

**CARIBBEAN EXAMINATIONS COUNCIL**

**REPORT ON CANDIDATES' WORK IN THE  
SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION**

**JANUARY 2012**

**SPANISH  
GENERAL PROFICIENCY EXAMINATION**

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## **GENERAL COMMENTS**

The 2012 January examination was written by 531 candidates compared with 627 in January 2011. There was an improvement in overall candidate performance with 69 per cent achieving acceptable grades (I–III) compared with 60 per cent in 2011. Candidates' performance was better on Paper 02 and Paper 03 in 2012 than in 2011, while on Paper 01 performance was similar to what obtained in 2011.

Teachers are encouraged to continue their creative teaching strategies to get their students to perform to the best of their ability.

## **DETAILED COMMENTS**

### **Paper 01 – Multiple Choice**

This paper, which comprised two sections, assessed the ability of candidates to listen to and understand a number of aural items in the target language and to read and understand a number of written items. Both sections required candidates to have sufficient mastery of essential grammar and vocabulary. Performance in 2012 was comparable to that of 2011.

### **Paper 02 – Free Response**

#### **Section I (Question 1) – Directed Situations**

In this section, candidates were presented with ten situations to which they were required to provide written responses in Spanish. The situations demanded that candidates recognize the function they were required to perform, all within the scope of their experience at this level. Candidates were assessed on the appropriateness of their responses and quality of language used. With regard to the quality of language, candidates were expected to demonstrate their control of appropriate grammatical structures and knowledge of relevant vocabulary, both expressed in clearly worded, concise responses. In assessing appropriateness, each response was categorized as fully or partially appropriate and was awarded marks accordingly. Inappropriate responses were awarded no mark even if the language of expression was flawless.

#### **Demands of the Section**

The questions suited the level of the examination so the majority of candidates made a fairly good attempt at answering them. The questions demanded vocabulary and structures of an everyday nature that candidates should be familiar with.

#### **Candidates' Performance**

Candidates performed creditably on this section. It was evident that the situations were straightforward and well within the experience of each candidate. The majority of candidates gained passing grades. Poor performance generally resulted from incorrect grammar and lack of vocabulary.

#### **Candidates' Strengths**

Candidates showed particular strength in their knowledge of vocabulary required in responding to the situations. Responses were not too lengthy and candidates provided generally correct responses, despite errors, and used subjunctives where appropriate.

However, some errors recurred in this area, for example, using *disturbar* to mean disturbed. There was also overuse of *simpático and interesante*.

### Candidates' Weaknesses

General weakness was noted in areas of grammar especially in agreement of subject and verb, agreement of adjectives with noun, production of commands and spelling. There was also the absence of prepositions or wrong prepositions being used after verbs and incorrect pronouns after prepositions.

The following are examples of errors in grammar.

- *I* before *hi* or *i* — *y interesante* being frequently used
- Incorrect use of *gustar* — *nosotros gustamos/yo gusto*
- Difference in use of *porque* and *a causa de/bueno* and *bien/asistir* and *ayudar*
- Errors in spelling *receptionista* for *repcionista*, *servico* for *servicio*
- General misuse of *bueno* and *bien*, for example, *es bien/canta bueno*
- *Y* before *i* — *y interesante*
- *Una otra* for *otra*
- *Busces* for *busques*
- *Buscar para* for *busca*
- *Simpático* used to describe animals and places
- *Ser* and *estar*
- *Yo estudiando* for *yo estoy estudiando*

### Comments on Individual Situations

#### Situation (a)

You report to the police that your valuable pet dog has been stolen. Write two descriptive features of the dog that you submit to the police. (Function — describing)

Suggested response: *Mi perro es grande y peludo.*

Candidates managed this question quite well providing the two elements of the description required. Descriptions provided were limited to colour and size. Candidates were not creative enough to use words like *peludo* or *juguetón*. Errors were made in the spelling of *perro*. In some instances where they may have been deficient in vocabulary candidates used *azul* or *rojo*. Errors in agreement and position of adjectives were also evident in some descriptions, for example, *Tiene ojos azul/ pequeño orejas*.

