

# PRINCIPAL COURSE SPANISH

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**Paper 9781/01**

**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 among our candidates this year was high. The majority of candidates were able to maintain a conversation in fairly accurate and fluent language. There were, however, some recurring mistakes, listed in another section of this report.

Before the first part of the test (Discussion of a Newspaper Article), many candidates used their preparation time very well, considering the issue in question and other issues that might arise in conversation. Quite a few others, though, did not seem to have spent enough time thinking about the General Theme, though they had carefully studied the article and prepared a good summary.

Most candidates were able to sustain an interesting discussion and use the language of argument well. The Examiners asked candidates to express opinions and to substantiate, elaborate, clarify or qualify them. Many of the performances were highly satisfactory and some were excellent.

Regarding the second part of the test (Prepared Topic Discussion), most candidates had prepared their topics thoroughly. Examiners found evidence of detailed research using different sources, and rewarded candidates highly for the quality of their research. When detailed and extensive factual knowledge was combined with clear analysis and well-founded opinion, candidates achieved much higher marks.

There were 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 in this part of the test.

Spelling and even lexical/grammatical mistakes occasionally appeared in the title or subtitles listed in the Prepared Topic Form. Whereas this in no way affected the candidate’s mark in the oral, it would be best to avoid it.

The discussions mostly flowed naturally without the candidates giving the impression of simply reciting pre-learnt material. They tended to respond readily to the Examiners’ questions with appropriate replies. Not only this, but most did not appear taken aback by unexpected questions and tackled them confidently and

honestly. Candidates were generously rewarded for their ability to engage in a natural and spontaneous conversation.

Many candidates also displayed an excellent ability to keep calm and collected or, at least, not to allow nerves to interfere significantly with their performance. Nevertheless, a couple of the visiting Examiners reported noticing a higher level of nerves this year, in some cases affecting intonation and the ability to express ideas clearly.

### **Comments on specific questions**

#### **Section A (Newspaper Article Discussion)**

This is in principle the most challenging part of the test, as the candidates need to choose one of four newspaper articles, never seen before, and have only twenty minutes to prepare it: read it through and understand it, make a note of their reaction and opinions on it, and think about which issues might arise from the topic presented in the article. They should also consider the general heading on the card and give some thought to possible areas of discussion.

The bulk of this part of the test is by nature unpredictable. After one minute's summary of the article and 3 or 4 minutes' talking about their opinions on it, the conversation broadens according to the general heading on the card. The cards this year were: 1. *Environment* (Un grupo ecologista se opone a la búsqueda de uranio como fuente de energía nuclear), 2. *Young people* (Verano y alcohol, un cóctel muy peligroso para los jóvenes españoles), 3. *Cultural life/heritage* (Una artista mexicana presenta una serie fotográfica sobre las camas en que durmió), and 4. *Religion and belief* (Un cura argentino es expulsado de la Iglesia Católica por defender el matrimonio homosexual).

The second and fourth, *Young people* and *Religion and belief*, proved by far the most popular, and candidates had plenty to say on each, with views being generally well-supported.

When tackling the second card, some candidates did not read the article deeply enough and were not able to understand whether the problem of young Spaniards drinking too much nowadays was the same situation as English/German youths going on holiday to Spain simply to drink. Many candidates likewise misinterpreted *fiestas locales* as private celebrations, rather than traditional community festivals.

The discussions on religion arising out of the fourth card revealed some difficulties with relevant vocabulary, in words like *el \*Dio*, *el \*Biblo/Bible* and *\*Jesus Cristo*, or *\*los morales*.

The first card, *Environment*, was chosen by a small number of candidates, who had strong views on the subject and spoke thoughtfully about it. The third card, *Cultural life/heritage*, was chosen by only three candidates. It could be argued that many candidates with an interest in the arts were prevented from choosing that card because their prepared topic was on a cultural or artistic theme, but the same argument cannot apply to the first card, as only two presentations were about the environment.

Candidates were naturally more nervous during this part of the test, but this did not result in significantly poorer performances than in the second part. In some cases, candidates rose admirably to the challenge and relaxed into a spontaneous and natural exchange with the Examiner. Occasionally, the conversation felt so "real" as to make it possible to forget, momentarily, that it was an exam. Having to improvise did stump some of the candidates, but a high proportion of them fared just as well in **section A** as in **section B**.

A minority of weaker candidates found it hard to support their views with arguments after an initial yes/no answer, and were nonplussed by why/how questions. They took refuge in simple statements and repetitive ideas. The very best candidates played an active role in the conversation and even introduced new topics themselves. Between these two extremes, the majority of performances showed good discussion skills and considerable resourcefulness.

