

# Spanish (continuers)

2010 ASSESSMENT REPORT

Languages Learning Area



Government  
of South Australia

**SACE**  
Board of SA

# **SPANISH (CONTINUERS)**

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### **GENERAL COMMENTS**

In 2010, a total of thirty-seven students sat the Spanish examination.

Students were generally adequately prepared for the examination and demonstrated a satisfactory level of language skills and knowledge. Most students attempted to answer every question in all sections of the examination paper, and there were many excellent responses.

The most successful students showed a good level of grammatical accuracy. Grammatical proficiency is one of several assessment criteria, but it is particularly important in Spanish because, to be clearly understood, it is crucial to have a good command in some distinctive linguistic aspects, including the different endings for verb tenses, noun and adjective correspondence of gender and number, proper use of pronouns and an adequate sentence structure. Students are reminded to write neatly, and to observe orthography and punctuation conventions.

The examiners recognise that, as with any assessment process, the oral examination can be stressful for candidates. Students who performed well overcame their nerves and went beyond minimal responses in the oral examination, and a few even took the lead in some parts of the conversation; the examiners viewed this very positively. It was also noted that some incorrect or incomplete answers in the written paper were accompanied by correct notes in the spaces provided. Again, students who did well in the paper usually ensured that they understood the scope and purpose of the questions, and elaborated their answers accordingly. Students are reminded to take their time when reading the examination questions, and to allow enough time to decide how to answer each particular question. Many questions demanded some level of interpretation and elaboration from the students, and so, more mature responses attracted higher marks.

In assessment components 3 and 4, the examiners welcomed the opportunity for students to speak their minds and give a personal response (when applicable) to the tasks and questions posed to them. Thus, the paper provided opportunities for students to go beyond a formulaic or partially memorised use of Spanish and show a thorough understanding of the nature of each text (or research topic). Critical personal responses were preferred over mere reproductions of the texts and sources consulted. The most successful responses examined the texts as a whole, were well-organised, and used the student's own words.

### **ASSESSMENT COMPONENT 3: ORAL EXAMINATION**

The overall performance of most candidates was quite satisfactory, and examiners noted a similar level of the general performance compared to previous years. Most students managed well at taking turns, showing politeness, and using conventional greetings. Although it was obvious to examiners that most candidates had been well-advised about how to prepare for the examination, and most were adequately prepared, some candidates could have benefited from a little more guidance from their teachers when choosing and undertaking their topics for the In-depth Study. In comparison, students were generally more successful in the conversation section and the examiners' perception was that the general treatment of the discussion topics, although adequate, tended to be a little superficial and uninvolved.

Practice is essential in preparing for an oral examination and students are encouraged to take up opportunities to use oral Spanish. There are many different and distinctive Spanish accents and it is advisable for schools to try and expose the students to some of these different styles of oral speech. Interestingly, reading in Spanish can help to improve the students' oral skills, and therefore students are encouraged to read as many different kinds of texts in Spanish as they possibly can.

## **Section 1: Conversation**

### ***Capacity to maintain a conversation***

Generally students were able to maintain a conversation in Spanish with the examiners, and the scope of their answers ranged from very basic and formulaic to extremely fluent. Most students were capable of maintaining natural conversations in Spanish, even when the examiners moved away from the published list of questions. Students are reminded that in this section of the examination preference is given to fluency and naturalness of the conversation as well as accuracy. So, hesitations and requests for clarification are not necessarily considered to be evidence of lack of skill, but just a normal part of natural oral language.

### ***Relevance and depth of treatment of information, opinions, and comment***

More successful candidates had prepared for the examination and could go beyond minimal responses, making use of different linguistic resources (including a variety of structures, tenses, and expressions) and responded fully. Candidates had genuinely interesting things to say, and examiners preferred answers that went beyond 'I like it', 'It's good', or 'It's interesting'.

### ***Clarity of expression***

The clarity of expression was generally good, with many students demonstrating fluency in Spanish. It was only natural that there was some English accent for most students, but this only occasionally caused a problem in comprehension. Students are reminded to speak as slowly and as clearly as possible, to minimise the potential negative impact of a thick accent. Students should be particularly careful when pronouncing vowels and some distinctive sounds such as /t/, /r/ or /ñ/.

### ***Accuracy of vocabulary and sentence structures***

Accuracy was mostly adequate and in some cases outstanding, with only a few cases where the lack of command over vocabulary and grammar structures posed a problem for communication. When conversation occurs in a natural context, it is usual for speakers to hesitate, repeat, request clarification, or even ask for clarification of some vocabulary. Students are reminded that, if they realise that they have forgotten a word or made a mistake, they should keep going and look for alternative ways to express the concept they want to convey.

