
GCSE

SPANISH

8698/RH Reading Higher tier
Report on the Examination

8698
June 2018

Version: 1.0

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General Comments

Many of the questions mirrored those in the two papers published as Specimen Assessment Materials and this helped students to be familiar with the question styles. As a general principle, students were given credit for all answers which conveyed the key idea intelligibly and without ambiguity, whether the answer was in English or in Spanish. Marks were not awarded where errors in spelling, punctuation or grammar led to a failure to communicate the key ideas without ambiguity. Students should be discouraged from giving alternative or additional information in an answer as this may make the key idea ambiguous and therefore wrong. It would seem that students did make occasional mistakes through working at speed. At times, they miscopied or omitted key words which led to ambiguous answers.

Section A

Question 1

This was intended to give students a comfortable start to the exam and performed exactly as expected, with 83.9% of the students getting this question correct. The new specification sets out to expose students to different types of written language. This question tested students' ability to understand public information. Students should be aware, however, that if the question asks what students **should** do, then answers which say what students should not do will be marked wrong. Students should show the ability to identify the key idea and disregard the incorrect information.

Question 2

Higher tier students scored significantly better on this overlap question than the Foundation tier students, showing an improved ability to identify opinions.

Question 3

Students are familiar with this question style, from both the legacy specification and the two sets of Specimen Assessment Materials; overall the question worked well. Students were able to identify key details and deduce meaning from complex language in a longer extended text.

Question 4

This is another familiar question style where students have to include information from the question and the circled answer in order to get the mark. Here, single items of vocabulary and very short phrases make the difference and test the students' ability to show precision in their understanding. In general, over 50% of the students answered parts 04.1, 04.2 and 04.4 correctly, but in part 04.3 less than 15% understood the word *jamás* and the verb *olvidar*.

Question 5

This was based on an adapted literary text '*La Regenta*' and was challenging both conceptually and linguistically for the majority of students. It targeted the most able students and worked well as a differentiator as only the top 20% of the students answered parts 05.1 and 05.3 correctly. Although many students identified the word *aburrimiento*, using communication strategies to get from *aburrido* to *aburrimiento*, very few were able to express the degree of boredom from the Spanish **me muero de aburrimiento**. In part 05.2, the expression *vale la pena* was not well known and *único* led many students to write about "love being unique". The sentence *sentía que la*

juventud se le escapaba; veintisiete años de mujer eran la puerta de la vejez que ya estaba llamando... was inaccessible to many students who, despite valiant efforts to make suitable answers, failed to understand that Ana's youth was passing her by and that old age was approaching. This question worked well in identifying students who were capable of using language out of context and differentiated very well to identify the most able students.

Question 6

Understanding appropriate social conventions, such as formal register in the '*usted*' form here, was not a barrier to understanding. What was a barrier was the fact that each of the answers in the multiple choice options was mentioned in the short texts. Students should be encouraged to read the *whole* of the short text in order to identify the correct answer and look closely at the link words to make sure that they have fully understood the texts.

Question 7

This question differentiated very well and there were some excellent answers by some of the very best students at this level. The text was extended, the context unusual and the questions demanding – all targeting the highest grades available. There were some excellent attempts at sensible answers, but it was really pleasing to see the most able students answering with precision, deducing meaning from unfamiliar material and drawing inferences in context. Identifying the part of the text with the correct answer was the first hurdle, but understanding difficult verbs such as *comprender*, *echar de menos* and *perder* was equally challenging. The mark scheme was rigorous and insisted on a level of detail that some students left out; this helped to identify the most able students. In part 07.1, for example, answers such as "it was a lifestyle that not many people understood" was marked incorrect whereas "the lifestyle of a **nun** was something that not many people understood" was correct. In part 07.3, students needed to make reference to the **final episode/final show** to get the mark. Those who wrote about the majority of people watching other programmes did not get a mark because they did not mention that this happened during the **last episode/last show**.

Question 8

This was again based on a challenging text. Grammatical accuracy was essential for the mark here and those who identified the conditional **tendrían que cerrar** got the mark in part 08.1. To be awarded the mark for part 08.2, the comparison **más temprano que** was required. Again, this question differentiated well and only 26% and 29% of the students got these questions correct.

Question 9

This tested understanding of public information in one of the new topics in the specification. The questions focussing on this theme and topic on the Foundation tier exam were noticeably more accessible. At Higher tier, less than 20% of the students were able to show understanding of the key vocabulary *despedir*, *dar la bienvenida* and *el bajo nivel de paro*.

Question 10

This style of question had appeared in both sets of Specimen Assessment Materials and tested students' ability to recognise the relationship between past, present and future events. Students at Higher tier performed better than the Foundation tier students on this overlap question. As with the Foundation tier, the most popular answer to part 10.1 was 'N', perhaps because students did not

read beyond the present tense *mis amigos van a clases de yoga* in order to see *es algo que voy a hacer*, indicating Maria's future intentions.

Section B

Question 11

Students were given another opportunity to show understanding of an adapted literary text, this time '*Doña Perfecta*', but with the questions and rubrics in the target language. At Higher tier the students relied less on 'vocabulary spotting' than was the case at Foundation, and were very successful. As an overlap question, it was deliberately placed at the start of section B and was successful in giving students confidence in this section of the exam.