#### **Section B (Prepared Topic Discussion)**

Most topics were well-suited to an 8-10 minute discussion, being neither too broad nor too narrow, or else fairly large topics approached in an intelligently selective way. So for example, if the candidate was talking about a long historical period, the presentation worked best when it clearly concentrated on particular aspects of that period, while perhaps touching more lightly on other points.

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.

There was a good range of interesting topics, generally arising out of personal interests. Some were of great topical interest, like abortion in Spain or the debate about Catalan independence. The most popular topic areas were History and Politics and Social Issues and Popular Culture. Also moderately popular were Art, Literature, Sport and Music. There were a number of presentations that mixed topic areas, like music and politics or art and literature. There were a small number of topics touching Religion, Philosophy and Psychology, Food and Drink, and the Environment. If we exclude the environment, this year there was a complete absence of specifically scientific/medical topics.

We had some of the more familiar topics, for example Che Guevara, Velázquez or Real Madrid and Barça, but many candidates had chosen to approach them in an original or personal way. All those who went beyond the purely descriptive in order to provide some analysis or personal view were highly 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 headings. Having said that, a controversial slant is not a necessary condition for a good oral topic.

There were also some highly original or unusual topics, for example about liberation theology in Latin America, anarchism in Spain, polo in Argentina, and the human population of the Galapagos Islands.

### 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. In contrast, quite a few candidates had been very well trained to give opinions using the subjunctive.

### Pronunciation

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

- Pronunciation of *u* in words like *ataque, conquista guerra, seguir*
- Pronunciation of *aceptar* as *\*acceptar*
- 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, Dios, dificil, atmosfera*
- Aspirated *h*: *hombre, hablar, alchoho*.
- Pronunciation of *c* as *k* in front of *e/i* in words like *sacerdote*

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 nouns like Dalí, Guernica, Gaudí.

### Intonation

As pointed out above, several candidates were very nervous and this affected intonation, lowering their overall mark for Pronunciation and Intonation.

### Verbs

- 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*
- Incorrect 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, \*vivó, \*empiezó, \*recordió*
- Use of *querer + object + infinitive*: \**quieren sus hijos aprender*

### Other grammar

The following proved problematic for some candidates:

- gender and number agreements between noun and adjective
- using the correct gender. Repeated examples include *problema, tema, parte, red, país, mano, foto, salud, situación and solución*.
- distinguishing between certain pairs of words: *nada/ningún, este/esto, bueno/bien, para/por, pero/sino, muerte/muerto, malo/mal*
- use 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*
- 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*.

# PRINCIPAL COURSE SPANISH

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Paper 9781/02  
Reading and Listening

## 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

This report will look at candidates' performance in this session, but will also concentrate on giving advice and guidance for future examinations.

This is a mixed-skills paper which allows candidates to show their Spanish-language skills in Reading and Listening. Candidates have 2 hours 15 minutes to complete the paper. They are advised to spend 1 hour 15 minutes on the Reading exercises and 1 hour on the Listening exercises. They may choose the order in which they prefer to tackle the exercises.

## Comments on Specific Questions

### **Part I – Reading (30 marks)**

There are two passages with a combined limit of 600 words. The first one has reading comprehension questions in Spanish requiring answers in Spanish. Although these answers are not assessed for quality of language, candidates must not 'lift' phrases from the passage. The second passage has questions in English that require answers in English. The third exercise is a retranslation from English into Spanish of a paragraph of about 75 words based on the stimulus of the earlier second reading passage.

**Reading Text 1** was a passage about the amount of satellite litter in space and plans of how to deal with it. The test is marked positively and the objective is to communicate the correct response, but not to reproduce the original text word for word. It is important for candidates to use their own words. Full sentences are not required in the answers but the correct information must be conveyed successfully. Accent errors are only penalised if they affect meaning and slight spelling errors are accepted if the word is recognisable, but not if the spelling error leads to another word. **Questions 1** and **2** were answered well by most candidates. Some lost marks in **Question 3** because they omitted essential information, such as *observables/pueden ser vistos*. Full information is always required in this type of exercise. Most candidates understood the material for **Questions 4, 5** and **6** and produced good answers. This type of exercise can be demanding in places, but overall the Examiners found that the majority of candidates displayed a good understanding of the Spanish material and were able to write their answers with an appropriate standard of Spanish language.

