

# Examiners' Report January 2008

GCE

GCE Spanish (8590/9590)

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## Unit 1: Listening and Writing

### Candidates' Responses

In general, the candidates' answers reflected a positive response to the Listening and Writing test. It was pleasing to see such a good performance. Centres had clearly prepared candidates well and most scripts reflected an appropriate level of competence and knowledge. The majority of candidates were able to complete the paper within the allotted time and there were few examples of unfinished scripts.

**Extract 1** was a weather forecast, with a *True, False, Not in the Text* exercise set on it. Most candidates understood the language of the broadcast, although some candidates did not know *despejado* for (b) or were confused as to whether the temperatures were due to rise today or tomorrow for (d).

**Extract 2** involved a radio item about a transport strike. Candidates had to listen to the information and insert the appropriate information in a grid. For (a) most candidates identified the city as *Valencia* but the mark could not be awarded for writing *valenciano*. Candidates were able to identify the number of days the strike had already lasted for (b) but weaker candidates failed to hear the correct number of passengers affected as '65,000' and either wrote *setenta y cinco mil* or gave another wrong number. For (d), most candidates identified the correct statement *no se ha llegado a ningún acuerdo*, but, whilst some attempted to transcribe without understanding and wrote *no sea llegado*, there was also some confusion between *acuerdo* and *recuerdo*. The final question (e) had two marks allocated and candidates needed to give full information to gain them. So, whilst most candidates succeeded in identifying *rutas y horarios*, several failed to mention the *diálogo abierto*.

**Extract 3** involved an advertisement for a department store, with a multiple choice exercise set on it. Most candidates understood the material and made the correct choices, with (a) and (c) causing the greatest confusion.

**Extract 4**, a discussion between a Spanish woman and her 18-year-old son about the way Christmas is celebrated in Spain, had two exercises set on it, with a total of 28 marks. The first exercise, involving straightforward Spanish questions to be answered in Spanish, was generally well done. The test is marked positively and the objective is to communicate the correct response, but not to reproduce the original text word for word. All the relevant information must be given but candidates are not required to answer in full sentences. The Examiners only mark what is correct. All irrelevant and superfluous information is disregarded, unless it adversely affects the correct target information. Nevertheless, there was evidence of weaker candidates attempting to transcribe the material without really understanding it.

In Q(a) almost all candidates gained the mark for identifying the reasons Encarna had enjoyed Christmas as a child, although there were many wrong versions of the verb *reunirse*. Similarly, Q(b) was well answered, although some candidates used the Present Tense, which invalidated the answer, as Encarna was talking about the past. Q(c) had two marks allocated to it and whilst most candidates gained one mark for children today not knowing the meaning of Christmas, some failed to understand *asocian* for the second mark and wrote about the 'social' aspects of Christmas. Most candidates were awarded the two marks for Q(d), with the most common error being *son más familiares* rather than *con su familia*. The expected answer for Q(e), *le*

*apetece*, was produced by very few candidates, and the examiners accepted an alternative answer referring to the extended family gathering. Some candidates lost the mark for using the Imperfect Tense, which invalidated the answer. The city *Madrid* was generally understood from the adjective *madrileño*, but some candidates offered other cities for Q(f), whilst a few even heard the town of *Albacete* from Pablo's statement *me apetece*. Q(g) and Q(h) each had two marks allocated to them and, in both cases, it was necessary to give the full information to gain the two marks. Some candidates failed to give sufficient information about the advertisements for (g) or referred to Encarna celebrating Christmas as she wanted to, rather than referring to how she was affected by advertising for (h). Some candidates were also unable to distinguish between the third person pronouns and wrote *la publicidad se influye*, rather than *le/la influye*.