#### Situation (b)

You participated in a karaoke competition and the judges wrote two reasons why they enjoyed your performance. What did the judges write? (Function — narrating)

Suggested response: *Cantaste/cantas muy bien y el público apreció mucho tu canción.*

Candidates did not perform as well on this question as they did on the previous question opting to comment on the performer's looks rather than the performance. Few candidates who attempted to use the word "performance" knew it and so resorted to the use of an anglicized version, *performancia*. Others also wrote comments in the first person — *Yo canté y bailé bien*. They did not adapt their answer to report

what the judges said. This is an indication that candidates need more practice in how to answer this question. Vocabulary deficiency was evident in candidates' attempts at translating 'sing a song' in Spanish. There was also poor use of *gustar*, for example, *nosotros gustamos...*

#### Situation (c)

You are not feeling well and go to visit the doctor. He recommends two things you ought to do. What does he recommend? (Function — giving instructions)

Suggested response: *Debes tomar una píldora por la noche y beber mucha agua.*

Many candidates used the verb '*recomendar*' but omitted to use the subjunctive after it. Most preferred to use the infinitive for giving instructions, '*beber y comer*'. Some candidates also used the incorrect gender for *agua* — *mucho agua*.

#### Situation (d)

Your school football/netball team lost the game yesterday. Write your brother/sister an email giving two reasons why the team lost the game. (Function — narrating)

Suggested response: *Los jugadores no jugaron bien y el mejor jugador fue lastimado.*

In this response many candidates used the present tense when the past tense was required. They did not know how to express 'to lose' in Spanish and made up words like '*loosamos*'. There was also a lack of agreement of the verb with *equipo* — many candidates used the verb in the plural. Candidates used *equipe/grupo/escuela* to express the word 'team'.

#### Situation (e)

Your teacher asks you to write down two details you will always remember about your Spanish class after you have left school. What do you write? (Function — providing information)

Suggested response: *La clase siempre era interesante y nos reíamos mucho.*

To express the Spanish class/teacher, some candidates wrote *la español clase* and *el español profesor*. Agreement of adjective was lacking, as seen in *la clase era divertido*. Candidates also misspelt *interesante*, frequently rendering it as *interesante*. *Profesor* was also very often spelt with a double 's'. Some candidates provided vague/incomplete answers — just saying that they liked the teacher and the class.

#### Situation (f)

You are having a party and need help with the preparations. Send an email to your friend requesting assistance with a particular activity. (Function — seeking assistance)

Suggested response: *¿Puedes ayudarme a decorar la sala?*

Vocabulary weakness was evident in instances where candidates used *asistir*, *attender* instead of *ayudar*. When *ayudar* was used the 'a' was omitted after the verb, or in some instances it was spelt *auydar*. Some candidates did not respond to both elements of the situation and only stated that they needed help but did not mention the activity and vice versa.

Situation (g)

You have been admitted to a new school. As you fill out the registration form you are required to state two reasons why you selected that school. What do you write? (Function — providing information)

Suggested response: *Esta escuela tiene buenos resultados y la disciplina es excelente.*

The responses were good. *Profesor* and *escuela* were often misspelt in this item. ‘Because of’ was rendered *porque de la educación* and *a causa de yo estudiando*. On occasions when candidates attempted to describe a feature of the school, they failed to make the noun/adjective agreement, for example, *moderno/nuevo escuela*. *Cercano a* was used in many instances instead of ‘*cerca de*’. Answers given were limited to *grande, excelente, buenos profesores, vive cerca*.

Situation (h)

You were very disappointed with the service you received from the receptionist at a hotel. Write a note to the manager stating how you feel about the incident. (Function — expressing feeling)

Suggested response: *Estoy enojado.*

Expression in this item was poor and an effort to give a reason proved difficult for candidates. Some candidates referred to the service rather than how they felt. There were many instances of incorrect spelling of ‘*repcionista*’ where candidates replaced the ‘c’ by a ‘t’, and of ‘*servicio*’ which was rendered *servico*. *Secretaria, mesonero, camarero* were all used as substitutes for *repcionista*.

Situation (i)

You are in your bedroom and do not wish to be disturbed. Write a note to hang on the door including the reason. (Function — giving instructions)

Suggested response: *Favor de no molestar porque estoy estudiando.*

Weakness in producing negative commands was noted — *No molestame. Disturbar* and *no disturba* were coined to mean disturb. ‘*Soy studio/estudiando*’ was produced to express what the individual was doing. In many cases candidates did not fulfil the requirements of the item by providing the reason.

