

SHORT COURSE SPANISH

Paper 1344/01

Speaking

Key comments

Candidates should:

- present their introduction “naturally”, even if pre-learnt.
- demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the topic.
- provide evidence of research.
- show interest in and personal engagement with the topic.
- support opinions with evidence.
- avoid sweeping statements.

Candidates should also expect to:

- be interrupted.
- be asked to support statements.
- be asked unexpected questions.
- be asked about the sub-headings in a different order from that provided in the form.
- give examples.
- be stretched linguistically to their ceiling.

General Comments

The general level of spoken Spanish was good. All of the candidates were fluent enough to sustain a conversation easily, in spite of some common errors which are listed in the next section.

Many candidates had prepared their topics very thoroughly using a variety of sources. Examiners rewarded candidates generously for the quality of their research. When sound factual knowledge was combined with clear analysis and well-founded opinion, much higher marks were achieved. Most candidates conveyed a genuine interest in their chosen topic.

There were, however, a significant number of under-prepared presentations, where the candidates appeared to have only vague knowledge of some crucial aspects of their topic. In a few cases, the candidates gave out incorrect information. This is surprising, given that gathering (and remembering) sufficient and accurate information is one of the easiest ways of gaining marks.

The discussions mostly flowed naturally, without an excessive use of recited, pre-learnt material. Candidates tended to respond readily to the Examiners’ questions with suitable replies. Many also tackled unexpected questions with great aplomb and honesty. Examiners rewarded highly this ability to engage in spontaneous conversation.

Some weaker performances did show a constricting reliance on recitation with a consequent lack of flexibility in discussion, and in these cases the candidates achieved lower marks even if they had researched their topics extensively.

Nervousness was evident in many candidates, but not to the point of detracting significantly from performance. Most candidates managed to relax after the first couple of minutes and were very keen to show their knowledge and express their opinions.

Specific comments

Topics

The presentations covered a variety of areas. Most topics dealt either with social, ethical and religious issues or with art, literature and music. There were also presentations on political matters and on sport. All those who went beyond the purely descriptive in order to provide some analysis or personal view were abundantly rewarded, as long as they supported their insights convincingly.

Some presentations produced excellent conversations because they included an element of controversy or debate. The contentious aspect could be implicit in the title, or else introduced in one of the sub-headings. Having said that, a controversial slant is not a necessary condition for a good oral topic.

We had some of the more familiar topics, like Guernica or drug trafficking in Mexico/Colombia, alongside more unusual ones, like human traffic and slavery in Spain or the relationships between Dalí, Buñuel and Lorca. Both kinds of topics can be done successfully if the candidate feels a strong interest in them and has done their research properly.

The topics were generally well-suited to an 8-10 minute discussion, being neither too broad nor too narrow.

Some candidates could clearly have carried on talking about their topic for another 10 minutes, as they had done plenty of research and reflection on it. Candidates should not worry if they feel they have not managed to say all they knew about their topic at the end of the test, as it is not always possible to cover all the aspects that they have prepared.

On the other hand, as pointed out earlier, there were more candidates this year who had not done enough research, and they struggled to stretch the information to cover 8 minutes.

Quality of language

Language was generally good/very good. A number of candidates showed a high degree of accuracy but without using complex sentence patterns. This limited their mark for Range and Accuracy.

Pronunciation

This was good overall and did not impair communication on the whole. These were among the most frequent errors:

- Pronunciation of *u* in words like *ataque, conquista guerra, seguir*
- *Aceptar* pronounced as *accepta*.
- Anglicized initial vowels in words like *unidad, Europa, usar*
- Soft *g* in words like *religión, ideología, legislar*
- Voiced *s* in words like *decisión, desastre, represión*
- Pronunciation of *s* as the English *th* in *thick*: **cauza, *Iglezia, *sucezo*
- Stressing the wrong syllable or vowel: *democracia, economia, pais, bombardeos, dificil*
- Aspirated *h*: *hombre, hablar, ahorro*

It is advisable for candidates to put particular care into learning the pronunciation of words and names directly related to the topic they are presenting. This includes stressing the correct syllable in proper nouns.