The second exercise, requiring candidates to write personal responses to the questions arising from the listening extract, produced a wide range of answers. Q(a) required statements about the best aspects of Christmas for Encarna and Pablo. Most candidates made correct references to the stimulus material, but a disappointingly large number failed to take on board the instruction *Según Encarna y Pablo* and simply gave their own views on what is the best aspect of Christmas. Their mark for content suffered as a consequence. Whilst most candidates were able to manipulate the language for (a) competently, others lost Language marks by merely repeating exactly what they had heard word for word, rather than using their own words. The Content mark was generally better for the more open-ended (b), as most candidates clearly understood the question and were able to give their views on the pressure of advertising, either at Christmas or throughout the year in general. Only a few candidates misunderstood the question and described the effect of advertising on Encarna. Most candidates were able to use the language of opinion for (b) successfully, whilst others wrote of advertising as being *ridiculoso*, misused the word *derecha* as 'the right thing to do' or appeared not to know whether to use *gustar* or *pasar* for the English 'to spend'. Whilst stronger candidates were able to use the subjunctive mood successfully, some candidates seemed determined to insert as many examples of the subjunctive as possible, often believing that it is used after *Creo que*.

The two personal responses are worth 16 out of the total 50 marks for the paper. It is essential, therefore, that candidates should understand what is required of them. The examiners seek a personal response, giving opinions and with some reference to the stimulus material that has been heard. On the other hand, material that is simply transcribed from the text will not gain marks. The first question will usually make a direct reference back to the stimulus text and the second question will generally be more open-ended. Candidates are also advised to use their own words and not fill the response with pre-learned set phrases or complicated attempts at the subjunctive. Without doubt, however, it is pleasing to see how well most candidates dealt with this exercise.

Extract 5, an interview with Laura, who runs a toyshop chain *Giro didáctico* in Argentina, required candidates to produce a guided English summary within a limit of 60 words. Specific and full information is required. Many candidates lost marks for the sloppiness of their English expression, rather than for the lack of comprehending the Spanish material. For Q(a) it was necessary to identify how Laura encourages a pleasant atmosphere in her shops. Whilst most candidates identified music', the full answer 'background music' was required and 'a place to explore the toys/merchandise/shop' was needed for the second mark. Many candidates gave

brief, incomplete answers. For Q(b), candidates needed to identify 'child psychologist'. Whilst many did so successfully, there were many spelling versions of 'psychologist' that were too distant from the correct word to gain a mark, whilst a rendering of the Spanish *infantil* as 'infantile' in English could not gain the mark. Most candidates gained one mark for (c) but the answers were often expressed weakly and there was not enough information to gain the full two marks available. Some candidates believed that the children were 'over-stimulated' or that parents had to help their children come to terms with reality. Q(d) was generally answered well, with a range of material to choose from, although there was evidence of some guesswork as to the benefits of traditional board games and a surprisingly large number of candidates did not know the difference between 'lose' and 'loose'. In general, this exercise was done well, with most candidates able to comprehend the material, but some had difficulty in explaining their answers in English.

### Advice and Guidance

There were some very good performances in this Listening and Writing unit. Nevertheless, several points of guidance could be made to enable centres to improve candidates' performance.

- Use of Spanish. Candidates should practice searching for Spanish synonyms and expressing answers in their own words. Transcribing information from the text (often without understanding) should be discouraged. Comprehension would prevent writing such errors as *la balancha con su mixta* for *la avalancha consumista* or *carabazan* for *cada vez*. It is also necessary to stress that correct Spanish grammar must be used in the answers. At AS level, candidates must always be able to use present, preterite and imperfect verb forms correctly and to use the correct pronouns.
- Spanish vocabulary and spelling. Dictionaries are not allowed in this examination, so it is essential that candidates should build up their vocabulary knowledge during their preparation, ensuring that they have covered the relevant sections in the General Topic Areas. Basic spelling rules must be adhered to and should be practised.
- Knowledge of Spain. The Assessment Objectives for this unit no longer require candidates to include an awareness of the target-language country/countries while writing their personal responses. Nevertheless, the Listening passages will all be taken from authentic sources, so it is still essential that candidates have a general knowledge of Spanish geography, life and culture. In this test, candidates had to transfer two adjectives *madrileño* and *valenciano* to the cities *Madrid* and *Valencia*. It was also necessary to understand the Spanish feast-days *Navidades*, *Año Nuevo* and *Reyes*.
- General listening skills. Candidates are encouraged to practice listening to authentic Spanish recordings in preparation for this examination and to consider Spanish speech patterns. This could help avoid such errors as writing *un día algo abierto* instead of *un diálogo abierto*.
- Word limits. The two personal responses to Texto 3 and the guided summary for Texto 4 have word limits. Credit cannot be given for material that appears beyond the stated length. Conciseness in answering questions is important. For example, it is not necessary to repeat the question when formulating an answer.

