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# GCSE

# SPANISH

8698/SH Speaking Higher 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 at Higher 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 they 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, in 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 a tu familia*.

In the role-play and in the photo card, 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 at Higher tier were clearly more challenging than those at Foundation. The majority of students did well in this part of the test, although there were some who would have been better suited to the Foundation tier examination.

Each of the role-plays asked for more details to be given than was the case at Foundation and one of the tasks in each role-play elicited a response which made reference to a past or future event. The greatest difficulty arose when students had to make reference to a past event, as verb formations were often incorrect.

Where two details were required in a prepared task, it was acceptable for there to be only one verb. See the comment for role-play 10, task a as an example.

As at Foundation tier, the mark for Knowledge and use of language usually corresponded with the mark for Communication.

### Role-play 10

#### Task a

This was done well on the whole. Only one verb was required and two marks for Communication were awarded when a student said, for example, *Trabajo como camarero en un restaurante*.

#### Task b

The usual reasons given were things such as *Hace calor* or *Es bonita*. It did highlight, however, the problems students have with describing the weather. *Es calor/sol* were commonly heard.

#### Task c

The main problem with this task, and all unprepared tasks which had two questions, is that teachers often asked both questions together. Almost invariably this led to the need for repetition of at least one of the questions. The three dots (...) in the Teacher's Role are there to indicate that there should be a pause between the first question and the second, in order to enable the student to answer one at a time. The first question, *¿Cuántos años hace que estudia español?*, caused more problems for students than the second one.

#### Task d

More able students dealt with this task well, but for others the need to refer to a past event proved challenging and the present tense was common.

#### Task e

Any question about money was accepted. All of the question tasks needed a verb in order to score two marks for Communication, unless it was appropriate to use *¿Qué tal ...?*

### Role-play 11

#### Task a

The aim of this task was to elicit local issues with the environment, such as traffic and green spaces, but a considerable number of students referred to global problems such as deforestation and drought. These were still accepted.

**Task b**

Students were familiar with the verbs needed for this task, such as *reciclar* and *ahorrar*. However, many could not form the preterite tense correctly.

**Task c**

For this unpredictable task, two details were required and this was stated in the Teacher's Role. It was perfectly acceptable for the teacher to ask *¿Algo más?* if the student only gave one detail initially. This was true of all tasks, prepared and unprepared, where two details were required.

**Task d**

Any question about the environment in Spain was acceptable for two marks, provided it included a verb, or through the use of *¿Qué tal el medio ambiente en España?* A good number of students tried to say 'What is the environment like in Spain?', but many did not know *¿Cómo es?* It would have been a very useful thing for them to know for this kind of task.

**Task e**

The opinion-giving tasks, as at Foundation tier, were done well and this was no exception.

**Role-play 12****Task a**

Students who got two marks for Communication usually asked *¿Qué/cuál es la mejor tableta?* and the task was done well.

**Task b**

The first question, *¿Cuánto dinero quiere gastar?*, caused a lot of difficulty, but the second one about a preferred colour proved very accessible.

**Task c**

As with all tasks eliciting past tenses, there were considerable problems with verb formation.

**Task d**

The most common mistake was to use the verb *trabajar* instead of *funcionar*, but a good number of students were able to talk about the screen being too small or the fact that their tablet was slow.

**Task e**

This was done well. Some students said they did not use tablets in class and that this was boring, which was credited.

**Role-play 13****Task a**

This was done well. Students generally used *Hay* plus two good features of the school, or gave two positive adjectives.

**Task b**

This proved to be one of the most demanding tasks, with many students using the present tense. The use of *reciente* in the student's prompt was an indicator that a past tense was required.

**Task c**

*¿Cómo son?* was attempted by many, but was not usually successful. Successful attempts included *¿Hay muchos institutos en Chile?* and *¿Los institutos en Chile son buenos?*

## Task d

This was widely misinterpreted as meaning ‘What are the best things about your school?’

## Task e

As with task e in role play 12, it was acceptable to say *No uso/usamos la tecnología*. Other correct answers mentioned interactive white boards and vocabulary learning games.

**Role-play 14**

## Task a

There was no problem vocabulary-wise, but verb formations were often incorrect.

## Task b

This was done well on the whole, although the use of *sana* for *salud* was common, as in *Es bueno para la sana*.

## Task c

Although it is a near-cognate, students often did not pick up on the word *dieta* in the question and gave doing a physical activity as a reason.

## Task d

This was done well on the whole. The more frequent correct answers were *Es peligroso* and *Es malo para la salud*, though there were other more detailed answers such as *Daña los pulmones*.

## Task e

This was done quite well, with *¿Tomas drogas?* and *¿Te gustan las drogas?* being among the more common questions asked.