Situation (j)

You have won a trip to a Spanish-speaking country of your choice. Send an email to a friend indicating your choice and two reasons for your selection. (Function—giving reasons)

Suggested response: *Prefiero ir a Cuba porque tiene una historia interesante y muchos lugares de interés para visitar.*

This item was fairly well done. However, some candidates used the English rather than the Spanish name for the country. *Quiero ir a Spain...*

## Recommendations

- Candidates need to follow the rubric which emphasizes that only one sentence is required for their answer. They need to provide the two elements required in one answer rather than supply two separate sentences.
- Candidates need to avoid using descriptors which mean the same thing in their answers.
- The need to produce the actual note, email or message must be stressed so that candidates will not attempt to translate the question or produce reported speech, or introduce the responses by restating the situation.
- Candidates must focus on the function required in their response before attempting to write their response.
- There is need to focus on the tense required by each situation.
- Writing of commands and alternative ways of giving instructions should be practised in preparation for this question.

## Section II (Question 2/Question 3) – Letter/Composition

This section is intended to assess candidates' ability to produce written language within the parameters set out in the syllabus. In addition to mastery of relevant vocabulary, idiom and language structure, the ability to express ideas clearly and coherently is emphasized. The two options given were the letter and the composition, each of which was marked out of 30.

### Demands of the Section

Both questions fulfilled the demands of the syllabus and catered to all range of abilities. Both questions were popular with most candidates and the majority attempted to answer. Candidates were able to explore a wide range of tenses and the more competent ones used the subjunctive comfortably.

### Candidates' Performance

Performance ranged from average to below average. Few candidates were in the excellent category. All four elements of the question were attempted by most candidates.

### Candidates' Strengths

The majority of candidates followed the rubric for both questions. Appropriate expressions for the format for the letter, especially the ones requiring the subjunctive, were well learnt. Tenses were fairly well known. Less competent candidates were able to use simple descriptors with the verb '*ser*'. The more competent candidates used a wide range of vocabulary and idioms.

## Examples of Good Performance

Good use of idioms and vocabulary:

*Me quedé boquiabierto*

*¡Qué guay!*

*En un dos por tres*

*Te extraño*

*Te echo de menos*

Appropriate usage of tenses

*¿Cómo te ha ido en Colombia?*

*Fui al cine, fui al museo y a la playa.*

*Gané una beca/premio/viaje*

*Participé en un concurso de ...*

Appropriate use of the subjunctive:

*Cuando regreses*

*Espero que estés bien*

*Espero que vuelvas lo más pronto posible*

*Quiero que me escribas*

## Candidates' Weaknesses with Examples of Errors

Several weaknesses were identified in scripts. Examples follow:

- In the letter, the date was sometimes written incorrectly:  
In words — *el trece de enero de dos mil doce* instead of *13 de enero de 2012*. Candidates need to note that the word 'el' is not required if the date is written in isolation.  
On some occasions the date was written as *13<sup>th</sup> de enero*
- Addresses were too long. The simple name of the city will suffice.
- Incorrect rendition of salutation. Omission of *querido*.
- Inclusion of language and abbreviations used in SMS texting, for example, *LOL*.
- Errors in negation:  
*Tengo no amigos*  
*Estás no aquí*
- Incorrect use of possessive and demonstrative adjectives:  
*Que besa fue el mejor*  
*Mis cumpleaños*
- Weaknesses in English Grammar were transferred:  
*Están muchos chicos en mi escuela*  
*Hay Argentina, República Dominicana, Cuba...*
- Incorrect rendition of the time:  
*La graduación es a son las dos*  
*Para son las siete*
- Confusion with past participle and preterite:  
*Yo recibido*
- Vocabulary errors:  
*Emocionante* instead of *emocionado*  
*Mirar* instead of *ver*  
*Mirar* instead of *parecer*  
*Muy* instead of *mucho*

*Amo* instead of *me encanta*  
*Devolver* instead of *revolver*  
*Extrañar* instead of *perder*