Verbs

The following areas were problematic for some candidates :

- confusion between *ser/estar*: **es muy bien/mal, *estar un experto, *es enfadado*
- missed subjunctives, or unnecessary subjunctives
- preterite for imperfect: **cuando trabajó en la corte*
- wrong person ending, especially with *tuvo/tuve, fue/fui*
- use of *gustar*
- use of *continuar* followed by *a + infinitive* (**continuar a desarrollar*)
- use of present subjunctive after *si* (**si haya problemas*)
- conjugation errors: **aprendó, *leó, *sirvió, *vivió, *empiezó, *recordió*
- use of *querer + object + infinitive*: **quieren sus hijos aprender*

Other grammar

Other grammatical difficulties included the following:

- gender and number agreements between noun and adjective
- wrong gender. Repeated examples include *problema, tema, parte, red, país, mano, foto, salud, situación and solución*.
- inability to distinguish between certain pairs of words: *nada/ningún, este/esto, bueno/bien, para/por, pero/sino, muerte/muerto, malo/mal*
- omission of *s* in the hundreds: **noveciento, *cuatrociento*
- use of cardinal instead of ordinal for kings and queens: *Carlos *cinco, Fernando *ocho* instead of *quinto, octavo*
- wrong adjective endings: **violente, *ridiculoso. *lente*
- omission of the preposition *a* in front of personal direct complements: **afectan la gente*

Errors that most impacted on the performance of candidates included the (very rare) use of an infinitive instead of a conjugated form (**la gente vivir en ciudades*), and some invented participles: **hacido, *escribido, *vido*.

Vocabulary

Some **pairs of words** were often confused:

- *Policía/política*
- *Tiempo/hora*
- *Derecho/derecha*
- *Nombre/número*
- *Crear/creer*
- *Gastar/pasar*
- *Largo/grande*
- *Pequeño/corto/bajo*

Invented words and expressions modelled on English, were also used: *el *resultado, el *extento, el *criticismo, el *empiezo, la *igualdad, las *demonstraciones, *involvidos, *conservativo, *political, *es el mismo con, *porque de*.

False friends were a problem: *confidencia, realizar, soportar, recordar* (instead of *grabar*), *sensible, actualmente, expectativas*.

Las personas was often heard in place of the more idiomatic *la gente*.

Candidates with a more sophisticated and specific vocabulary achieved higher marks in Range and Accuracy than those using the more general and common words, for example *llevar a cabo/realizar actividades nocivas/perjudiciales* against *hacer cosas malas*.

SPANISH

Paper 1344/02
Reading, Listening and Writing

Key Messages

In order to do well in this examination, candidates should:

- focus only on the required information and communicate it precisely in their answers
- pay particular attention to conveying the required information to the Examiner in unambiguous language.

General Comments

Candidates seemed to find the material in the examination accessible, and this was reflected in good and relevant responses. Some very good responses were seen in all three parts. The best performing candidates responded in detail and demonstrated a wide-ranging, accurate knowledge of vocabulary and an ability to use complex sentence structures.

Comments on specific questions

Part I: Listening Comprehension

In this section there are three recordings with listening comprehension questions in Spanish and in English. Language accuracy is not taken into account as long as it does not impede communication. Candidates hear the recordings three times and there are pauses both between and within the sections.

Listening Text 1 was an item about a traffic incident in Cataluña. Candidates were given a printed summary of the extract with six gaps left blank. Below the summary, they were offered a choice of three words / phrases to complete the sentences and had to underline the most appropriate option. The material was understood well by candidates and generally the correct options were chosen, although some candidates chose *causó* rather than *evitó* for **Question 3** or *para comprar* rather than *al faltarle* for **Question 4**. During the preparation for this type of question, it is essential that candidates should become confident in finding and using Spanish synonyms.