Question 12

Here, students had to demonstrate an ability to scan for particular information. The sub-topics on which the questions were based may seem daunting but the vocabulary was quite accessible, including a range of cognates and Foundation tier vocabulary, and the students performed well. The question gave a positive response to social and global issues in that the rich and famous were helping the less fortunate. Although it targeted the most able students, more than 62% of them got part 12.1 correct, more than 74% got part 12.2 correct and more than 63% got part 12.3 correct. Students coped well with the demands of this question, especially as it came towards the end of the exam.

Question 13

Continuing on the theme of local, national, international and global areas of interest, this question tested the topic of travel and tourism in a more grammatical context. For consistency, all of the verbs were in the third person plural preterite, a tense with which the majority of Higher tier students are confident. Although the verbs themselves were common verbs, the challenge was to understand the meaning of each of the sentences so that students could identify the correct verb in context. Less than 10% of the students got full marks on this question which was therefore successful in targeting the most able students.

Question 14

In Question 14 students had to show understanding of specific details. There was a general tendency to include too much information in the answers. Students were clearly nervous about missing out some information but they should write **only** the information necessary to convey the key idea. As a general rule, students were not penalised for spelling mistakes unless this led to an incorrect or ambiguous answer. For example, in part 14.1, some students wrote "*se casaba y se quedaban en casa*" – correct despite the extra information which was not required for the answer. Others wrote "*se casaban en casa*" – wrong because the spelling mistake changed the meaning of the answer. In part 14.2, some students found the words *más felices* in the text and simply copied out what came after *comparadas con las personas sin pareja* – this was incorrect. Sometimes students have to read **back** from the place where the words that are common to the question and text are, in order to find the answer. In part 14.2 students were told '*menciona una razón*', yet many wrote all three reasons. Students also failed to gain marks in part 14.3 because of incorrect copying from the text. For example, answers such as "*no hay explicaciones a nadie*" and "*no hay dar explicaciones a nadie*" were marked wrong because they did not quite make sense. In part 14.4, if students missed out the word '*para*' from their answer "*no necesitan pareja ser madre*",

they were awarded the mark because it was felt that many students genuinely thought that they were writing ‘they do not need a partner **to be** a mother’; this is an error that students continue to make at AS/A-level.

A small number of students manipulated the Spanish in their answers and it is worth mentioning at this point that this is not necessary at GCSE. Students can lift their answer from the text without changing the Spanish in any way. Any correct manipulations were awarded the mark, obviously, but this is not a requirement at GCSE.

Question 15

Once again, this question style had appeared on both sets of the Specimen Assessment Materials, so students who had used these as practice papers knew what to do. Marks were not awarded to those students who copied whole chunks of text or, in some cases, the whole text. Part of the skill being tested here is being able to identify the key ideas from longer texts and to write only the key idea as an answer. Students who copied out partial sentences made their answers ambiguous. For example, in 15.2 “*falta clases de apoyo*” was a common answer. By including ‘*falta*’ the students made their answer ambiguous. Similarly, in 15.3, answers such as “*Nueva York pero me apetece más ir de visita a Alemania*” were ambiguous and thus marked incorrect. Students should learn how to spot the distractors, to identify the key idea and write **only** the key idea. As expected, students at this tier performed better than Foundation students and over 80% got parts 15.1, 15.3 and 15.4 correct. Just over 50% got part 15.2 correct.

Section C – Translation

10% of the students scored full marks on the Higher translation. Students had to identify the gerund in *chateando* and they had to know comparisons. Some were a little over-literal in their translation of the comparison, but were awarded a mark. For example, many wrote “it is more easy than to read books” – correct. Others wrote “it is easy to read books” – incorrect. The verb *escoger* was not widely known and, surprisingly, *asignaturas* was often translated as ‘assignments’. The verb *esperar* was translated as ‘to wish for’. The subjunctive did not cause too many problems in either *sean* or in *empiece*, but *carrera* led to many mis-spellings of the word ‘career’. On a positive note, there were some impressive translations and it was clear that students had practised this skill in class. There were very few unattempted translations and very few unfinished answers either. Over 90% of students were able to translate *me gusta pasar mucho tiempo chateando con jóvenes por Internet*, thereby scoring at least two marks out of the nine available. Precision is key to the translation. For example, when translating *sean útiles para mí*, if the student only wrote “are useful”, a mark was not awarded. Those who wrote “are useful **for me**” were awarded the mark. It is an exercise where every word counts.

Advice to Students

- Read the introduction to the question. This will help you to give sensible answers.
- Answer every question, especially where you have to write a letter. If in doubt, have a guess!
- Read the whole of the sentence so that you can check that your first reaction is right. If you think the answer is ‘N’ (Now) for example, read on to make sure that this is not the distractor and that the correct answer is in fact ‘F’ (Future) or ‘P’ (Past).
- Do not copy whole chunks of Spanish because you might include the wrong answer as well as the right answer.

- Do not change the Spanish – copy it exactly from the Spanish passage.
- If you are asked to give **one** reason, only give one.
- In a questionnaire-type question, such as Question 4, include information from the answer and the question in the questionnaire.
- Translate every word in the translation.

Advice to Teachers

- Bear in mind that Higher reading tests up to Grade 9 and that out of 30 of the 60 available marks will test grades 7 to 9. Thus, 50% of the exam will be aimed at the most able students. Students working at the lower end of the Higher tier ability range will struggle to answer many of the questions on this paper.
- Train students to spot distractors and practise this in class.
- Encourage students working towards the highest grades to give accurate and precise answers so that they include all the details elicited.
- Encourage students to learn the short items of vocabulary which are given in the General Vocabulary section of the specification. Knowledge of these important vocabulary items can be crucial to the understanding of texts, particularly at Higher tier.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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