

Spanish (continuers)

2013 Chief Assessor's Report



Government
of South Australia

SACE
Board of SA

SPANISH (CONTINUERS)

2013 CHIEF ASSESSOR'S REPORT

OVERVIEW

Chief Assessor's reports give an overview of how students performed in their school and external assessments in relation to the learning requirements, assessment design criteria, and performance standards set out in the relevant subject outline. They provide information and advice regarding the assessment types, the application of the performance standards in school and external assessments, the quality of student performance, and any relevant statistical information.

GENERAL COMMENTS

Students were generally adequately prepared for both school and external assessments and demonstrated a satisfactory level of language skills and knowledge.

Examiners and moderators were satisfied overall with the quality and appropriateness of most responses. Almost all students attempted to answer every question in all sections of the examination, and there were many excellent responses.

As usual, students whose overall performance excelled also showed a good level of grammar accuracy. Although grammatical proficiency is one of several assessment criteria, in Spanish it is crucial to have a good command of 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, especially when using complex sentences. It is advisable that students express themselves as clearly as possible. In the written examination, it is expected that students write legibly and that spelling and punctuation conventions are observed.

Students who did well in the examination usually took time to make sure they understood the scope and purpose of the questions..

Students are advised not to hurry when reading the examination questions and to allow some time to think about how to answer each question. Many questions demand some level of interpretation and elaboration, and hence, the more considered responses attracted higher marks.

SCHOOL ASSESSMENT

Assessment Type 1: Folio

Most folios submitted for moderation complied with the assessment format prescribed in the subject outline. A few folios exceeded the appropriate number of tasks, but, overall, tasks were appropriately designed for the purpose of assessing students' level of skill in Spanish.

Although the extent and complexity of responses varied greatly, most students were able to successfully produce relevant and appropriate responses in Spanish with a good level of accuracy. Most students showed a fluent command of spoken Spanish and an ability to extract information and interpret intention from both written and oral texts. Overall, students were quite able to express their insights on cultural differences, language features, and their own learning.

Moderators noticed a tendency by some teachers to ask closed questions during oral interaction tasks with students, even when students demonstrated some ability to initiate and maintain the conversation. Teachers are reminded that the student's elaboration of ideas and capacity to interact in Spanish are essential elements of the assessment design criteria, and that open-ended questions give students the best opportunity to demonstrate their level of skill.

Teachers are also reminded to describe the performance of students according to the grades described in the performance standards. Moderators noted a tendency at some schools to use arithmetic methods to assign grades, which may not always correlate with the performance standards.

Assessment Type 2: In-depth Study

As for the folio, most students showed a good overall level of skill in Spanish in the in-depth study, particularly in conveying clear ideas in a consistent and organised manner. It was noted, however, that some students struggled to interpret and reflect on the topic of their choice, and their responses tended to be sketchy. Students are advised that just slightly adapting an English version of the facts and presenting it in Spanish may not address the specific feature IR3 (Reflection). Some tasks were suitably designed to provide opportunities for student reflection, but it would seem that in general, students required more guidance from teachers.

The more successful in-depth studies included not only a vast array of information about the topic of choice using a high standard of Spanish, but also showed a sound understanding of the influence, importance and/or nature of the topic. The best in-depth studies detailed selected aspects of the topic. It is recommended that students avoid generic, superficial treatment of well-known topics (e.g. Frida Kahlo's biography, descriptions of La Alhambra, celebrations for Mexican Día de los Muertos) and focus on a selection of particular relevant aspects (e.g. Frida Kahlo's painful experiences, La Alhambra's significance in Hispanic-Muslim art, the connections of Día de los Muertos to Aztec tradition). Moderators and examiners identified the topic of 'My Family' as particularly unsuitable for this assessment type.

EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT

Assessment Type 3: Examination

Oral Examination

Any assessment process, and oral examinations in particular, may be very stressful for students and every effort is made to help students feel at ease. Examiners understand this and do keep it in mind when they are assessing the students.

Students who performed well overcame their nerves and went beyond minimal responses in the oral examination.

As in previous years, the overall performance of most students was quite satisfactory. Most students managed the interaction well, displayed good manners, and used conventional greetings. It was obvious to examiners that most students had been well advised how to prepare for the examination and most of them were adequately prepared. However, some students would have benefited from a little more guidance from their teachers when choosing and tackling a topic for in-depth study and preparing their reflection on the topic. The most successful discussions were original in their treatment of the topic or reflected a personal interest in it. Discussion topics included social issues in Hispanic countries (such as abortion, gay marriage, guerrillas, and homeless children), celebrations (e.g. El Rocío, Fallas), and contemporary artists and institutions (e.g. Santana, Alejandro Amenábar).

Students are also encouraged to bring to the oral examination, whenever possible, any suitable graphic materials to support their discussion. These materials helped the examining panel to better follow the discussion and the student to stay focused on the topic.

Practice for the oral examination is essential and students are encouraged to participate in as many opportunities as possible to speak Spanish. It is also important to remember that there are many different and distinctive Spanish accents and it is most advisable for schools to try and expose students to these different styles of speech. Reading Spanish is a useful tool for improving students' oral skills; students are encouraged to read Spanish texts aloud as much as possible, including many different kinds of texts.

Section 1: Conversation

Generally, all students were able to maintain a conversation in Spanish with the examiners. Answers ranged from the very basic and formulaic responses to excellent, well-considered responses. Most students maintained natural conversations in Spanish even when the examiners moved away from the rehearsed questions, and showed a good level of understanding in Spanish that required only minor rephrasing.