Some common mistakes are difficult for native speakers of English to avoid, including the incorrect use of preterite and imperfect conjugation endings when talking about the past, incorrect use of *por*, *para*, *ser*, and *estar*. Other errors such as English word order, incorrect correspondence of gender/number between nouns and adjectives, and inappropriate verb regime (*regresan sus casas*, *sirven los clientes*), were present but not overwhelmingly so. Students are encouraged to use structures and expressions like *gustar* (*encantar*, *molestar*) that are favoured in Spanish over typical expressions in English such as passive voice.

### ***Range and appropriateness of vocabulary and sentence structures***

In general, students demonstrated their vocabulary and sentence structure understanding well, especially when talking about the present, past, and future. Some students had difficulty dealing with hypothetical situations (which require use of conditional tenses), and expressing accurate opinions (which often require the use of subjunctive tenses).

Examiners understand that students tend to address their teachers and classmates in a casual way in the classroom, therefore preferring the forms with *tú* over *usted*. An examination is, by nature, a formal setting in which students usually meet the examiners for the first time and need to be courteous and polite. It is advisable to start any conversation in a polite, formal manner, and shift to a more casual register if appropriate, after being prompted to do so (for example, *tutéame, puedes tutearme, trátame de tú, por favor*), or after checking with the other speaker (as in *¿puedo tutearla/o?, ¿está bien si uso tú?*).

## Section 2: Discussion

### **Capacity to maintain a discussion (communication strategies, comprehension, exchange of opinions, ideas and information)**

Overall, most students performed successfully in this section, with most candidates achieving 80% or more. The nature of the chosen topic and each student's approach played a big part in results for this section. Students are reminded to speak clearly and at an adequate pace. Successful candidates also made good use of materials and maintained eye contact with the examiners, avoided repeating or paraphrasing extended chunks of texts from their resource documents, and explored their chosen topics using their own words. This enabled a natural and fluent presentation, and these students were never out of their depth. Students who prepared well for this section not only elaborated in their presentations, but were also ready to give appropriate answers to examiners' questions on the topic, as well as offering their own opinions. Students are reminded that they will be expected to lead this part of the examination and therefore should be prepared to elaborate and expand on their chosen topic when answering the examiners' questions.

### **Clarity of expression (capacity to speak clearly and accurately with correct pronunciation, intonation, and stress; capacity to speak without undue interference from other languages)**

Most students demonstrated an adequate level of skill, and a large number showed a level of proficiency close to that of native speakers. As expected, some Australian accent was present in many instances, but only a few speeches were badly affected by a heavy accent. It is important for students to check how to pronounce new, long, or difficult words, which they may encounter during their research. It reflects poorly on a student's preparation when they repeatedly mispronounce a name or even the title for their topic.

### **Accuracy and range (capacity to speak fluently using a range of expressions; capacity to use language appropriately, e.g. polite form of address)**

As in the conversation section, the overall command of grammar was adequate and, in many cases, outstanding. There were minor problems, such as *ser* versus *estar*, or the use of *por* versus *para*. Two recurrent mistakes made by students when talking about themselves were the overuse of the gerund instead of the infinitive, and the wrong use of a pronoun when using verbs like *gustar* (as in '*Yo me gusta trabajar*', '*Es bueno trabajando con niños*'). Also, there were frequent instances of '*viajar alrededor de Europa*' (*viajar por Europa*). The appropriate use of *mayor*, *menor*, *major*, and *peor* was again an issue for some students this year.

### **Relevance and depth of discussion (general preparedness and use of support materials, evidence of research, in-depth study topics chosen, use of in depth study forms)**

Some of the most popular topics this year included Hispanic Arts and Cultures, Hispanic History and Society, and personal trips to Hispanic countries.

Although most candidates performed well in this section, a substantial group of candidates had not prepared thoroughly for this part. Many candidates chose to prepare topics that posed no challenge for them, such as sports rules or future career interests, and then limited their presentation to a brief summary about their lives. These topics did not lend themselves to

discussion, as the discussion tended to revolve only around the student's own interest in the subject. In other cases, students did not recognise data from their own research when the examiners referred to it in the course of the discussion. Students are reminded to become familiar with their own research so that nerves do not affect their ability to engage in the discussion. In a few cases, students brought photographs that were irrelevant to the topic, or were not integrated with the discussion. Some students admitted they had not prepared at all. Some candidates showed a good level of oral skills in the interaction with examiners but did not produce a well-organised presentation, and limited themselves to providing isolated pieces of data about the subject.

Students, especially those coming from Hispanic families, are advised to prepare thoroughly for the In-depth Study, and not to rely solely on their oral skills to do well in the examination. Teachers could also help their students to prepare for their presentations by reminding them to start their exposition with a brief introduction to the subject (describing what or who, relevance of their choice, and reasons for having chosen the topic) rather than opening with a range of details and figures about the student's childhood. Strategies for reporting are essential in this section of the examination as reporting plays a very important role in text types such as discussion and a speech or talk (formal or informal), as listed in the Curriculum Statement.

