

**UNIVERSITY OF MALTA**  
**THE MATRICULATION EXAMINATION**

**ADVANCED LEVEL**

**SPANISH**

**MAY 2016**

**EXAMINERS' REPORT**

**MATRICULATION AND SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE  
EXAMINATIONS BOARD**

**AM SPANISH  
MAY 2016 SESSION  
EXAMINERS' REPORT**

The statistical table below outlines the results of the candidates sitting for Advanced Spanish during the May 2016 session.

*Table 1: Outline of candidates' results*

GRADE	A	B	C	D	E	F	Abs	Total
<b>Number of Candidates</b>	4	5	13	5	6	1	2	36
<b>% of Total</b>	11.11	13.89	36.11	13.89	16.67	2.78	5.56	100

### General Comments

The number of candidates sitting for this year's exam was slightly higher than last year's.

Overall, the board of examiners is satisfied with the candidates' performance since the results obtained this year were better than last year's. In fact, 58.3% of the candidates obtained Grades A, B and C.

Observations on the general performance of the candidates for each exercise are being documented below.

### Focused Remarks

#### Oral

The oral examination consisted of a picture interpretation and a free topic conversation. Most candidates were very well prepared in both tasks. Whilst most of the conversations were interesting, some candidates had limited vocabulary and could not express themselves clearly. In general, most of the candidates need to work on their intonation and pronunciation, in particular when pronouncing 'za, ce, ci, zo, zu'. As last year, some responses were influenced by Italian. Some of the most common mistakes included incorrect article use and difficulty in the use of *ser* and *estar*. Another common mistake was that of using the infinitive of the verb instead of conjugating it according to the subject and the verb tense required.

#### Paper 1

##### Essay writing and short writing exercises

As regards essays, all the titles except for the first one were attempted by the candidates. The fourth title was chosen by the majority of the candidates. As regards the interactive writing component, both titles were chosen.

With regard to the essays, in general a sound level was observed. Most of the candidates presented well-structured and creative essays. Some good arguments were also made. The examination panel was also pleased to note that quite a good number of candidates managed to use Spanish proverbs and idioms adequately. Nevertheless, in some cases candidates lacked ideas and in the argumentative essays, instead of introducing new ideas and opinions, presented work that was repetitive and monotonous. Others opted to present a brief list of ideas. In the interactive writing task, some candidates did not present the correct letter format and did not distinguish between formal and informal styles of writing. In fact some candidates used *estimado* in an informal context. As a result of all this, whilst some candidates excelled in this part of the exam, the majority of the candidates presented average work. Unfortunately, some candidates showed that they had not yet reached the level required.

Some candidates encountered difficulty in expressing themselves in Spanish and resorted to Italian, English and Maltese words to make up for the lack of Spanish vocabulary. Many candidates neglected the use of the comma. In most cases, candidates omitted the comma even after commonly used expressions such as *en mi opinión* and *sin embargo*. Some candidates also failed to use accents correctly. Unfortunately, in some cases candidates even made mistakes with regard to accents on basic words. Some candidates made spelling mistakes, with the most common mistakes involving using 'z' instead of 's' and vice versa. Other mistakes included the use of double 'p' and 's'. At this level candidates should know that in Spanish the only double consonants are 'c', 'r', 'l' and 'n'. The examination panel are concerned about the fact that in some instances, candidates failed to make good use of capital letters. It is important to remember that in Spanish, nationalities and languages are written with a small letter and that names of countries start with a capital letter.

Recurring morphological mistakes include the wrong conjugation of regular and irregular verbs, and tense confusion. This year the examination panel's attention was drawn by the incorrect use of adjectives and articles in such a way that they did not agree in gender and number with the nouns used. At this level it is expected that candidates make good use of articles and adjectives, and that candidates can distinguish between masculine and feminine words, and between singular and plural.

Difficulties in the use of the subjunctive mode were once again present. Some candidates failed to use the subjunctive with impersonal phrases. On the other hand, some candidates managed to make excellent use of this verbal mode, even using the imperfect subjunctive.

Another common difficulty was that of distinguishing between the use of *porque*, *por qué*, and *¿por qué?* As in previous years, the use of *ser* and *estar* and *haber* and *tener* proved to be a problem. Difficulties with regard to the use of prepositions, in particular confusion of *por* with *para* and *con* with *a*, were also present.