**Role-play 15**

## Task a

Most students answered this task well by giving personal views of their brothers and sisters.

## Task b

This was done well by the majority, the reason often being a simple one such as *porque es más divertido*.

## Task c

Although only one detail was required, students found it very difficult to describe a problem they had had in the past. When it was done well, it was often related to a problem connected with social media.

## Task d

The first question proved quite demanding, but the second, saying how many times per week you go out with friends, was done much better.

## Task e

The expectation was that students would frequently ask *¿Qué haces con tu familia?* However, this was not a common question at all. Students who got two marks for Communication tended to ask something like *¿Te gusta jugar deporte con tu familia?*

**Role-play 16**

## Task a

Generally, this was done well, usually by using verbs like *escuchar*, *escribir*, *leer* and *jugar*.

## Task b

Students usually got zero or two marks for this task. There were some really good answers, such as *Me ayudan a sacar buenas notas en pruebas*.

## Task c

Many gained two marks for Communication by asking *¿Te gustan/Qué piensas de los exámenes?*

## Task d

Many students seemed not to understand *viaje escolar* and so their replies made no sense. However, far fewer problems were encountered in this task eliciting a reference to a future event than those that required a past reference.

## Task e

*Idioma* was not widely known. Many misinterpreted the question as being a request to mention a favourite subject.

**Role-play 17**

## Task a

This was done quite well. Most students began by using *Quiero* or *Quisiera* and asked for a certain number of tickets on a certain day. Others were more general with the time, saying something like *esta semana* or even *este verano*, but this was accepted.

## Task b

Students scored highly on this task, predominantly giving a simple reason, such as *Es interesante/bonito*.

## Task c

This proved to be the past event task that was done the best. Most students used *fui* in order to give both details by saying, for example, *Fui a Barcelona con mis padres*.

## Task d

This was done well overall, with students getting two marks for Communication by saying something like *No me gusta porque es aburrido*.

## Task e

It was very rare to hear a student ask *¿Qué museos recomiendas?* A lot of students seemed to recognise that this was quite a difficult question and were still successful, by asking questions such as *¿Qué museos prefieres?*

**Role-play 18**

## Task a

Most students seemed to find this task straightforward.

**Task b**

There were issues with past tense verbs, but the biggest problems occurred when students tried to say things that were quite difficult. The most successful responses were things like *Vi una película de acción con mi amiga*.

**Task c**

This was not done well, despite the cognate and near-cognate in the first question. Sometimes students seemed not to want to give the name of an actor because they thought it was not Spanish and therefore could not be used. The reason, too, was often a problem. The most common correct answers were the name of an actor and *Es guapo/a*.

**Task d**

Students did well on the whole with this task. They said things like *Es malo para la salud y adictivo*.

**Task e**

This proved quite challenging and relatively few students could ask *¿Qué haces/Qué te gusta hacer en tu tiempo libre?* Many students got into difficulty by trying to say things that were too difficult or literal.

**Photo cards**

The maximum three minutes available for this section of the tests were ample. The only students who went over time were those who had considerable hesitation during their replies. As at Foundation tier, sometimes the re-wording of a question by the teacher did not retain the same meaning as the one in the Teacher's Booklet, and therefore any answer given by the student had to be discounted.

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. However, because of the added challenge of the questions at this tier, and because of the ability of the students, many of the answers did contain more complex language.

The best students were able to give extended responses to all five questions but, as at Foundation tier, there was only a need to develop three of them well. The unprepared questions had to be answered clearly for a mark in the top band, but there was no need for development.

As at Foundation tier, this part of the test discriminated well. Some of the answers to the questions were excellent and contained a lot of information in response to the questions.

Students at this tier also described the people in the photo and said what they were doing, but they would also use conjecture. For example, in photo card M, students might say something like *Creo que los amigos van a salir a un restaurante más tarde para celebrar su cumpleaños*. Although in itself this was not a direct answer to the question, it was a good development for those who had already said that it was the woman's birthday.



As at Foundation, 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 are the ones which students found most challenging:

#### Photo card J

*Con respecto a una vida sana, ¿cómo es diferente tu vida ahora comparada con el pasado?*

Many students found it hard to compare by using the present and imperfect tenses. If the preterite was used in place of the imperfect, there was no problem with communication and students could still access the top band. However, confusion of tenses meant that answers were often unclear.

#### Photo card K

*¿Piensas que la tecnología es siempre positiva? ... ¿Por qué (no)?*

Most students found difficulty in giving a reason.

#### Photo card L

*¿Dónde prefieres alojarte cuando vas de vacaciones? ... ¿Por qué?*

Those students who understood *alojarte* answered this question well. However, many did not and it made little difference if the teacher changed it to *quedarte*.