- Agreement and placement of adjectives:  
*La gente son muy simpática*  
*Blanco zapato*
- Use of possessive pronoun instead of the adjective:  
*¿Cómo es tuyo trabajo?*
- Omission of personal ‘a’
- Omission of accents:  
*Estas* instead of *ésta/estás*
- Failure to use the subjunctive:  
*Cuando vuelves*  
*Espero que vienes*  
*Lo siento no estás* (the ‘lo’ is also not required here)
- Incorrect use and position of subject pronoun:  
*Perdió tú*
- *Por* instead of *para*:  
*Escribí una carta por mi directora*  
*Una fiesta por el año que viene*
- Poor spelling:  
*Querido — quierdo, queridido, quierido, quierda*
- Poor knowledge of vocabulary:  
 Work was rendered as *trabaje, trabajado, trabaja*  
 Ceremony was written as *el ceremonio*
- Incorrect translations:  
 I miss you – *Yo miss tu/Mi es mismo tu mucho/Yo perdidia tu mucho/yo pierdo tu*  
 To go shopping — *ir a comprar/fui comprando*  
 I met Lionel — *encuenté Lionel*  
 Cousin — *primero/primera*  
 Girlfriend — *chica amiga*  
 Too — *Mis padres es bien a/quieren a ver tu a*  
 The party was enjoyable — *la fiesta fue divertirse*

### Recommendations

- Grammatical structures and vocabulary need to be reinforced through consistent practice. Practice must be meaningful and in context.
- Translation is an effective teaching tool to reinforce idiomatic expressions, tenses and vocabulary and exposes candidates to the nuances of both languages.
- Teaching and learning can be enhanced through the use of varied classroom activities, games overseas trips and the use of the Internet.

### Section III (Question 4/Question 5) – Contextual Announcement/Contextual Dialogue

This section required candidates to choose to write either a contextual announcement or a contextual dialogue completion. Cues in English were provided for both options.

## Demands of the Section

The contextual announcement and the contextual dialogue were not beyond what was outlined in the syllabus and therefore were within the scope of candidates' ability. However, it seemed that candidates were more comfortable with the subject matter of the contextual dialogue as this was the more popular choice. Many of the candidates who attempted the contextual announcement seemed to have difficulty with the relevant vocabulary to expand on cue iii, the concept of utilities.

## Candidates' Performance on the Contextual Announcement

Fewer candidates attempted this question and those who did showed limited knowledge of the following:

- a) Relevant vocabulary as many candidates were unable to express
  - *compañero de habitación/ cuarto,*
  - *buscar*
  - *compartir*
  - *instalaciones*
  - *alquiler/ alquilar*
  - *el costo*
  - *el apartamento*
  
- b) Grammatical Structures. Some errors included
  - *estoy/soy mirando por/ para*
  - *yo soy miro*
  - *tiene/allí es baños en la habitación*
  - *ha la luz y Internet*
  - numbers — *un mil dólares/cinco ciento*
  - subjunctive — *estoy buscando una persona que quiere vivir conmigo*
  - *ser* and *estar* — *el apartamento es situado en la ciudad*
  
- c) Agreement of Adjectives—*dormitorio larga,* and *apartamento blanca*
  
- d) There was some use of English where candidates lacked the relevant vocabulary item. Some examples include 'electricity' and 'roommate'.

## Candidates' Performance on the Contextual Dialogue

The majority of candidates attempted this question, but in many cases failed to master:

- a) Vocabulary skills. For example:
  - *estoy emocionante*
  - *la universidad es simpática*
  
- b) Grammatical Skills. For example:
  - *Ser* and *estar* — *la universidad es en la ciudad*  
*soy ir/soy viajar/soy preparando mis maletas, soy muy contento/feliz,*  
*estoy yendo, soy aquí decirte que salgo para la universidad*
  - Incorrect use of the indefinite article — *quiero ser un médico*
  - *estoy volver*

- *compré mis ropas*
- *...y interesante*
- *'salir' de mi familia*
- *Siento feliz*
- Subjunctive — *te veré cuando llego/vuelvo*
- *Tener que* — *tengo algo decirte/tengo a decir*
- The use of 'y' and 'e' — *los profesores son simpáticos y interesantes estudio español y historia*
- Spelling — *mis profesores/England/mathematica*
- *Después de* + infinitive — *después graduar*  
*después graduación*  
*después yo graduarte*

The cue which dealt with obtaining a visa was often overlooked. Many candidates anticipated the cues and therefore responded prematurely.