**Reading Text 2** was about an energy-saving house in the north of Spain. The material was generally understood by the candidates, who succeeded in answering the English questions set on the passage in a fluent, comprehensible way. Many candidates scored high marks on this exercise. Most candidates started well by gaining the marks available for **Questions 7** and **8** but some spelling versions of 'Pyrenees' were given in Spanish or French and could not be awarded the mark. A large number of candidates did not give the full information that the owner was wearing a short-sleeved t-shirt for **Question 9**, whilst a surprising number thought that *sin un solo radiador a la vista* meant 'there was just one radiator in the house', rather than 'not a single radiator'. Others confused the two English words 'sight' and 'site'. For **Question 10** some element of extreme heat was needed to explain *el calor achicharra*. An answer such as 'it is hot in summer' does not convey the meaning of the Spanish text. Some candidates had difficulty with basic vocabulary such



as *ventana* and *pared* for **Question 11**. Candidates must retain the vocabulary they learned for GCSE as the Pre U course consolidates and builds on this. Whilst most candidates gained the two marks available for **Question 12**, some had difficulty in understanding *me suelen preguntar por el plazo en el que se amortiza* for two reasons: *el plazo* was not understood as an expression of time and some candidates did not understand the meaning of *amortizarse* or understood the concept but could not explain it in English. Whilst generally most candidates understood the material and provided good English-language answers, there were some strange interpretations of the text, such as 'the house has 25 windows covered in shirts'.

**Reading Text 3** was a paragraph in English based on the material in **Reading Text 2**. Candidates had to translate this into Spanish. The previous text contained words and phrases that could help them, but generally some manipulation of language was required. For marking purposes, the text is divided into 30 boxes and these are each awarded one mark or zero. The total score is converted to a final mark out of 10. The correct information should be communicated and suitable and accurate alternative renderings are accepted. Slight spelling errors are disregarded, but not if the meaning of the word is altered. The final mark scheme document gives a detailed list of versions that were accepted or not. Most candidates performed well in this exercise, although few accessed the highest marks available for the task this year. Although slight errors are permitted, the Examiners point to several common errors. These include confusion between *por* and *para*; missed subjunctives after *es esencial que*, *quizás*, and *hacen que*; lack of knowledge of weather expressions (*cuando nieva*, *cuando está nevando*, *cuando hace sol*, *cuando brilla el sol*); inventing words, such as *calefacar* for *calentar*; confusion between *gastar* and *malgastar* or between *ahorrar* and *guardar/salvar*.

### **Part II – Listening (30 marks)**

Candidates have control of their own individual listening equipment. They may stop, rewind and replay the recording at will, and they may make notes and write their answers at any point. There are three passages with a combined limit of 700 to 800 words. The first has listening comprehension questions in Spanish requiring answers in Spanish, whereas questions for the second passage are in English and require answers in English. Answers in the target language are not assessed for quality of language but for communication. Candidates then listen to a third recording of about 250 words and summarise it in English using bullet points for guidance (maximum of 100 words).

The extract for **Listening Text 1** was an item about Spanish parents who are protesting about the state of education in Spain. The test is marked positively and the objective is to communicate the correct response, but not to reproduce the original text word for word. It is important for candidates to use their own words. Vocabulary items need to be understood but they should be conveyed in an answer that is a logical response to the question. Full sentences are not required in the answers but the correct information must be conveyed successfully. Accent errors are only penalised if they affect meaning and slight spelling errors are accepted if the word is recognisable, but not if the spelling error leads to another word. It would appear that candidates understood the material well and produced sound responses. Many candidates scored highly in this exercise and no specific question caused particular difficulty. Errors included *calidad* for *calidad* in **Question 15** and missing part of the information required to answer **Question 16**. For **Question 17** the daughter was in a class *con otros 34 alumnos*, so the answer *en una clase de 34 alumnos* was incorrect. The answer to **Question 18** had to refer to the teachers and some candidates attempted to transcribe the text without comprehension by writing *descubrirse* for *de cubrirse*. An answer for **Question 19** needed to be in the future tense, so a response such as *dejaron de recibir* could not gain the mark. Similarly, *dejarán de recibirlas* does not give enough information. Finally, for the first part of **Question 20**, whilst most candidates understood that the young people were now unemployed, some did not understand that they were returning to school to continue their studies.

In **Listening Text 2** candidates heard a news report about a court case where a group of Spanish nurses demanded the right to wear trousers, rather than a skirt, to do their work. Candidates appeared to understand the material well and produced some good, thoughtful answers. Occasionally, 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. All of the questions were answered well and some high scores were achieved. The single vocabulary item that caused difficulties was *el quirófano* for **Question 23**, which is an operating theatre.