- Time management. Candidates have control over their cassettes: they may stop, rewind and replay at will. But they should be trained to use the time sensibly. Most candidates finished the examination in the allotted time, but some rushed the last question and did not do it full justice.
- Tidiness of presentation. This year this unit was marked on-line, with the candidates' scripts scanned into the computer system. There were problems with the occasional use of pencil and of scripts where the candidate had first written in pencil and had then written over in ink, leaving the answers illegible. All candidates are encouraged to present their work as tidily as possible, to write their answers in the designated spaces and, in particular, to take care that the examiners can read the difference between the vowels a, e and o.

## Unit 2: Reading and Writing

Candidates are required to read authentic printed Spanish material and to retrieve and convey information given in the material by responding to a range of mainly Spanish questions. In the last question, they are required to write 140 - 160 words in Spanish (letter, report or article) based on a short printed Spanish stimulus, involving the development of specific points from Spanish instructions.

### Assessment principles

Up to 40 marks are awarded positively for correct information, successfully retrieved and conveyed in response to the Spanish and English questions. The quality of language is only an assessment factor in so far as it impedes communication. Superfluous information, information not contained in the stimulus information and self-contradictory combinations of correct and incorrect information cannot gain credit. The last question requiring an answer of 140 -160 words of Spanish is marked positively out of 40 using the grids printed in the syllabus.

### Candidates' responses

#### Text 1 - Q1

A text about the attraction of living in Spain as opposed to other European countries. Candidates had to decide whether four statements were true, false or were not mentioned in the text. Candidates are now very familiar with this type of question, but should be aware that close reading of the text is essential to gain full marks. As in recent examinations, the majority of candidates scored the full range of marks, although a few scored only 1 or 2 marks.

#### Text 2 - Q2(a)

A text about the new link being constructed between the centre of Granada and the Sierra Nevada. Part one required candidates to match up beginnings and endings of sentences to form eight correct statements according to the sense of the text. Many candidates found this passage very accessible and so scored high marks, with many gaining 7 or 8 marks. However, some weaker candidates did find difficulties with this question, possibly because they did not use their knowledge of basic grammar to work out which endings could fit correctly to create viable sentences.

#### Text 2 - Q2(b)

Candidates were required to find synonyms in the passage for six words. Although some candidates still find this type of question demanding, it was pleasing to see far less non-attempts or completely wrong answers. Candidates are clearly being drilled to look for a similar type of word and apply their grammatical knowledge to find answers, even if they are unsure of the meaning of the target word or phrase. Some candidates clearly were not at ease with the future tense as they failed to choose words with appropriate endings. 'Colgadas' also produced a wide variety of answers with 'personas' being a popular choice. This is a fairly easy exercise to set up in a class situation, and candidates will definitely improve with practice.

#### Text 3 - Q3

This was an article about a Spanish lady who aspired to be an assistant referee in La Liga. As always, candidates found this question challenging, often simply because they could not manipulate fairly straightforward language or they were content to try and lift from the original text. Only minimal changes are required, but some change from the original is expected at this level. It is not enough to simply put quotation

marks around the original words. Very often, of course, a lift is bound to be wrong because the verb needs to be changed, perhaps from first to third person.