The extract for **Listening Text 2** was an interview with Marta Milans, a Spanish actress who is the star of an American horror film “Devoured”. The exercise, involving straightforward Spanish questions to be answered in Spanish, was generally done well. 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. All irrelevant and superfluous information is disregarded, unless it adversely affects the correct target information. Most of the questions were understood and candidates wrote appropriate replies. For **Question 7** candidates had to identify Marta’s first reaction when offered the role in the film. Most candidates successfully identified *ilusión* rather than *miedo*, which came later, but some did not gain the mark because they wrote the English word “illusion”. Most candidates answered **Question 8** correctly, and **Question 9**, which required changing *nocturno* to *durante las noches*. Most candidates understood the material for **Questions 10-12** and provided appropriate answers. However, some candidates lost a mark for **Question 13** by confusing *sentirse* and *sentarse*. Marta was not sitting at home in Spain, but felt at home there.

In **Listening Text 3** candidates heard an interview with Juan Gabriel Vásquez, a Colombian writer who lives in Europe and who has won a prestigious Spanish literary prize. The material certainly appeared to be accessible and candidates made a good attempt at answering the English questions set on it. Sometimes, however, rather than weak comprehension of the Spanish material, a candidate might have lost marks because of awkward English expression that did not convey the information correctly. Some candidates misunderstood the word *lectores* for **Question 14**, believing that it meant “lectures” rather than “readers”.

Others confused “writer” and “reader”. Most candidates gave good answers for **Questions 15, 16, 17 and 18**, but some lost marks in **Question 19** for not fully understanding the writer’s reasons for leaving Colombia. Whilst **Question 20** was generally answered well, some candidates failed to gain the two marks available for **Question 21** because they did not give full information. “Corruption” was not enough; the full answer needed to be “the corrupt people in power”. Similarly, “drugs” was not enough; the full answer needed to be “drug-trafficking”.

Part II: Reading Comprehension

There were three passages with reading comprehension questions in Spanish and in English. Language accuracy is not taken into account as long as it does not impede communication.

Reading Text 1 was a short article about a cycling school for residents in Santander. The material was understood by the candidates and the exercise, involving Spanish questions to be answered in Spanish, was generally well done. The majority of candidates succeeded in using their own words in the answers. It is important to stress that, when answering these questions, candidates should aim to communicate a correct response, but should not reproduce the original text word for word. Some candidates failed to gain the mark for **Question 22** because they just copied the expression *como si no* without explaining its meaning. **Questions 23-25** were generally answered well.

The passage used for **Reading Text 2** was a longer article about the new trend for people in Málaga to rent out their spare rooms to make ends meet in the present economic crisis. The text had Spanish-language questions and answers set on it. Generally, the material was understood very well and most candidates answered the questions with confidence and correctly. As for the first Reading task, it is essential that candidates should use their own words rather than attempt to reproduce the original text word for word. They must also ensure that they give the full information required to gain the marks available. **Question 26** required a clear distinction between the previous rental situation and the new trend. Most candidates answered **Question 27** well, whereas some failed to understand that Álvaro had had to reduce the asking price for his apartment rent. Most candidates answered **Questions 29-31** well, but for **Question 32** some failed to understand that it was a flat-mate who stole Rosa’s bag, not a general thief/burglar.

Reading Text 3 was an article about a wedding fair in Madrid. The material was generally well understood by the candidates, who succeeded in answering the English questions set on the passage in a fluent, comprehensible way. The only individual vocabulary item that proved problematic was *alianzas* (wedding rings) for **Question 39**. Otherwise, it appears that the candidates found the material accessible and gave appropriate answers.

Part III: Guided Writing

Candidates are given a choice of two texts and have to write a response of 200-250 words in Spanish, based on a series of five bullet points. The material contained in the two extracts was clearly accessible to candidates and candidates succeeded in writing appropriate responses in a good level of fluent Spanish. The two options were equally popular and a variety of interesting essays were seen.

The first article discussed the findings of a recent World Bank report about mobile phone usage around the world. Candidates had to write a letter to the newspaper in response to the article, firstly giving their reaction to the article and discussing the importance of telephone communication, then moving on to give their opinions on other modern technological advances and the problem of the abusive use of technology. Finally, candidates were asked to offer a conclusion as to whether modern technology has too much importance in the world today. The candidates who chose this option were clearly familiar with the concepts and the vocabulary needed and produced some good answers.