**Listening Text 3** involved an interview with Andrés Valdearcos, head chef at the Parador de Salamanca, talking about Spanish omelettes. The test required a summary of his views in no more than 100 words in English. There were four bullet points of information to be covered. The full gist of the passage needs to be understood, there has to be detail and it needs to be well selected. The material should be expressed concisely, read well and be informative. The 10 marks available are awarded positively according to these

criteria. Length is important. A summary with fewer than 80 words is likely to be self-penalising, as all the above criteria are unlikely to be met. On the other hand, candidates should beware of writing over-long summaries. It should be stressed that the Examiners operate a cut-off point and any material written beyond that point cannot be assessed, even if it is correct. Many candidates appeared to find the material accessible and there were some high marks awarded in this exercise. They appeared to be familiar with the vocabulary and concepts in the extract. The Examiners found that many candidates produced good summaries that demonstrated understanding of the gist and detail of the original Spanish extract. They were able to infer ideas and showed an ability to select key facts and to communicate this information concisely. Sometimes, however, candidates wrote in note form, only using isolated phrases that they had heard in the text without attempting to make sense of them in coherent statements. Although continuous English prose is not required to answer this test and bullet points are acceptable, they must contain enough information with logical links and coherent statements. Otherwise, the marks cannot be awarded. This year many candidates omitted essential information, such as 'free-range eggs', 'a good olive oil' and 'new potatoes from Galicia'. Generally, however, most candidates produced a suitable summary and gained good marks.

## Advice and Guidance to Candidates

### Listening and Reading Comprehension

#### What comprehension skills are required?

- The material for the texts may come from any of the Topic Areas in the Syllabus;
- the material could be factual or abstract;
- inference – you have to work out the answers;
- manipulation – you will be expected to manipulate the language;
- explanation – you will need to explain;
- synthesis – you may need to combine points of information;
- full information is always required – answers may be long;
- a high level of Quality of Language is expected – accuracy and sophistication are needed.

#### 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 make sense. If they do not, then there is something wrong.

#### 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.

#### Retranslation for Reading Task 3

- Study the Spanish stimulus passage in **Reading Task 2** carefully: it gives vocabulary and structures to be used and re-worked;
- read the English passage and understand what is required;
- study the setting, context and tone of the extracts;
- use sensible and intelligent guesses where vocabulary is not known;
- never leave gaps;
- think carefully about the grammar of the sentence being translated; Examiners regularly point to the failure of candidates to translate tenses correctly, to spot adjectival agreements and to link pronouns with the nouns to which they refer;
- beware of literal translation and poor/meaningless Spanish;

- beware paraphrasing – do not stray too far away from the original;
- but, on the other hand, do not be afraid to change word order, parts of speech, etc.;
- remember that accuracy is more important than creativity.

### Summary skills for Listening Text 3

What are summary skills?

- All the bullet points have been covered.
- The gist of the passage has been understood.
- There is detail and it is well selected.
- The material is expressed concisely.
- The material reads well and is informative.
- There is no incorrect information.

### Advice on summary skills

Writing a good summary is a matter of regular practice and also of acquiring the correct technique. An unsuccessful attempt at a summary may be due to lack of understanding of the original text, but more often than not, it is the way the exercise has been tackled that is at fault.

- Listen to the passage until you have a good idea of what the whole text is about.
- Do not start summarising (or even translating) every sentence; you will not be discarding the less significant details and you will quickly run out of words.
- Make rough notes on the question paper; you are not likely to have time to write out a full version of the summary and then write out a clean copy.
- It is often not necessary to know the meaning of every word – do not panic if you do not understand something.
- Remember this is a summary – be selective – you cannot include every bit of information.
- Make sure that you cover all the bullet points.
- Spread the words: it is a common error to say too much about the first half of a passage and too little (or nothing at all) about the last parts.
- 'Prune' written summaries, removing unnecessary words without deleting the main points that you wish to convey.
- Absolutely stick within the word limit – do not exceed 100 words.
- Check the accuracy of everything you have written.

### The Quality of your Spanish Language

- Remember that essential Spanish grammar knowledge is required; you should aim for responding in accurate language.
- Be confident in your use of 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 with confidence, 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 (eg. *un problema*, *cinco rosas rojas*, etc.).
- Know when accents are important (e.g. *trabajo* or *trabajó?* *esta*, *esta* or *ésta?*).
- Be familiar with the subjunctive mood: know when and how to use it successfully.



# PRINCIPAL COURSE SPANISH

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**Paper 9781/03**  
**Writing and Usage**

## Key Messages

When choosing an essay title in **Part 1**, candidates should:

- make sure they fully understand the implications in each essay title
- consider whether they have an opinion on the subject that they are able to justify
- consider whether they possess the relevant topic-specific vocabulary to be able to express their ideas about the chosen topic.

When writing the essay, candidates are advised to:

- carefully plan their essay
- write an introduction, discussion and a conclusion
- ensure their response is fully relevant
- use sophisticated vocabulary in order to demonstrate their linguistic ability, including a variety of adjectives
- give relevant examples to illustrate the points made.