### **Candidates' Strengths**

Most candidates followed the rubric in terms of using the required number of words and choosing only one of the two questions.

### **Examples of Good Performance**

- *Pónganse en contacto*
- *Favor de contactaros*
- *Te echaré de menos*
- *Voy al extranjero*
- *Desde las ocho hasta las cinco*

### **Recommendations for Teachers**

Students should be given more practice in both question types. Every attempt must be made in the teaching/learning process to ensure that students develop a solid command of essential elements of grammar to ensure accuracy in expression. The importance of idiomatic expressions should not be overlooked. Below is an indication of the areas which need immediate attention to help strengthen candidates' proficiency in the language.

- *Ser* and *estar*
- Correct usage of definite and indefinite articles
- Use of idiomatic expressions
- The order of adjectives and nouns in sentences
- Noun and adjective agreement
- The use of *por* and *para*
- Correct verb conjugation

## Section IV (Question 6) – Reading Comprehension

This section assessed candidates' ability to read a passage in Spanish and then demonstrate comprehension skills by responding in English to questions posed in English based on the passage read.

### Demands of the Section

This passage contained vocabulary and grammar that were pitched at a level that candidates who have completed five years of Spanish should be able to handle.

### Candidates' Performance

Overall, candidates seemed not to have read the passage as carefully as they should have. A lack of vocabulary, especially related to countries and capitals, parts of the body and personal traits led to incorrect responses where such information was required. Given that the situation in the passage related to a theme that candidates would have encountered in Form 3, this question was not handled as well as it should have been.

### Candidates' Strengths

Questions (a), (f), (h) and the first part of (j) were handled relatively well.

### Candidates' Weaknesses

Those questions that required either considerable information or required candidates to draw conclusions from the context (questions (b), (c), (d), (e), (g), (i) and (j)) presented some challenges for the candidates.

### Comments on Individual Questions

Question (a): Where did the incident take place?

Suggested response: On board a plane.

Incorrect response: On board a boat.

Generally this question was well done, except where candidates did not recognize that *vuelo* referred to travel by air. Some candidates wrote that Pedro Sarmiento also travelled by boat or bus.

Question (b): Where was Mr Sarmiento going?

Suggested response: He was going to Caracas or from Madrid to Caracas.

Incorrect response: He was going to Madrid in Caracas/Caracas in Madrid.

This question highlighted candidates' lack of knowledge of countries and capitals and/or their inability to distinguish between countries and capitals.

Question (c): At the outset, what emotion did Mr Sarmiento display, and what prompted it?

Suggested response: He was very annoyed because of the person sitting next to his seat.

Incorrect response: He was unhappy because a passenger which he didn't like was sitting in his seat.

This question spotlighted candidates' lack of comprehension. Although many candidates understood what his emotion was, they did not understand the sentence that would tell them what prompted the reaction — '*La pasajera al lado de él tenía una pierna fracturada y su asiento estaba sobre el pasillo...*'. There were a few candidates who assumed that either Pedro or the passenger was molested — '*Cuando encontró...se molestó.*'

Question (d): Describe the person in the seat next to Mr Sarmiento.

Suggested response: The passenger was a lady with a fractured leg.

Incorrect response: The person with the fractured hip.

Two items here confused the candidates — '*la pasajera*' and '*la pierna*'. *La pasajera* was not recognized as the feminine form of *el pasajero*, so candidates opted to write 'person' instead of 'lady'. Some candidates seemed not to know that *pierna* is 'leg', so they used other limbs although they understood that *fracturada* meant 'fractured'.

Question (e): How did Mr Sarmiento justify his reaction to the person sitting next to him?

Suggested response: It would be a long flight. He would be uncomfortable and would have difficulty crossing over the passenger to go to the bathroom.

Incorrect response: He justified his reaction by shouting that he wanted to go to the bathroom.

Most candidates said that it would be uncomfortable and earned the first mark for the question. They omitted to mention how long the flight was going to be and the difficulty with going to the bathroom.

Question (f): What did Mr Sarmiento request?

Suggested response: He demanded a change of seat.

