

UNIVERSITY OF MALTA
SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE
SEC

SPANISH

May 2007

EXAMINERS' REPORT

MATRICULATION AND SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE EXAMINATIONS
BOARD

**SEC SPANISH
MAY 2007 SESSION
EXAMINERS' REPORT**

1.0 Summary of Results

Tables 1.1 and 1.2 below show a summary of the distribution of grades for Paper IIA and Paper IIB for the May 2007 Session.

Table 1.1 Distribution of Grades Paper IIA May 2007

Grade	1	2	3	4	5	U	Abs	Total
Total IIA	16	16	33	33	23	13	11	145
% of Total	11	11	22.8	22.8	15.9	9	7.6	100

Table 1.2 Distribution of Grades Paper IIB May 2007

Grade	4	5	6	7	U	Abs	Total
Total IIB	11	17	23	11	13	10	85
% of Total	12.9	20	27.1	12.9	15.3	11.8	100

2.0 General Comments

A look at the results obtained by 230 candidates who sat for the 2007 Spanish SEC Paper IIA shows that 83.5% were awarded grades between 1 and 5. With regards to Paper IIB where 85 candidates sat for the exam, there were 72.9% who obtained grades between 4 and 7. Last year (2006) the number of candidates sitting for Spanish SEC was 277, this shows that this year there was a decrease of 47 candidates.

2.1. 11 (7.6%) out of 145 IIA candidates were absent from all the components of this examination. This in marked contrast with 10 (11.8%) of the 85 IIB candidates who stayed away.

2.2. The guiding principle of the paper setters was to present examination papers which were child-centred and student-friendly. Detailed marking schemes were prepared as the examination papers were set. When setting papers, the paper setters did their best to present clear rubrics.

3. 0. Report on Candidates' Performance

3.1. Paper 1, Part 1 – Listening Comprehension.

For logistic reasons, 3 different passages were set. The three texts chosen were about famous personalities: *Diego Armando Maradona*, *Alain Robert* and *Farruquito*. The format was similar to that of last year presenting an exercise of 10 questions: 5 multiple choice and another 5 True/False questions. Each question was allotted 1 mark each. The level obtained by the candidates was very good, showing that the candidates grasped the meaning of the passage.

3.2. Paper 1, Part 2 – Multiple Choice Grammar

A common error, evident in question 3 and 10, showed that some candidates are still unfamiliar with the use of the *Pretérito Indefinido* and the *Subjuntivo* respectively. Overall candidates fared well in this exercise.

3.3. Paper 1, Part 2 - Cloze Test

Most candidates showed that the exercise was well within their ability, though some did demonstrate a poor ability in this exercise. The text chosen was *Jóvenes y la Comunicación*. It

was not considered difficult and its content was about advertising. As usual most of the vocabulary used was basic mainly filling in with the use of prepositions, adjectives, possessive adjectives and some verbs in the present indicative. In all there were 10 blanks to be filled up and each answer carried 1 mark.

3.4. Paper 1, Part 2 – Cultural Component

Most candidates fared good in this multiple choice exercise. As usual, there were 5 questions related to the culture of Spain and another 5 to that of Latin America. To ensure reliability, all questions set were of the objective type. The idea was to help candidates reason out the answers with the least recourse possible to memorized information.

3.5. Paper IIA / Paper IIB – Exercise A. Reading Comprehension

On the whole, candidates were prepared for the reading comprehension. The texts chosen were *Los Alcántara – Cuéntame cómo Pasó* and *La Novia*. Meanings/definitions of completely new words were given at the bottom of the text to help the candidate to understand the text better. It was noted that some candidates need more training to answer questions which require them to express themselves in reasonably correct Spanish. Candidates should be encouraged to **use their own words and not copy directly from the text**. Full answers should be given whenever possible. Some candidates knew from where to elicit the answer but did not know which was the relevant information for the answer. Therefore they ended up copying whole sentences where they gave irrelevant information.

3.6.1. Paper IIA - Exercise B. Composition

Most candidates chose compositions 5 – *Mi ídolo*. This composition title was also common for Paper IIB. Compositions 2 – *Escriba una historia que empiece con las siguientes palabras “Al llegar al aeropuerto ...”* and 1 – the e-mail were also among the most popular among candidates.

3.6.2. Paper IIB - Composition

The most popular compositions were *Mi ídolo* and the letter invitation for the birthday party. Few candidates opted for compositions 3 and 5, the reason behind this could be the use of the past tense. Some candidates prefer to stay away from the use of the past tense mainly the *Preterito Indefinido* and the *Preterito Imperfecto* therefore, they opt for an essay title where they can use the present indicative only..

3.6.3. General comments

In general, candidates proved that they are well versed in the skills required to produce the composition. Nevertheless, some essays were dry, short and showed clear signs of incompetence in self-expression. Some were flat that the message which the candidate attempted to convey was ambiguous to interpret. This was due to lack of language creativity. In addition, candidates have limited opportunities of listening or exposure to the target language. As in previous years, some candidates learnt by heart some compositions. This was evident because some sentences were identical within a series of candidates showing lack of imagination and creativity. More regular practice in a variety of themes should be recommended.

The influence of other foreign languages being learnt by the candidates, mainly Italian, continues to dominate many compositions. Other candidates still find it difficult to conjugate simple verbs even in the present tense of the indicative, therefore, they tend to write the verb in the infinitive. Once again it has been noted that when having to use the past tense in the compositions most students still do not know in what situations one has to use the *Preterito Indefinido* and the *Preterito Imperfecto*. One can see that students confuse one tense with another when they are writing creatively. In fact, many compositions start with one tense and end with another, not to mention the continuous change of tense within the essay itself. This has to be tackled seriously.

Another common error was the confusion of the usage of *haber*, *ser* and *estar*. The reason behind it is that the English language has only one verb *to be*. It is very difficult to eradicate this mistake. Maltese candidates find it difficult to make a distinction between the particular uses of *ser*, *estar* and *haber*.

More emphasis should be made on the basic agreement of nouns with adjectives and person with verb. Candidates showed that they have not yet mastered the rules behind accentuation. In fact many errors related to this seem to have hindered candidates' performance in the language essay chosen. Accentuation rules should be stressed as very often accents were incorrectly marked at random.

3.7. Paper II A/ Paper IIB Exercise C – Guided Conversation

The guided conversation required candidates to use the present indicative only so there was no need to use other tenses. Most candidates fared well, though some found it difficult to form simple questions such as *¿Qué tomas?* (Paper IIB - to ask for someone in a restaurant what he wants to eat). Students should be encouraged to get familiar to such daily life situations in the classroom to learn the basic communicative skills.

4.0 Conclusion

There seems to be a good command of listening, reading and speaking skills but results would certainly be better if writing skills were improved. As a result of their limited experience of the target language, they make mistakes. It is evident that students of Spanish read very little, resulting in vocabulary deficiency. Language is a system of systems and cannot be fully learned until all interconnected parts are fully learned.

Chairperson
Board of Examiners

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