#### Photo card M

*¿Cuál es tu opinión sobre las corridas de toros?*

It was unclear at times whether students did not understand the question or whether they understood it but could not answer. Many who said *No me gustan* in reply to the first question could not give a reason. Few said *Porque es cruel/son crueles* and it may be that 'cruel' was a piece of unknown vocabulary.

#### Photo card O

*Para ti, ¿cuáles son los aspectos importantes de un trabajo? ... ¿Por qué?*

Although it is almost a cognate, many students seemed not to understand the word *aspectos*.

#### Photo card Q

*¿Cuál es tu opinión de las instalaciones para los jóvenes en tu región?*

A good number of students seemed not to understand *instalaciones*.

#### Photo card R

*¿Qué harás para celebrar el día de los resultados en agosto?*

Many students could not answer this question, even if the teacher changed *harás* to *vas a hacer*.

#### General conversation

Most students had been entered appropriately for this tier and were able to score well. There were some, however, who would have benefitted from being entered for Foundation tier because they failed to reach the standard required for Higher tier and so scored zero in all categories.

As at Foundation tier, it was really pleasing to see how much improvement there has been in pronunciation. This was certainly true of those conversations which had a natural feel to them and where teachers followed up on the students' answers which were pre-learnt to some degree. It was clear that students were well aware of what they were being asked and could exchange information successfully.

On the other hand, there were some students who had learnt very long answers to a few questions on each of the themes covered and the effect on intonation was often more noticeable than at Foundation because of the amount that had to be reproduced. In this type of test, poor pronunciation and intonation was often one problem, but also it meant that the thread of what the student was saying was hard to follow. This also affected the mark for Communication because clarity was lost.

It was very encouraging to hear many centres embracing the character of the new examination by asking different questions of different students. However, there were teachers who kept to a set list of questions which usually meant that some of the more demanding questions could not be answered by the less able at this tier. There was also a negative effect on the mark for Intonation and fluency. For example, the teacher perhaps asked a question in theme 2 about holidays and the student gave a good answer, narrating some of the things that he/she had done. It would have been logical at that point to follow up with at least one supplementary question about something the student had mentioned. Some teachers did this well, while others went straight to a completely different topic in the same theme, maybe asking about the environment in the student's home town.

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 Higher tier is between five and seven minutes. However, the time spent on each theme is equally important. If a student spent less than two and a half minutes on one or both themes, there was a reduction of two marks for Communication. This happened very 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 seven 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.

The students who scored in the top band for Communication developed their answers consistently and, even if there were some errors of grammar or pronunciation, the intended meaning was always clear. As previously stated, this is where those students who had very long pre-learnt answers to questions often missed out on the top band.

For Range and accuracy of language, students had to make reference to past, present and future events. In this specification the mention of 'tenses' has been replaced by 'time frames', which means, for example, that a present tense verb can be used to refer to a future event: *Este fin de semana voy al cine*. If a student did not make reference to all three time frames, the maximum mark was two for Range and accuracy of language. The vast majority of teachers gave students

the opportunity to avoid this happening by asking appropriate questions, eliciting references to the past, present and future.

If all three time frames were covered, this did not mean an automatic minimum mark for Range and accuracy of language because the other strands were of equal importance: range of vocabulary and structures; accuracy of the language. The key thing for a high mark was the variety of language used by the student and how accurate that language was. The less varied and the more inaccurate the language mark, the lower the mark awarded.

Pronunciation was generally good with the most common problems being with the *jota* sound; pronunciation of 'qu' in words like *quedarme*; an aspirated 'h'; anglicised vowel sounds.

For Spontaneity and fluency, there often had to be a balance between the two strands. As stated above, teachers were able to help with this by following up on students' replies and getting them to engage in a more natural way. If a student's delivery was fluent, but everything was clearly pre-learnt, the maximum mark was three.

## 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 unpredictable 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 three-minute maximum time, you may be better to interrupt an answer and ask the next one.
- If there is a two-part question in the unseen questions, ask the first question, wait for an answer, and then ask the second question. Failure to do so in the unprepared questions almost invariably leads to the student having to ask for repetition.

### General conversation

- Encourage students to vary their language structures and vocabulary as much as possible. Opinions are the most obvious area to focus on, so at Higher tier encourage students to express them using a range of more sophisticated structures and a wider variety of adjectives than at Foundation tier, for example expressions such as *me aburre*, *no aguanto*, *diría que ...*
- 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 their 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 2'30", there is a deduction of two marks for Communication.
- The maximum length of the general conversation is seven 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.
- 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.
- Practise using past tenses so that you can answer questions about what you have done in the past. You will be required to do this in at least two parts of the test.

**Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

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