## General Comments

The June 2015 examination reflected the standards achieved in previous examination sessions. Almost all candidates demonstrated sound knowledge of the tasks demanded of them.

In **Part 1**, there were some excellent answers which used a wide range of lexis and syntax though frequently the writing was inaccurate. Candidates should be reminded that a broad and fluent command of the topic is highly commendable and will be well rewarded, but that accuracy in writing is absolutely essential for full credit to be given. This session there were many candidates who struggled to qualify their arguments and made errors even with basic adjectives (dañosos, practicales, aduetez, benefical).

As usual, it was clear that candidates were well prepared for this Examination.

## Comments on Specific Questions

### **Part I: Discursive essay**

The essay is marked following the published marking grids; for accuracy and linguistic range out of 24 marks. Development and organisation of ideas are then assessed out of 16 marks. Candidates are advised to write about 350–450 words in Spanish as a response.

Some candidates did not follow the advice on how many words are expected, and there were essays of between 700 and 900 words, or even longer in some cases. Candidates writing any such amount are self-penalising, as it will normally have an impact on repetition and lack of organisation. Candidates should be reminded that organisation and presenting a well thought-out argument is paramount in order to achieve the highest marks. Marks are lost in long essays which do not begin to address the required points within the first 150 words. Often also when the essay is very long, the information given is underpinned with false numerical data and statistics or generalizations affecting the effectiveness of the argument. Furthermore, by writing at excessive length, candidates clearly will not have the time to check their work as carefully as they should in order to minimise the incidence of error.

The vast majority of scripts were neatly presented and this was, as always, very much appreciated by the Examiners. However, a number of cases of poor presentation with messy and unclear handwriting were noted. Candidates should be reminded, particularly if they make alterations to their script, that, while Examiners will always try to be tolerant, illegibility and ambiguous writing are never credited.

It was pleasing to note that the majority of candidates were well prepared for the examination, both in terms of knowledge of the chosen essay topics and understanding of the requirements of the examination itself; presenting clear and well developed arguments. The essay title most popular with candidates was A, and only a few candidates answered B.

- (a) This was the most popular question and many candidates displayed sound understanding of the topic in a range of approaches to the question. The most successful answers gave a broad and well developed argument starting by defining what success was and presenting relevant examples. It is important to keep the focus of the answer on the key words of the essay title.
- (b) Fewer candidates chose this option. This question caused few problems for some of the candidates who did not understand it fully and focused too much on the cost of organic food, without fully addressing the question. The top answers were varied in their approach and candidates presented some discussion about the advantages of non-organic crops for farmers and the emerging countries.
- (c) This was the second most popular choice. The top answers gave a considered account of how the ageing population has already changed society in ways we don't even notice anymore, with some discussion as to how society is benefiting and dramatically changing at the same time; losing some of its identity and changing the fabric of society as we know it.
- (d) This question, surprisingly, wasn't a very popular option. Some candidates focussed on the role of the press and the stereotypes of beauty it presents and how people feel when they try to achieve that unrealistic ideal of beauty. Others focused their argument on the cost of plastic surgery and the addiction it causes to some people. Some candidates focused on positive changes plastic surgery can bring into the life of people who really need it.
- (e) This was the third most popular question and generally candidates presented a balanced argument. Candidates tackled this essay title with originality in their approach. It was pleasing to see that most candidates had a lot to say about the topic. Most of the candidates focused on the importance of sex education and the changes in womens' lives. Some candidates concentrated in the benefits and disadvantages contraception can bring to developing countries. Others discussed the conflict of religious beliefs and the use of contraception.

## Part II: Usage

### Exercise 1 Questions 2–6

Candidates generally performed well in this exercise. In previous years candidates scored higher marks in **Exercise 1** than **Exercise 2**, but this was not the case this year. Some candidates struggled with **Questions 5** and **6**, where the Continuous future and the Conditional Perfect were tested. **Question 3**, testing the present subjunctive of a radical changing verb, also presented difficulties to many candidates.

### Exercise 2 Questions 7–11

Candidates seemed better prepared for this exercise than in previous sessions. **Question 10** proved to be the most challenging. It was pleasing to see that some candidates were able to understand the use of direct and indirect object pronouns with an infinitive and that the use of a tilde was needed (dámelo).

**Question 7**, many candidates found the change to indirect speech difficult (no admitiría más insultos).

**Question 9** proved to be difficult for a number of candidates. They needed to use “a no ser que” + present subjunctive (a no ser que me digas).

### Exercise 3 Questions 12–31

Most candidates score well on this exercise. Almost all candidates demonstrated sound knowledge of the tasks demanded of them. They coped effectively with the tasks set. When mistakes were made, they usually occurred in **Questions 19, 24, 25, and 28**.