- (a) Although many got the correct answer here, there were many candidates who could not work out how many sisters the woman had or, in the most extreme cases, thought she was a boy.
- (b) Generally well done, although some targeted the moment she started to train a football team rather than her interest being developed at school prior to this.
- (c) Many candidates managed to convey both of the required points although, as often in the past, there were candidates who only answered one half of the question. It is important that they realise that two or three mark questions will require more than a single point to gain full marks.
- (d) Many candidates found little problem in making the minor linguistic changes necessary to gain both marks, although some failed to understand that she had two activities which filled her time.
- (e) This perhaps caused most problems. Candidates were expected to target the decision as to when or if she would have a child.
- (f) Many candidates successfully expressed her decision to delay the birth of a child for a short time.
- (g) Although many realised she wanted to progress to La Liga, there were candidates who thought she would be playing in it and therefore did not gain the mark.

#### Text 4 - Q4

This question required English answers to questions on a passage about a woman who was able to continue her career after the birth of her child by using a computer from home. Unfortunately many candidates continue to lose marks because their English expression is too poor.

- (a) The first part of the answer posed few problems as candidates were able to identify the logo or jacket as being clear indications of where people might think she was working. Some candidates, however, found the second part more difficult, with many suggesting she was wearing pyjamas or tracksuit bottoms.
- (b) The majority of candidates realised she would be able to kiss her son when he woke up, but those who guessed went for hugging or feeding him.
- (c) Most candidates made reference to the new technology, but less were able to satisfactorily convey that it was the flexibility of her bosses or her company that enabled her to work in this way.
- (d) Many candidates identified her pregnancy as the moment when this decision was taken. Those who simply referred to her having a baby were not precise enough in their answers.
- (e) This posed few problems.
- (f) This caused many problems to candidates who did not realise that her colleagues were able to watch the baby **grow** and they did this via the video link or webcam.
- (g) This posed few problems, with many candidates identifying two of the possible three answers.
- (h) Very few candidates did not score a mark for this question.

#### Text 5 - Q5

Candidates were asked to respond to a stimulus about a teenager injured in a fight at school, using their own experience of such a situation or one they had read about. Most candidates were able to respond effectively to some or all of the bullet points. Weaker candidates tended to rely too much on the stimulus and only had minimal reactions to what happened. Most were able to express opinions on why such things happened and how they could be eliminated. Weaker candidates tended to lift too much from the stimulus material, which clearly cannot be credited. As in previous years, there was a wide range of performance. At the weaker end, verb forms in the preterite caused serious problems. At this level, at least an ability to use correct first person is essential: 'ir', 'tener' and 'decir' were again handled poorly. 'Ser' and 'estar' continue to be confused. The best candidates produced accounts in accurate, fluent Spanish showing good imagination with excellent use of idiom. Sadly, for some candidates, writing too much remains a serious problem. There is a word limit and examiners only mark up to this number of words. Therefore candidates who write pages of Spanish will lose marks for content.



### Unit 3 (6813/15): Prepared Oral Topic

Candidates are required to present and to discuss with the examiner for 10 to 12 minutes a topic of their choice related to Spain, or a Spanish-speaking country or community. In the course of the discussion they must demonstrate knowledge and understanding of contemporary society or the cultural heritage of the relevant country or community.

#### Assessment Principles

The test is assessed positively out of 60 using the grid printed in the Specification: Quality of Language 20 marks, Response 20 marks, Knowledge and Understanding 20 marks.

#### Candidates' Responses

Most Centres demonstrated a good understanding of the requirements of this test and presented candidates who had researched their topics well and had plenty of information and opinion to share with the examiner. Many of the performances were highly satisfactory and some were excellent.

There was a wide range of topics relating to the life, culture and history of Spain and countries of Latin-America. Although a number of candidates chose very familiar topics, such as Flamenco, Bullfighting and Fiestas, others explored more widely and produced interesting and well-researched presentations on more unusual subjects. The following are examples of these: *Club Social de Buena Vista*; *La baraja española*; *La cerámica de Lladró*; *Andrés de Urdaneta*; *El mate*; *Inventores españoles*.