Some candidates seemed reluctant to express their opinion, beyond a minimal response, and most students answered many questions by repeating or adding new data from their presentations, rather than with a personal evaluation of the data presented. Some students did not produce any personal assessment about the topic researched or provide a personal conclusion. Students are reminded that expressing opinion is important in the assessment for this section, and that students are expected to be able to analyse and summarise information.

Students are reminded to bring their In-depth Study outline form to the examination, as this document is very important to help the examiners manage the conversation.

## **ASSESSMENT COMPONENT 4: WRITTEN EXAMINATION**

Overall students performed well in the written examination and most candidates achieved average marks well above 60% across all three sections of the paper. There were some outstanding performances and a few insufficient responses, but most students managed to extract information, relate concepts, and summarise content successfully in Spanish.

Although most students broadly understood the factual contents in the different passages and texts, the depth and breath of their responses varied extensively when they were asked to identify, connect, and summarise text features such as the expression of the participants' emotions, intentions, and relationships. Cultural aspects conveyed in the texts and the overall purpose and tone of some texts were, at times, difficult for many students to grasp. Most students showed partial understanding of such features, but few incorporated them thoroughly in their responses. It is important for candidates to be familiar not only with essential features in different text types but also with all kinds of discourse markers in Spanish.

### **Section 1: Listening and Responding**

There were five different passages in Spanish, all varying in length and nature. At least four of them contained questions about the purpose or tone of the verbal exchanges included in them, a task that required interpretative, rather than translation, skills. As in past years, most students answered in general terms, but few were able to show that they understood all specific information. The most successful responses addressed the specific requirements of the questions, and provided not only relevant supporting evidence from the texts but also some degree of elaboration and synthesis. Some questions that were weighted more heavily in the

distribution of marks needed more thorough elaboration, in other words, a more exhaustive scanning of both content and language features in each text.

### **Text 1**

Most students were able to identify the situation and extract basic information about what was said in the announcement; not all students, however, managed to discriminate relevant information that was needed to obtain full marks (that a meal voucher was offered because the delay occurred at a typical meal time, and not that the delay was due to technical problems).

### **Text 2**

Most candidates were able to identify the core of the initiative described in the text, but almost half of the cohort did not offer any relevant details. Question 2 (b) offered an opportunity for candidates to select and contrast some of the arguments in favour and against the program contained in the passage. Most students were able to provide a coherent answer, but a large number did not give examples from the text to substantiate their opinions.

### **Text 3**

Although the text was challenging for students, because of its formal register and the foreign nature of both topic and vocabulary, most students were well able to correctly identify a range of features in the passage related to the question.

### **Text 4**

Most candidates offered a thorough description of the finished dish in question 4 (a). For question 4 (b), the majority of students were able to give examples of the positive aspects of the dish, but some students did not clearly take account of their perceived target audience in their response, or identified the target audience incorrectly.

### **Text 5**

Both questions 5 (a) and 5 (b) required students to identify and discriminate relevant information in the passage. Question 5 (b) referred to the nature of the language used by both speakers rather than the content of the dialogue. As expected, most candidates extracted content from the passage quite well, but not all offered a thorough account of the attitudes (support, trust, humour) expressed by both friends to each other. More successful responses featured relevant supporting evidence from the passage, as is required by this kind of interpretation question, and most candidates answered both questions satisfactorily.

## **Section 2: Reading and Responding – Part A**

This section consisted of two inter-related texts, *La basura nuclear busca hogar* and *Bando municipal del alcalde*. The first text was an editorial from a newspaper urging different political groups to collaborate and work towards the building of a nuclear waste depot in the country. It featured some criticism against different political players at different administration levels, as well as arguments in favour of the construction of the depot. The second text was a mayor's announcement of the council's decision to offer some of the council territory to the National Government in order to build that nuclear waste depot. The mayor's text was an almost desperate attempt to justify an expectedly very unpopular decision. Both texts contained plenty of suggested, non-explicit content that needed to be extracted through attentive reading.

### **Text 6**

As expected, most candidates provided an appropriate explanation of the issues covered in the text in Question 6 (a), although varying levels of detail were offered. The more successful answers included not only the obvious position of the editorial in favour of a nuclear depot, but also some indication of the urgency of the matter, the government's responsibility to safely

dispose of the waste, and the opposition of the newspaper towards nuclear power. In the same way, in Question 6 (b) most students were quite able to identify and articulate the author's criticism of those who opposed the building of a nuclear depot.

