



L-Università
ta' Malta

MATSEC
Examinations Board



Examiners' Report

Advanced Spanish

Special September Session 2020

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Examiners' Report (2020): AM Spanish

The table below illustrates the results obtained by the candidates who sat for the Advanced Spanish Exam during the September 2020 Special Session. It also represents last year's number and percentage of candidates as well as their grade.

Grade	A	B	C	D	E	F	Absent	Total
No. of candidates sitting for exam in 2020	5	1	7	7	1	2	11	34
% of candidates sitting for exam in 2020	14.7	2.9	20.6	20.6	2.9	5.9	32.4	100
No. of candidates sitting for exam in 2019	6	5	11	4	1	0	4	31
% of candidates sitting for exam in 2019	19.35	16.13	35.48	12.90	3.23	0.00	12.90	100

Table 1: Distribution of grades for Advanced Spanish 2020 Special Session and 2019 First Session

A. General Comments

The number of candidates who sat for this year's exam was slightly higher than last year's. However the Examination Panel noticed that out of 34, 11 candidates were absent for all of the sections of the exam. 38% of the candidates obtained a grade between A and C.

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

B. Focused Remarks

Oral - Picture Interpretation and Free -Topic Conversation

No exam held due to the coronavirus pandemic in the country.

Paper I

Essay Writing and Short Writing Exercise

Paper I comprised two sections. In Section A candidates had to write a short essay of around 250-300 words on 1 out of the 5 given topics. These were: (1) the problems posed by the aging of the population, (2) discuss the saying 'the more you have the more you want', (3) the main challenges that European societies will face in the next decades, (4) the worst trip ever made, and (5) the importance of private companies for the economy of a country. Most candidates chose the first topic.

Some of the candidates obtained a high score since they knew how to use the most complex linguistic phrases and structures safely and properly based on the developed ideas.

In general, the candidates' writing was logical in its construction with coherent ideas. However, syntax was quite poor in standard. The most common mistakes made by candidates were grammatical and orthographic mistakes, such as lack of accents and/or unnecessary use of accents (*pais, tuvé*, etc.),

placing *un/a* before *otro/a*, failing to match the gender of the article and/or adjective with the gender of the noun (*sus opinion, los negocio*, etc.), misuse of prepositions *de, por* and *para*, incorrect use of the reflexive pronoun *Se*, incorrect conjugation of stem-changing verbs.

In several occasions, errors were the consequence of linguistic interference from Italian and/or English e.g. *macinarios, phrase*, etc.

In Section B, candidates had to elaborate a letter of about 100-150 words, on one of the two given topics: a letter to a newspaper stating what is the main problem of the city and an email to family and friends encouraging them to come to a surprise birthday party. The majority of candidates chose the second option.

In general, the performance in this question was acceptable. Candidates' ideas were developed in such a way that they were related to the topic giving a suitable answer. Few were those who omitted an adequate start to the email (*De, para, asunto*). However, it was observed that some of the texts were too short and did not make use of connectors to enrich the writings. In addition, some candidates misused the Subjunctive Mood in phrases such as: '*espero que*' and instead used the Indicative Mood.

Paper II

Paper II consisted of two sections. Section A included language exercises, whereas Section B included a reading comprehension exercise.

Language Use Exercises

In exercise 1 of Section A, candidates were given two different situations and they were asked to complete 10 sentences (5 on each situation). Most of the candidates did well in this exercise. In general, sentences were structured in a coherent and intelligible manner. However, candidates lost marks for using incorrect tenses and/or having orthographic mistakes. Candidates did not earn any credit for out-of-context answers.

In exercise 2, candidates were asked to write synonyms of homophones. Marks were slightly lower for this section as many failed to write synonyms for two or more homophones. The most problematic substitutions were those presented in Questions (c.) and (d.); instead of writing *reza* as the synonym of *ora*, some candidates wrote: *llora, leo, and canta* and instead of *profunda* as the synonym of *honda*, some candidates wrote: *larga, alto, and llena*. Few candidates opted to leave their answers blank.

In exercise 3, candidates were given 5 sentences and a set of connectors. They had to rewrite the phrases and include the given connectors without changing the meaning of the sentence. A recurring error was failing to write a sentence using *tanto ... como*; some omitted part of it e.g. *Tanto los estudiantes y los profesores quieren organizar una excursión a Madrid*, while others wrote *Tanto quieren organizar una excursión a Madrid, los estudiantes como los profesores*, instead of *Tanto los estudiantes como los profesores quieren organizar una excursión a Madrid*.

Reading Comprehension

Section B provided a reading comprehension text followed by a series of questions. The most common mistake in this part was failing to provide full and detailed answers as requested. It was also observed that candidates had difficulty in answering Question 3 (a.) resulting in an out of point response. The importance of understanding the meaning of the interrogative words used is emphasised.

In Question 4 candidates were asked to summarise the last paragraph of the text in no more than 50 words. Overall, candidates answered this section well although marks were deducted when important information was left out and/ or the word limit was exceeded. Very few candidates obtained full marks in Exercise 5; some failed to provide a clear explanation and/ or did not manage to use their own words.

Paper III

Literature Appreciation and Spanish-American Intercultural Knowledge

In this Paper, the candidates were asked to write three essays of 300-350 words each; two about literature and one about a cultural aspect of the Hispanic world.

Candidates were given pairs of literature questions on (1) Federico García Lorca's *La casa de Bernarda Alba*; (2) Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer's *Rimas*; (3) Isabel Allende's *La casa de los espíritus*; (4) Miguel de Unamuno's *San Manuel Bueno, mártir* and (5) Camilo Jose Cela's *La familia de Pascual Duarte*. As regards to cultural topics, candidates could choose between four themes: (1) Hispano-American cinema and music; (2) the role of the family in Spanish society; (3) Hispano-American fine arts and (4) geographical and linguistic characteristics of Spain.

As regards Section A (Literature) the most common questions were those of *La casa de Bernarda Alba* and *La familia de Pascual Duarte*. None of the candidates chose *San Manuel Bueno, mártir*.

The Examiners were pleased with the writing production of an excellent minority that showed a good command of the language and the literary works, where there was more analysis than description with excellent use of quotes.

Overall, the majority showed an average capability to answer both questions presenting well-structured texts and obtaining an average grade of 7 out of 10. However, there was a minority that left some parts out failing to provide direct examples from the literary works, and/ or only partial aspects of the question were addressed. The Examiners would like to emphasise that analysing a plot is not the same as repeating the plot, and the importance of including quotes to enrich the candidates' compositions.

Regarding Section B (Culture), most candidates chose the second question about the role of the family in Spanish society. None of the candidates chose the first theme, whereas it was noticed that one candidate did not answer the stated cultural component.

Overall, the majority showed a fair capability to obtain an average grade of 6 out of 10: ideas were organized effectively and the most important points were included. However, some writings contained factual errors and/ or needed a more in depth elaboration.

The Examiners would like to point out that even though in Paper III content has more weight over the language used, candidates are still expected to write accurately with the least grammatical and orthographic mistakes possible. Candidates are also encouraged to use varied vocabulary and connectors.

Paper IV 'Listening Comprehension'

The listening comprehension exam was not held due to the coronavirus pandemic in the country.

Chairperson
Examination Panel 2020