The second article discussed a report that the Mediterranean diet can reduce depression. Candidates had to write a letter to the newspaper in response to the article, firstly giving their reaction to the article, giving their opinion as to the relationship between good health and the food we eat and then moving on to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of fast food. They then needed to discuss whether young people eat too much junk food today and, finally, to offer a conclusion as to whether eating healthy food is easy in today’s world. Most candidates who chose this option provided some interesting responses to the task, although a few failed to make a clear distinction between fast food and junk food, which are not always the same.

Advice and Guidance to candidates

Listening and Reading Comprehension

Answering Spanish questions set on the texts

- Remember that full sentences are not required. However, the full information asked for must be given;
- highlight the question words (*¿quién?*, *¿cómo?*, *¿cuándo?*, etc.), so that it is clear what information is needed;
- note how many marks are awarded for each question, so that no essential information is omitted;
- try to use your own words and do not reproduce the language of the texts word for word;
- practise building a wide Spanish vocabulary, so that you are at ease using synonyms for words in the texts;
- remember that your Spanish answers must clearly make sense.

Answering English questions set on the texts

- Write your answers in good English and check your spelling;
- beware of “false friends” (words that look alike in Spanish and English but have different meanings);
- realise that some Spanish words can often have two meanings; choose the correct one;
- find the appropriate English word, not necessarily one that looks similar to the Spanish word;
- make sure your whole answer sounds like real English and makes sense to someone reading it;
- make sure that you give the full information required; do not omit any essential information.

Guided Writing

Covering the content

- Read the two stimulus passages and decide quickly which one you wish to tackle;
- pick the topic that most appeals to you and is most in accordance with your strengths;
- ensure that you have enough knowledge to tackle the question and enough vocabulary associated with the topic;
- read the chosen stimulus text again: analyse it to grasp the aim, content and context of the passage and to note key words and concepts;
- study the bullet points carefully and consider the full implications and scope of the requirements;
- pay attention to the form the response should take: (a letter? a report?);
- adopt the correct linguistic register: (formal? informal?);
- plan carefully and stick to your plan, avoiding digressions, getting carried away, recapitulation, putting in afterthoughts, etc.
- all the bullet point must be covered and developed, but not necessarily given equal weight;
- make sure that ideas follow a logical sequence, both overall and within each paragraph;
- avoid generalisations; make sure that ideas are illustrated and substantiated;
- take care to ensure full coverage of the content within the limits of the word count;
- develop the skill of communicating succinctly but effectively;
- leave enough time at the end to check your writing for accuracy.

The Spanish-language requirements for all the tasks

- Essential basic grammar knowledge is required. You should aim for responding in accurate language;
- know all Spanish tenses, in particular the present, preterite, imperfect and conditional, both regular and irregular;
- be able to use tenses with all persons, not just the first person;
- be able to switch between the first and third persons with confidence, as this is often required in comprehension passages;
- use pronouns correctly, in particular *le* and *se*, and be able to switch from first person to third person pronouns and adjectives with ease (e.g. *mi* to *su* and *mío* to *suyo*, etc.);
- use *gustar* and similar verbs properly in all tenses;
- be strict when applying the correct articles and adjectival endings (e.g. *un problema*, *cinco rosas rojas*, etc.);
- know when accents are important (e.g. *trabajo* or *trabajó*? *esta*, *está* or *ésta*?);
- be familiar with the subjunctive mood: know when and how to use it successfully;

Cambridge Pre-U Short Course
1344 Spanish June 2014
Principal Examiner Report for Teachers

- develop a bank of suitable phrases for your essay writing: how to begin (para empezar), making general statements (hablando en forma general), giving opinions (me parece que), explaining (es decir), disagreeing (no estoy de acuerdo con), giving justification (no cabe duda de que), expanding ideas (no sólo ... sino también), contradicting (a pesar de que), suggesting (es posible que) and concluding (en resumen), etc. (NB. These are only suggestions and candidates should build up their own banks of phrases).