## Paper II

### Language-use exercises

This year's candidates fared better than those of last year in these exercises. However, this year, this component still proved to be the most challenging mainly due to the candidates' inability to use Spanish fluently.

#### A1

Most of the candidates did well in this exercise, yet very simple phrases made up of just one or two words and influence from Italian were once again observed. Mistakes related to the use of the infinitive (A.1.1 b) and the subjunctive (A.1.2.d) were noted.

#### A2

This exercise proved to be the most challenging exercise of this section probably because of the candidates' limited vocabulary. In fact, some of the answers showed that the candidates understood the meaning of the underlined word however they did not know its synonym in Spanish and to make up for this difficulty opted to use an Italian word or to invent another word. Due to this fact, some candidates confused *método* and *modo*. The majority of the candidates encountered difficulties in A.2.c since they did not know the meaning of *gente corriente*.

#### A3

In general, candidates did well in this exercise. Nevertheless, the examination panel was disappointed that a number of candidates failed to conjugate the verb 'tener' correctly. Such mistakes should not surface at this level. Other mistakes included not putting the words in brackets in the correct place. In A.3.e some answers showed that the candidates lacked knowledge of the gerund.

### Reading comprehension

A general level of understanding of the text was noted. However, even if candidates fared better than last year in this task, grammatical difficulties and incorrect sentence structures were once again present. The following is an analysis of the candidates' answers per question:

Question B1: Most of the answers were correct.

Question B2: Incomplete answers were observed. Some candidates copied the answer directly from the text. A grammar mistake noted in this part of the exam was the use of the preposition 'por' instead of 'durante'.

Questions B3 and B5: Once again, most of the candidates copied the answer directly from the text. This shows that either the candidates do not have the ability to rephrase sentences or else they did not really understand the text. In these questions, some candidates showed difficulty in conjugating verbs in the past simple and also in differentiating between the verbs 'ser' and 'estar'.

Question B4: The summary highlighted difficulties in narrating events using the past tenses.

### **Paper III**

#### **Literature appreciation and Spanish and Spanish-American intercultural knowledge**

All candidates attempted to answer the three questions required for this part of the exam and in general the candidates showed that they were acquainted with the literary texts and with the set cultural topics.

With regard to the literature section, the candidates preferred questions related to *La casa de Bernarda Alba* written by Federico García Lorca, *Rimas* written by Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer, and *La Familia de Pascual Duarte* written by Camilo José Cela. In the culture section, candidates opted either for question number 2 or question number 4.

Although, when compared to last year, this year's essays were of a poorer quality, some candidates managed to present excellent essays which showed deep understanding of the literary text and /or of the culture question.

The very good literature essays presented well elaborated arguments and statements supported by information and quotations from the literary texts. Other candidates produced very good essays full of quotations, however, they did not address the questions; these essays were remembered by heart. As has been repeatedly stated in previous years, candidates must avoid preparing model answers for specific topics to be reproduced in the exam no matter what the exam question is. It is useless to write an excellent essay which is barely relevant to the exam question. Moreover, candidates need to understand that introducing a lot of quotations does not automatically constitute quality. Quotations need to be well presented and explained to reflect true understanding and need to support an argument or a statement.

With regard to the culture essays, some essays contained incorrect information while others lacked details. For example, one cannot mention the fact that Spanish gastronomy has many typical characteristics and fail to mention what these characteristics are. Marks were also lost for writing information which had little or no connection to Spain.

Incorrect sentence structure and grammar use once again surfaced in this part of the exam. Some candidates also lost marks for repeating the same ideas and for providing simplistic essays. On the other hand, some candidates introduced a lot of ideas but did not explain any of them well.

Candidates should also observe the word limit. Quite a number of candidates presented essays which consisted of 200-250 words or even less.

### **Paper IV**

#### **Listening comprehensions**

In this part of the exam, candidates showed that they had good listening skills. Some of the most common mistakes included answers which were not detailed enough, and a confusing structure which impeded understanding. In the first listening comprehension, some candidates were not able to give the correct answer for the statements marked as false.

**Conclusion**

Candidates need to practise Spanish even outside the classroom. They are highly encouraged to read and listen to authentic sources in the targeted language so as to improve their language skills. They need to familiarise themselves with a wider range of vocabulary and need to try and avoid basic mistakes.

*Chairperson  
2016 Examination Panel*