# PRINCIPAL COURSE SPANISH

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Paper 9781/04

Topics and Texts

## Key Messages

To achieve high marks for content a focused, wholly relevant and analytical response to the question is required. Essays should keep to the recommended length of 350–500 words for **Part I** and 450–600 for **Part II**.

## General Comments

This year there were answers to a wider range of questions than ever before, with all Topic questions attempted and answers submitted on five of the eight Texts. The overall level of attainment remained good, with nearly all candidates able to make valid critical judgements on the works they had studied.

In terms of content, candidates can safely assume that the examiner is aware of the author and publication date of the works in the syllabus, so they do not need to supply this information. However, one point that should be mentioned more is the usage and effect of irony, a significant element of most of the works in the syllabus. At a more mundane level, there were several instances of mislabelled answers, with candidates leaving themselves at the mercy of the examiner's ability to identify what question was being attempted. Some candidates even concocted their own numbering system, e.g. '6A2'. There were instances of complex asterisking to reorder text or add afterthoughts: many of these were hard to follow or completely indecipherable. Verbosity in both English and Spanish was rare, making it the exception rather than the rule to read, e.g. 'The realist portrayal of the 16<sup>th</sup> century which is painfully evoked and the employment of satirical resources to communicate the solemnity of the socio-economic and psychological conditions imply this pessimistic view.'

Candidates should bear in mind that questions asking 'To what extent...?' / '¿Hasta qué punto...?' require them to assess a specific feature of the topic or text. There is scope for answering 'to a limited extent' and then referring to other features, but these other features should not then become the focus of the answer. Thus, for example, in **Question 12C**, asking to what extent the text is 'about trust and betrayal', the candidate would be well advised to devote at least 80% of the answer to the theme of trust and betrayal. If s/he wishes to argue that actually corruption is a more important theme, it is legitimate to make that point (backed by appropriate evidence), but not then to devote whole paragraphs to the topic of corruption: the question is about trust and betrayal, and the answer duly needs to focus on that aspect of the text. The same applies to 'Do you agree?' / '¿Estás de acuerdo?' questions.

Language marks in the Topics section were higher than in previous years, with a good proportion of answers including enough complex sentence patterns to meet the requirements of the higher end of the grid. *Si* clauses look good when used successfully, although when artificially worked into an academic text they can become awkward and counter-productive.

Specific language points worth comment include confusion between *rodar* and *rodear* and between *audiencia* and *público*. *Mostrar* was often misspelt in its various conjugations, and would in any case often have been better replaced by *demostrar*, *ilustrar*, *indicar*, *retratar* or *representar*. As in the previous year, there was some confusion over when to use *tanto ... como...* rather than *ambos*. In the Texts section, some candidates who chose to comment on a passage in question A did not pay as much attention to the passage itself as befits a question of that type, and instead wrote about more general aspects of the work. As a rough guideline, one might normally expect that about three-fifths of any such answer will focus on the passage itself, and two-fifths on wider aspects of the work brought to mind by the passage. Also in the Texts section, candidates are well advised to remember that the mark scheme awards marks out of 5 for 'structure', with 5 marks awarded to answers that include a 'comprehensive introduction and conclusion'. Many candidates made little attempt to make their introductions and conclusions 'comprehensive', leading to scores of 4 marks for an 'adequate' introduction or conclusion, or 3 for 'weakness' in those areas. Candidates who did offer

introductions and conclusions mostly understood that these two features of an essay have different functions and should not closely resemble each other.

### Comments on Specific Questions

#### **Part I: Cultural Topics**

##### **Question 1**

All candidates attempting this question wrote on *La lengua de las mariposas* and *Las bicicletas son para el verano* in their answers. Candidates displayed sound knowledge of the texts/films but they could have drawn more effectively on the historical background to justify their answers.

- A** Candidates showed good understanding of how *lealtad* fitted into the two works. However, not all answers managed fully to explore the characters' moral struggles in a time of war.
- B** There was a good range of answers, though most focused on Don Gregorio and Don Luis as the prime examples of morality. Candidates clearly found *La lengua de las mariposas* accessible, but the strong sense of community in *Las bicicletas son para el verano* was also well understood.

##### **Question 2**

Although there were many good answers to these questions, there was a tendency for candidates to lose sight of key terms (*solidaridad* in **2A** and *ingenuidad* in **2B**). This, together with the temptation (discussed above) presented by the '*¿Hasta qué punto...?*' and '*¿Estás de acuerdo?*' wording, led some candidates to write rather general answers, not all of which were relevant to the question and some of which were partly narrative.