Incorrect response: Mr Sarmiento requested to speak to the captain./ He requested that she be moved. This question was generally well done. However, some candidates saw *me cambie* as an 'exchange' of seats.

Question (g): What did the persons around him think of Mr Sarmiento?

Suggested response: They thought Mr Sarmiento was selfish and inconsiderate.

Incorrect response: They thought he was ignorant and 'disconsiderate'.

While candidates understood what the question was asking, they did not know the English meanings of those particular traits. For example, 'inconsiderate' became 'unconsiderable' and 'disconsiderable'.

Question (h): How did Miss Aldana respond to Mr Sarmiento's request?

Suggested response: Miss Aldana explained to him that she needed to speak to the captain first.

Incorrect response: She responded by moving him.

This question was generally well done when attempted by candidates.

Question (i): How was the problem resolved?

Suggested response: The captain told her to move the lady to a first class seat and to leave Mr Sarmiento in his original seat.

Incorrect response: Mr Sarmiento was moved to first class.

Some candidates became a little confused about who was moving to first class, hence they said that Miss Aldana or Mr Sarmiento was moving to first class instead of the injured passenger.

Question (j): How did the other people respond to the instructions given to Miss Aldana and why do you think they responded in that way?

Suggested response: They applauded because it was the lady with the fractured leg who was upgraded to first class instead of Mr Sarmiento.

Incorrect response: They applauded because they thought that the conflict was over.

Most candidates, if not all, answered the first part of this question correctly. It was, however, difficult for them to infer that the lady was treated well and Mr Sarmiento deserved what he got.

### **Remarks and Recommendations**

Candidates are commended for their ability to equate the amount of information needed to answer the questions with the amount of marks awarded for each. It must be emphasized that *vocabulary* is a key element of reading comprehension. Teachers should take steps to find creative ways of getting their students to learn vocabulary, and then reinforcing it, particularly in the areas of word formation and word building. Incorporating crossword puzzles, word searches and other such activities can lend an element of fun to the classroom while achieving these objectives. The Internet and the television can serve as useful resources where some programmes can be adapted to the classroom situations, while fostering in students a sense of competitive spirit, team work and fun. Teachers can come up with their own version of LINGO (as seen on the Game Show Network), Wheel of Fortune and Jeopardy.

Finally, it is recommended that students be taught to read the passage a minimum of three times to ensure maximum understanding; that is, first reading to get the sense, followed by reading the questions; then the second reading which could lead to finding the answers, and then answering the questions; finally, reading a third time to ensure that the questions have been answered appropriately and fully.

### **Paper 03 – Oral Examination**

The oral examination assessed the ability of candidates to: (i) respond appropriately in Spanish to a number of situations testing specific functions, (ii) read aloud a short passage in Spanish and (iii) converse in Spanish by responding to questions based on four out of six topics set out in the syllabus, namely, Daily Routine, School and Career, Sports and Recreation, and Shopping.

## Section I – Responses to Situations/Instructions

This section required candidates to produce appropriate responses in Spanish to situations/instructions described in English in keeping with the function specific to the situation.

Candidates' responses demonstrated a range of abilities. The candidates who performed very well in this section produced responses which were not only appropriate but which were expressed correctly, demonstrating sound grammatical structures, an ample range of vocabulary and the liberal use of idioms. These candidates delivered their responses without undue hesitation, in fact with spontaneity and self-confidence.

On the other hand, many candidates performed poorly in this section. In many instances the weaknesses in grammar and vocabulary resulted in long delays in producing the responses, many of which were characterized by short, one-word answers. Candidates who fell in this category showed an inability to use idiomatic expressions.

The more common grammatical errors included the following:

- Subject–verb agreement  
\* *Yo prefiere ir a Venezuela*
- Noun–adjective agreement  
\* *La sopa no es bueno*
- Incorrect verb tense  
\* *Tenía que ir a una fiesta la semana próxima.*
- *Ser* and *Estar*  
\* *No sé donde es el libro*
- Conjugating the verb when the infinitive is needed.  
\* *Prometo saco la basura cada día.*

Vocabulary errors included:

*Promeso* for *prometo*

*Curso* for *curso*

*Silla* for *asiento*

*Ropa* for *uniforme*

## Recommendations

Students and teachers need to acquaint themselves with the functions as listed in the syllabus. These functions must be practised in a variety of situations/instructions with students being encouraged to respond orally. A few functions should be practised each term from the lower forms and right up to the examination year.

