended response by maybe narrating events. Questions that elicited opinions were also needed. The clarity of information was invariably better when students had not been asked to learn long replies to a limited number of questions.

For more able students at this tier, teachers did the right thing by asking questions which would elicit answers in all three time frames. However, for students who were not expected to score a mark in the top band for Range and accuracy of language, it would have been better if some teachers had focused on questions requiring answers in the present tense. Students can still score eight marks if everything is in the present tense. Keeping to the present tense with less able students is also likely to lead to greater clarity in their answers.

As mentioned previously, some conversations had a natural feel to them. The Spontaneity and fluency category has two very separate strands. In order to score in the top band at Foundation, students had to show some spontaneity even though there was some reliance on pre-learnt responses. The teachers who asked follow-up questions after a pre-learnt response had greatest success in getting the best marks for their students at this tier.

Advice to teachers

General

- Do a short test recording before the first student's test to check recording levels and clarity.
- Position the microphone or digital recorder so that it picks up both voices clearly.
- Make sure that your own and the students' mobile phones are switched off (not just on silent) before the recording begins. Students should not have access to their mobile during the preparation time or during the exam, in accordance with examination regulations.
- The *Instructions for the conduct of examinations* document is in the Secure Key Materials (SKM) area of e-AQA, available via the AQA website. If you do not have access to SKM, ask your examinations officer to download the document for you. It is *essential* that you follow the instructions in that document.
- In the Instructions document, you are told how to introduce each student in English. This is what you should say at the start of the recording for every candidate:
GCSE Spanish examination, June (*year of exam*). Centre number ____, candidate number ____, candidate name ____. Role-play number ____, photo card letter ____, general conversation theme chosen by candidate Theme (1, 2 or 3).
- Use Spanish throughout the exam once you have introduced the student and his/her role-play and photo card combinations and the nominated theme for the general conversation in English.
- Respond positively to what students say, even if it is not very good. It will encourage them for the rest of the test.
- Practise pronunciation as often as possible. It can be a good use of the Foreign Language Assistant's time, if you have one.

Role-play

- Keep to your script as laid out in the Teacher's Role. Not to do so will mean that the student's response will receive a mark of 0 for Communication in that task.
- If you see that a student is starting to give the wrong answer to your question, stop him/her and repeat the question. Once the student completes an incorrect answer, a mark of 0 for Communication is given for that task, even if you repeat the question and a correct answer is given subsequently.
- If a student asks for repetition of your question or if there is no answer, you may repeat the question.
- If there is a two-part question in an unprepared task, ask the first question, wait for an answer, and then ask the second question. Failure to do so in the unprepared task almost invariably leads to the student having to ask for repetition.

Photo card

- You may paraphrase a question, provided the same meaning is maintained. However, be careful that that is the case or the student's reply will not be credited.
- Ask all five questions in the Teacher's Booklet, but do not ask any follow-up questions.
- Keep an eye on the timing. If a student's replies are very long and it looks as though you may not be able to ask the final question in the two-minute maximum time, you may be better to interrupt an answer and ask the next one.

General conversation

- Encourage students to vary their language structures and vocabulary as much as possible. Opinions are the most obvious area to focus on – not everything has to be described as *interesante* or *aburrido* and there are other ways to say *me gusta*. In order to introduce some variety of language, ensure that students have a bank of adjectives such as *divertido*, *impresionante*, *maravilloso*, *estupendo*, *antipático*; and verbs such as *me encanta*, *me interesa*, *lo encuentro ...*, *odio*, *me molesta*.
- Train students to give and justify opinions without necessarily being asked to do so. This can form the basis of different starter activities.
- Be sensitive to the ability of the students – someone who struggles to describe his/her town is not going to be successful discussing more challenging aspects of the topic, for example the impact of global warming.
- Try to ask students questions that reflect their interests. Don't ask all students identical questions.
- In order to achieve a greater sense of spontaneity in the conversation, follow up a student's response by asking about what they have just told you.
- Announce the change of theme in Spanish: *Ahora vamos a pasar al tema número uno*, etc.
- Keep a close eye on the time. If one of the themes lasts for less than 1'30", there is a deduction of two marks for Communication.
- The maximum length of the general conversation is five minutes. Everything after that will *not* be marked.
- Remember to prompt the student to ask you a question if they don't do it without being asked. It is better to get them to ask you the question in their nominated theme so that you don't forget to do it later on.
- If the first question the student asks you makes no sense, get them to ask you another one.

Advice to students

- Use the 12 minutes preparation time wisely. You can write down exactly what you are going to say in the role-play tasks and in response to the three questions on the photo card.
- For the photo card questions, try to prepare answers of at least three sentences, using a verb in each one.
- Listen carefully to the questions that your teacher asks you for the unprepared questions in the role-play and photo card and to all questions in the general conversation.
- Make sure you know common question words such as *¿cuándo?*, *¿cuántos?*, *¿dónde?*, *¿quién?*, *¿cómo?* and *¿qué?*
- You can ask for repetition of a question in any part of the test, but make sure it is in Spanish. You can say *Repíte, por favor* or *¿Cómo?*, for example.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.