In most cases the candidate's choice of topic was entirely appropriate, but occasional problems arose. For example, with topics such as *Los abortos en España*, *El tabaquismo en España* and *El botellón*, there was a tendency to devote too much of the discussion to the general problem and to provide insufficient information about the phenomenon in Spain. Such topics would have been better handled as an issue to be debated as a Unit 4 test.

Despite the warnings in previous reports, at least one candidate failed to appreciate the fact that topics relating to pre-Hispanic civilisations in South America, unless carefully handled, fall outside the scope of the Specification.

Some presentations involving tourism, Spanish food or geographical areas were inclined to rely rather more on personal experience than on research and frequently degenerated into lists of amenities or dishes.

It was difficult to reward candidates for the quality of their individual research at centres where they all presented very similar material.

The majority of candidates, however, had prepared their topics very thoroughly. Examiners found evidence of detailed research, using a variety of sources such as books, articles, magazines, films, television, newspapers, the Internet, surveys and personal experience. When detailed and extensive factual knowledge was combined with clear analysis and well-founded opinion, the candidates achieved very high marks.

Thorough preparation of the topic enabled the candidates to approach the test with confidence, to respond readily and fluently to the questions of the examiner and to develop their replies appropriately. Candidates were rewarded for their ability to

engage in a natural and spontaneous conversation and those examiners who allowed their candidates to deliver pre-prepared memorised material did them a considerable disservice. When a discussion clearly lacked spontaneity, very few marks could be awarded for response.

Although the majority of candidates could communicate in language that was sufficiently fluent and accurate to sustain the conversation, there were many cases in which basic error impeded comprehensibility. Some of the most common errors are listed below:

Pronunciation errors: faulty stress causing confusion in the person and tense of the verb and in words ending in *-ia*; unclear vowels; interference from English pronunciation in words like *religión, Europa, sociedad, idea*, etc.

Conjugation errors: poorly formed radical changing verbs; use of infinitive for finite verbs; verbs omitted.

Failure to place the negative in the correct place: *es no bueno, es no necesito, es no vale, tengo no tiempo*, etc.

Inability to distinguish between *ser, estar* and *haber*.

Confusion of adjectives and adverbs: *es muy calor, es muy violencia, mucho famosa*, etc.

Inaccurate genders and agreements.

Inability to use *gustar*.

### **Advice and Guidance**

Centres are reminded that the oral forms submitted by the candidates should contain only a title and brief headings in the target language. The purpose of this is to provide guidance to the examiner and a reminder to the candidate of those aspects of the subject that s/he wishes to discuss. They must not contain lists of facts, dates, statistics or useful vocabulary. Examiners have been instructed to discount any material that is written on the oral form and re-produced in the discussion, when arriving at an assessment of performance.

No materials other than the oral forms are allowed in the examination room. This includes supplementary notes and visual aids. Reading any part of the test, including the introduction, constitutes a violation of examination regulations,

The correct timing of the tests must be observed. Marks are deducted when tests are significantly short. Candidates whose tests are longer than necessary are subjected to excessive demands and consequently may also lose marks.

Care must be taken with the recording of the tests. It is essential that the examiner and the candidate can be clearly heard and that there is an absence of interference or external noise. Mobile phones must not be taken into the examination room. Examiners should ensure that the tape does not run out before the test is concluded. All tapes must be checked before they are dispatched to examiners, and if a candidate has not been recorded, the examination must be taken again.

The appropriate paper work must be used and forwarded with the tapes. At the start of each tape the centre name and number and the name of the examiner must be announced and the name and number of each candidate must be stated in English at the start of each test. Tapes must be clearly labelled, using copies of the label reproduced in the handbook for centres, with the name and number of the centre and the names and numbers of the candidates, and should be rewound to the start of side A.

Care should be taken with the packaging and dispatch of tapes to ensure that they are not broken when the examiner receives them.