### Text 7

All three questions for text 7 proved challenging for most candidates, no doubt because of the interpretative nature of the responses. Most candidates extracted enough information from the text to answer the questions, but the degree of detail provided to support them varied considerably. Successful responses to Question 7 (a) included some indication of the persuasive nature of the text as well as its informative intention. Question 7 (b) allowed for both positive and negative portraits of the mayor, but not all responses catered for all different aspects of the mayor's complex chain of thought. Successful responses managed to include some mention to his sincere (or perhaps poised) honesty (*'creo sinceramente', 'nada a sus espaldas'*); his alleged selflessness (*'me va acostar el cargo'*); his realism (*'no utopías'*); and his altruism (*'pensando en lo mejor para el pueblo'*). Question 7 (c) offered multiple possible correct answers, including the use of dramatic language (*'condenados a desaparecer', 'agoniza'*); opposing arguments (*'traición vs 'legitimación', 'utopía' vs 'realidad'*); urging the readers to take action (*'no hay opción', 'brazos cruzados'*); and a range of evaluative terms (*nada, menos, único, nuevo*). Again, the number of language traits identified varied greatly, as did the number and nature of the examples provided.

Students are advised to take time to think through their answers in this section before they start writing, so they can clearly identify the type of text. It is also essential for students to read each question carefully and decide on an approach for their response. Most responses need some degree of comparing, connecting, interpreting, and summarising different parts of the text, often across the whole text. This was the case for questions 7 (b) and 7 (c). Students are also expected to answer many questions in their own words, and refer to the original text as fully as is required to support their response, rather than using only a few disconnected words from the text.

### Section 2: Reading and Responding – Part B

Text 8 prompted many heartfelt responses, ranging in nature, style, and complexity. There were many appropriate responses, with a high number of students achieving marks of 70% or more. A small number of responses did not meet the minimum word count (200 words).

Regarding the text type, almost all students in the cohort showed a very good understanding of the text features required for the task (formal register, with heading and farewell). The pertinence and soundness of their responses varied greatly, however, from articulate and organised to a basic sequence of information details and personal wishes (*'soy buen estudiante... quiero viajar... la paz es muy importante...'*). Most successful responses linked personal aptitudes and interests with how to contribute to the wider community.

Successful responses showed a good command of syntax, verb conjugation, and use of pronouns and prepositions. Common mistakes included inappropriate use of *por* and *para*; *ser* instead of *estar*; improper choice of adjective or adverb, that is, *bueno* instead of *bien*; incorrect choice of prepositions (*pero* vs *sino*), and the use of indicative mood when subjunctive was in order. The examiners viewed these and many other expected mistakes negatively when the natural flow of the text was interrupted, or when the meaning of the message was obscured. Students are reminded that, to produce successful, articulated texts in Spanish for this section and other parts of the examination, a sound command of verb conjugation is essential. A substantial number of responses had satisfactory syntax but contained profuse punctuation and orthographic errors, for example, the misuse of *b* and *v*, absence of *h*, and lack of graphic accents.

### **SECTION 3: WRITING IN SPANISH**

Of the three questions in this section, question 9 was the most popular choice (54%), followed by question 10 (approximately 30%). Only 16% of candidates chose question 11.

Markers were satisfied with the overall ability of this year's cohort to produce written texts, and two-thirds of all students achieving grades above 60% with almost a third of these students obtaining a grade of 80% or more. The biggest proportion of top marks for this section was obtained for question 10.

Most students produced well-structured texts that raised relevant and coherent ideas, which sometimes lacked some detail and sophistication. Many students wrote long, rich, and very interesting narratives for question 11. Only a few responses for questions 9 and 10 did not include an introduction or a farewell to their texts. It was also noted that for question 9, many responses did not progress but instead repeated the same limited number of ideas.

Consistently with the previous section in the paper, many responses showed a good command of syntax and a sound knowledge of the conventions for each text type. Independently of their level of skill, some students showed some degree of inconsistency in register or tone, and some speeches displayed casual language that was somehow too relaxed for a formal setting.

Grammatical mistakes were similar to the previous section and students should be careful of:

- use of appropriate accents and other punctuation signs
- use of present continuous after preposition
- choice of adjective versus adverb
- correct verb regime
- construction of 'back-to-front' verbs
- correspondence for gender or number
- verb endings or conjugations
- avoiding the use of 'Spanglish'
- choice of tense in narrative
- choice of preposition
- use of the definite article
- choice of indicative or subjunctive.

Students are reminded to take some time after they have completed their responses to check their punctuation, spelling, and syntax. It is also very important for students to have a basic but solid command on the use of subjunctive, since this conjugation is needed constantly in Spanish to express ideas and opinions, and is used in the text types that are part of this examination.

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Spanish (continuers)