Particularly in **2A** it was helpful if candidates could differentiate clearly between terms such as *amor*, *solidaridad*, *pasión* and *amistad*. There was also a tendency to overlook the role of John Brown as a prime exponent of *solidaridad*.

##### **Question 3**

- A** There were a number of impressive answers to this question, with *Hable con ella* in particular offering inspiration for comments on communication. More sophisticated responses identified the use of dance as a form of communication, or remarked on the different physical conditions of Alicia and Lydia in their comas as an indicator of whether their companions were communicating with them or not. Some noted that Benigno's suicide was partly the result of the lack of communication from which he suffered in prison, as represented by the physical barriers between him and Marco. Marco and Lydia's one-sided conversation in the car was much cited, as were the shortcomings of '*los medios de comunicación*' in *Hable con ella* and *Volver*. Perceptive answers noted that, after playing Stella on stage, Manuela was able to communicate better in *Todo sobre mi madre*, just as Raimunda was able to after singing *Volver*. Relatively few candidates showed familiarity with the director's views on how a lack of communication can be positive (as discussed in the *Saber fingir* section of his notes on *Todo sobre mi madre*), an idea illustrated clearly in that film and, particularly, in *Volver*. Less successful answers equated communication with relationships; some others overlooked the instruction to analyse the films, and instead listed memorable instances of failed or successful communication.
- B** There were too few answers to make comment appropriate.

##### **Question 4**

All answers focused on *Diarios de motocicleta* and *También la lluvia*. There was evidence that candidates had read around the topics raised in these films to achieve a good understanding of the issues, with *Las venas abiertas* again cited to good effect.

In **4B** a number of answers suggested that these films demonstrate that individual efforts achieve nothing. However, this line of argument needs to be reconciled with the far-reaching effects of the commitment that Bartolomé de las Casas or Che Guevara (among others) showed to their respective causes. Less successful



answers gave broad overviews of the oppression depicted in the films, or general assessments of the effectiveness of characters' actions, rather than looking specifically at the protagonists' responses.

#### Question 5

- A** This question prompted some lively discussion. Most candidates decided that neither *conformismo* nor *rebeldía* was good, but the latter was the less bad. Some candidates reflected on how Lorca might have seen this question, as well as considering their own response. A strong case was made that Lorca did not promote either response, since his priority was social criticism rather than prescribing a course of action. Some answers put forward a link between *conformismo* and *soledad*. There were also claims variously that the characters shaped their fate, that the characters were victims of fate, or that the characters' fates were shaped by social norms: in these cases, and others referring to a *mundo cíclico*, it was crucial to cite evidence and ensure a clear link to the question.
- B** This was mostly well answered, with apposite references to *honor* and *cotilleo* as well as the socio-economic structures of rural life.

#### Part II: Texts

#### Question 6

Answers on this text featured good citation of critical commentary (although there were also a few cases where factual statements about some obvious aspect of the text were unnecessarily attributed to a critic).

- A** Lázaro's wife is the archpriest's maid, so her visiting his house is not in itself scandalous as some answers implied (in contrast to her bearing him three children out of wedlock). The *malas lenguas* and *arrimarme a los buenos* references were well explained. However, few candidates alluded to the self-justificatory slant that the narrator tries to impart to the text.
- B** There were too few answers to make comment appropriate.
- C** Lazarillo's dealings with four clerical masters were well covered in these answers, though the fifth – the *buldero* – received surprisingly limited attention. It was helpful for candidates to define corruption in the context of the clergymen in the tale. A number of candidates argued that Lazarillo wears out his shoes in chapter 4 participating in the immoral life-style of the friar, thereby making a significant assumption about the servant's participation in the master's misconduct. The counter-argument is that Lazarillo swiftly leaves this master because he does not have a taste for his life-style. There was some difference of opinion over whether, at the end of the tale, Lázaro has become corrupted, or just compliant with a world of double standards. He appears to be doing an honest job, but is accepting life in a *ménage à trois* because of the perks that the situation brings. Claims that Lázaro takes on the traits of his former masters needed careful corroboration.

#### Question 7

- A** There were too few answers to make comment appropriate.
- B** There were too few answers to make comment appropriate.
- C** There were too few answers to make comment appropriate.

#### Question 8

- A** There were too few answers to make comment appropriate.
- B** There were too few answers to make comment appropriate.
- C** There were too few answers to make comment appropriate.

#### Question 9

- A** There were too few answers to make comment appropriate.

- B** There were too few answers to make comment appropriate.
- C** There were too few answers to make comment appropriate.