## Unit 4, Paper 1 (6814/01): Oral Discussion of Issues

Candidates are required to demonstrate a definite stance on a chosen issue and to use the language of debate and argument to discuss the issue with the examiner. Candidates are further required to demonstrate the ability to continue a discussion that moves on and away from the initial issue.

### **Assessment Principles**

The test is assessed positively out of 60, using the grid printed in the Specification: Quality of Language, 20 marks, Response 20 marks, Grasp of the Issue, 5 marks, Justification and Debate, 15 marks.

### **Candidates' Responses**

The candidates who entered for the examination at this session generally had a good understanding of the requirements of this unit and responded well to its demands. Most of them performed very well and some excellent discussions were noted.

The issues chosen by the candidates were usually polemical and included subjects such as abortion, euthanasia, the death penalty, bullfighting, immigration, homosexual marriages, smoking, drinking and drug taking. Just occasionally a candidate presented a case that it was difficult to argue against, for example, "*Estoy en contra del terrorismo*" or "*Estoy en contra de la obesidad*". For a genuine debate to take place, it is important that there should be two discernible sides to a question.

Candidates were rewarded for their ability to defend their point of view, to justify their opinions and to engage in debate. Most examiners presented a vigorous challenge to the opinions of the candidates and gave them the opportunity to demonstrate these qualities. Just occasionally an examiner failed to adopt the role of devil's advocate, and as a result the candidates were disadvantaged.

The subsequent unpredictable issues introduced by the examiner were usually skilfully sequenced, and on the whole the candidates responded well and continued to express valid opinions. However, one must point out that it is essential that the candidates should have no advanced knowledge of the issues to be raised, since they are rewarded for their ability to respond naturally and spontaneously. When a number of candidates at a centre produce similar arguments and use similar language, the marks of all of them can be affected.

Almost all of the candidates produced language of a good standard, with a wide range of appropriate vocabulary and structures, and familiarity with the language of debate. The best candidates demonstrated a high level of accuracy, but with others there were some basic errors such as faulty agreements, and confusion between the verbs *ser*, *estar* and *haber*. Subjunctive usage still constitutes a problem for a significant number of candidates.

### **Advice and Guidance**

The topic declaration form must be completed indicating the issue and the stance that the candidate intends to take, the topic presented for Unit 3 and the topics and texts studied for Unit 5. The candidate must sign it.

No materials other than the topic declaration form and, if required, an article in Spanish are allowed in the examination room. This includes supplementary notes and visual aids. Reading of any part of the test constitutes a breach of examination regulations.

At least two further issues must be introduced and must not be known to the candidates in advance.

Careful attention must be paid to the timing of the different parts of the test, five minutes for the initial issue and ten minutes for the unpredictable areas.

Candidates must choose a controversial issue that lends itself to debate.

The views of the candidates must be challenged so that they can demonstrate their ability to argue a case and justify their opinions.

Care must be taken with the recording of the tests. It is essential that the examiner and the candidate can be clearly heard and that there is an absence of interference or external noise. Mobile phones must not be taken into the examination room. Examiners should ensure that the tape does not run out before the test is concluded.

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## Statistics

### Unit 1 Listening and Writing

Grade	Max. mark	A	B	C	D	E
Raw Boundary Mark	50	36	32	28	25	22
Uniform Boundary Mark	90	72	63	54	45	36

### Unit 2 Reading and Writing

Grade	Max. mark	A	B	C	D	E
Raw Boundary Mark	80	57	50	44	38	32
Uniform Boundary Mark	120	96	84	72	60	48

### Unit 3 Prepared Oral Topic

Grade	Max. mark	A	B	C	D	E
Raw Boundary Mark	60	45	39	34	29	24
Uniform Boundary Mark	90	72	63	54	45	36

### Unit 4 Oral Discussion of Issues

Grade	Max. mark	A	B	C	D	E
Raw Boundary Mark	60	47	42	37	32	27
Uniform Boundary Mark	90	72	63	54	45	36





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