**\*An asterisk (\*) indicates an incorrect form, spelling or structure.**

## Section II – Reading Passages

In this section, candidates were assessed on their ability to read a passage (125–130 words). Candidates were expected to correctly pronounce the discrete sounds of the language, to exhibit good intonation and read in a fluent manner. Performance on this section ranged from very good to very weak. Candidates who performed very well demonstrated a good knowledge of the Spanish sound system, showed facility in applying the rules of accentuation and stress and were fluent in their delivery. Those in this superior category were obviously well prepared and were given adequate practice in reading out loud.

Unfortunately, for far too many candidates the reading component of the oral examination proved to be a daunting challenge. It was indeed disheartening to hear so many candidates struggle with Spanish pronunciation which they had been exposed to for at least five years. Production of the discrete sounds of the language, particularly the vowel sounds, was a painful experience to these lower performing candidates. It was obvious that they understood little or nothing of what they were reading.

Among the pronunciation errors which were presented were:

- The pronunciation of the ‘g’ sound in Spanish. Weaker candidates displayed no distinction between hard and soft ‘g’ in words like *Magia, tecnología, magos*.
- Diphthongs were generally mispronounced. *Pudieron, videojuego, realidad, europeos*.
- The anglicizing of cognates *Urbana, personal, identidad, adictos*
- A disregard for the placement of stress particularly in words with accents *Rápida, jóvenes, época, interés*
- Words that were difficult for candidates included *Consumidores, exitazo, angloparlantes, hispanohablantes*

## Recommendations

Pronunciation, intonation and fluency can only be mastered by constantly practising the reading aloud of the language. As often as possible the teacher must use Spanish in the classroom so that students will be exposed to the auditory nuances of the language. Where possible, students should be exposed to native speakers or recorded material of an authentic nature.

## Section III – Guided Conversation

This section of the oral examination assessed the ability of candidates to respond to a number of questions based on four topics specified in the syllabus. For this examination the topics chosen were Daily Routine, School and Career, Sports/Recreation and Shopping. Candidates were asked four questions on each topic and were assessed using the criteria of comprehension and spontaneity, fluency and correctness of expression.

This section continues to be the most challenging part of the oral examination. Only a small percentage of candidates demonstrated competence in conversing easily and accurately. These candidates were spontaneous in their answers which tended to be extended and exhibited a wide range of vocabulary, idiom and sound grammatical structures. For these candidates, it was evident that much time had been spent in honing their conversational skills through constant drills and mock oral exercises.

Most candidates struggled with this conversation component of the examination. Very often they did not understand the question asked and even if they did, they were handicapped by their limited vocabulary and restricted grammatical competence. Requests that questions be repeated were frequent and very often no response was forthcoming.

The weaknesses revealed in this section were not dissimilar to the ones in Section I. Fundamental grammatical structures like verb tenses, agreement, *ser* and *estar*, *por* and *para*, object pronouns were frequently not known.

The following are some specific problems as they relate to some of the questions asked:

#### Daily Routine

*¿Cómo vas a la escuela ...?*

Some candidates proceeded to give a description of the school.

*¿Qué vas a hacer cuando regreses a casa?*

The word *regreses* was not widely known.

*¿Qué hiciste ayer en la escuela?*

Candidates did not recognize *hiciste* as coming from *hacer*.

#### School and Career

*¿Qué profesión quieres seguir?*

The indefinite article was often used before the profession.

*Describe a tu profesor/a favorito/a.*

Many candidates simply gave the name of the teacher.

#### Sports/Recreation

Some candidates were not familiar with the word 'Reggaeton'.

*¿Qué piensas de los concursos de belleza?*

Most candidates did not know *concursos de belleza*.

#### Shopping

*¿Que te gusta comprar?*

Very often the response was *Si*.

*¿Cuál es tu talla ...?*

The word *talla* was not known generally.

**Recommendations**

The weak performance of the candidates in this section was reflective of a lack of preparation. Opportunities must be created in the classroom for students to hear and to produce the language. It was apparent that for many candidates they had little or no practice in this type of testing. There is a need for mock oral examinations to be conducted with frequency particularly in the year of examination.