### Question 10

Some answers on these texts were strikingly enthusiastic, with a number citing critical works by Williamson, Boldy, Sturrock and others, or even other Borges stories beyond those specified. Such references are not needed to attain high marks, but it is interesting that some candidates had found a use for such material in studying these texts. Most answers to question **A** referred to at least three stories from the collection, and answers to **B** and **C** usually considered at least four (it would be inadvisable to refer to fewer than this). The term 'metaphysical' was used by most candidates, though not all seemed to understand it in the same way, suggesting scope for defining the term when using it.

**A** Most candidates picked up well on the drama and vividness of Emma's shock in the first paragraph, and how this reaction was transformed in Borges' prose from that one moment into something enduring and outside the normal flow of time. Likewise, the more sophisticated answers looked at the sentence structure in the second paragraph as an example of Borges' succinct storytelling style.

**B** There were a number of interesting and learned assertions about labyrinths in the many answers to this question, all valid as long as supported by evidence. *La casa de Asterión* featured prominently and to good effect in a number of answers, with Asterión cast as a prisoner ever more aware of the horror of his existence in the labyrinthine house. *El jardín de los senderos que se bifurcan* also offered a rich seam of evidence for how labyrinths can exist not just as spatial constructs. Those citing *La muerte y la brújula* also found much to draw upon, though not all references to Zeno's paradox were helpful to the argument being made.

Many answers cited *Emma Zunz* as illustrating the use of labyrinths, though some very specific textual references were needed to justify this. Few candidates picked up the labyrinth references in *El encuentro*, and *El sur* barely featured.

**C** This was well answered, with candidates showing an understanding of both the autobiographical references and the stylistic elements characteristic of this story, comparing and contrasting it helpfully with other stories in the selection.

### Question 11

- A** There were too few answers to make comment appropriate.
- B** There were too few answers to make comment appropriate.
- C** There were too few answers to make comment appropriate.

### Question 12

**A** Candidates found much to discuss in this extract. The strongest answers were those which recognised that the people's reaction to the Colonel is the key aspect of this passage. There were differing opinions about the cockerel's performance, with some candidates claiming it had 'won', others that it had 'lost', and others (more accurately) describing the event as an *entrenamiento*, and *una farsa* even for the birds. The *gallo's* change from trembling to confidence (just before this extract begins) was cited by some as significant. Some candidates saw the reference to the Colonel's intestines (line 21) as another example of the physical ailments of old age, but others more accurately stated that the Colonel was remembering how the drum-beat at the *espectáculo* resonated through his body. Hardly any candidates looked at the apparent contradiction in the juxtaposition of '*Todo el pueblo – la gente de abajo – ...*' or questioned whether the appearance of the whole town is meant as a literally accurate account of what took place or is an example of non-realist language. (The notion of the whole town appearing implies some arcane method of summoning them to which the text does not refer.)

**B** There were too few answers to make comment appropriate.

- C** This question evoked a range of interpretations. Few answers pointed out that the Colonel was betrayed by his own leader (Colonel Buendía) in the revolutionary war (indeed, there was confusion in some responses about which side the Colonel had been fighting on). Some answers raised doubts over the definition of 'betrayal': for example, claims that the Colonel and his wife betray each other called into question whether 'betray' is a valid term in that context (one candidate astutely wrote that the couple 'make life bearable by telling each other little lies'). Some references to betrayal by the state or by the church sounded rather forced (can authoritarian repression accurately be described as 'betrayal'?). Not all candidates were able to differentiate between the inefficiencies of state bureaucracy and the exercise of malign political influence, both of which are implicitly factors in denying the Colonel his pension. Candidates were evenly split over whether the Colonel really expected to receive news of his pension when he went to the post office, with some astutely suggesting that he went there mainly as an act of defiance against an unjust system which denied him his entitlement. There were a number of references to 'fate', though these needed to be well supported by evidence from the text.

### Question 13

- A** Candidates showed good understanding of the insights this passage offered into the state of mind of both Mario and *la Tía* Julia. Many made the point that for the marriage finally to take place after so much drama (and, on Julia's part, doubts) might come as a considerable surprise to some readers. The similarity between this scene and *radioteatro*-style melodrama was widely identified from the passage's first two lines. The importance of the couple's support network was well understood, as were the challenges that remained for them back in Miraflores. In commenting on the style, more could have been made of the irony of the wedding ceremony and the closing paragraph.
- B** Most answers drew on similarities and differences between Mario and Pedro Camacho to address this question, also taking into account the way in which *la Tía* Julia's and Pedro's storylines shadow each other. There was evidence of good knowledge of the text, with candidates offering clear evidence to support their conclusions.
- C** The challenge for candidates was to give coverage to primary, secondary and tertiary characters, including ideally some brief reference to the *radioteatros*. Answers which did not get beyond the three protagonists were less successful than those which did.