Students are reminded that in this section of the examination, the examiners take into account fluency and naturalness of the conversation, as well as accuracy. Therefore, hesitations and requests for clarification are not necessarily considered to be evidence of lack of skill, but just a regular part of a natural conversation.

As in previous years, a large proportion of students made a conscious effort to interact with the examiners and posed their own questions. This initiative was welcomed by examiners, but students should be coached as to when and how this is appropriate in a formal examination setting.

Students are reminded that any sample questions available on the SACE website are not prescriptive and that they should not expect such questions to be asked in this same format in the course of the examination. Some students experienced difficulties when examiners phrased the questions differently or when examiners rephrased the student's own response.

Most students had clear expression, with many demonstrating fluency in Spanish. Naturally, examiners detected an Australian accent among students, but only occasionally did this represent a real obstacle to comprehension. Students are reminded to speak slowly and clearly, in order to minimise the potentially negative impact of an accent. Students should be particularly careful when pronouncing vowels and some distinctive sounds such as /t/, /r/ or /ñ/.

Accuracy was usually adequate and in some cases it was outstanding. There were only a few instances where poor grammar and a lack of vocabulary 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 some isolated words.

Some common mistakes included the incorrect use of preterite and imperfect conjugation endings when talking about the past, and incorrect use of *por*, *para*, *ser*, *estar*, etc. Other errors, such as English word order, incorrect correspondence of gender/number between nouns and adjectives, and inappropriate verb regime (*yo le dije para ella ir a Costa Rica, mi hermana parece mí*), were infrequent. Students are encouraged to use structures and expressions like *gustar*, *encantar*, and *molestar*, which are favoured in Spanish over typical expressions in English, such as passive voice. Only a small number of students showed a tendency to use the infinitive instead of the pertinent conjugated verb.

In general, students performed well, using a wide range of vocabulary and sentence structures, especially when talking about the present, past, and future. Some students found it more challenging to deal with hypothetical situations, which require use of conditional tenses, and to express accurate opinions, which often require the use of subjunctive tenses.

Successful students had prepared for the examination and demonstrated the capacity to go beyond minimal responses, making use of different linguistic resources (e.g. a variety of structures, tenses, expressions) and avoiding very simple responses such as 'I like it', 'It's good', 'It's interesting'.

It is acknowledged that students tend to address their teachers and classmates in a casual way in the classroom, therefore preferring the forms with *tú* over *usted*. Some examiners also prefer to be addressed using casual forms, as this can create a relaxed atmosphere during the examination and is consistent with students' practice in the classroom. This poses a dilemma for some schools since an examination is, by nature, a formal setting in which students usually meet the examiners for the first time, and courtesy and politeness are expected from all participants. It is advisable to start any conversation in a polite, formal manner and perhaps shift to a more casual register if appropriate, after being prompted to do so (*tutéame; puedes tutearme; trátame de tú, por favor*), or after checking with the other speaker (e.g. *¿puedo tutearla/o?, ¿está bien si uso 'tú'?*).

Section 2: Discussion

Overall, most students performed successfully in this section. As in previous years, the nature of the chosen topic and the approach of each student to it played a big part in each student's success in this section.

Students are reminded to speak clearly and at an adequate pace. Successful students made good use of materials, managed to maintain eye contact with the

examiners, and avoided repeating or paraphrasing extended chunks of texts from their resource documents by expanding on their chosen topics using their own words. This made their presentations seem natural and fluent. Students who prepared well for this section gave appropriate answers to examiners' questions on their topic, and offered their own opinions. Students are reminded to be prepared to expand on their chosen topic when answering the examiners' questions.

Examiners noted that most topics for discussion were varied and well planned. Depending on the topic chosen for discussion, some students may have benefited from bringing relevant support materials such as maps, photographs, or charts.

Most students demonstrated an adequate capacity to convey information accurately and appropriately, and many students showed a very high level of proficiency. It is important, however, for students to check the pronunciation of new, long, or difficult words that they encounter in their research.

As in the Section 1, the overall command of grammar was adequate and in some cases outstanding. The usual problems such as the use of *ser* versus *estar*, or the use of *por* versus *para*, had an expected and minor presence, but were never an issue. Two recurrent mistakes that students made when talking about themselves were the overuse of the gerund instead of the infinitive and the incorrect use of pronouns when using verbs like *gustar*. There were frequent instances of *viajar alrededor de Europa* instead of *viajar por Europa*. Also *mayor*, *menor*, *major*, and *peor* were not always pronounced correctly.

Some of the most popular topics this year included Hispanic arts and cultures (e.g. Santana, Amenábar), Hispanic history and society (e.g. El Rocío in Huelva, guerrilla war in Latin America, gay marriage in Hispanic countries), and Hispanic countries.

It was good to note that most students chose relevant topics for discussion and that they prepared appropriately. In the past, some students had not prepared for this part thoroughly and opted for topics that posed no challenge for them, such as the rules of a sport or future career interests. These topics do not easily lend themselves to interpretation and reflection, which is one of the assessment design criteria assessed through the discussion. Students are reminded to choose a topic that fits with the themes 'The Spanish-speaking Communities' or 'The Changing World'. It was clear that some students were not able to recognise their own information when it was reworded by the examiner. In some isolated cases, the photographs that students brought were irrelevant to the topic or were not integrated with the discussion at all.

Students are advised to prepare a thorough in-depth study and refrain from relying solely on their oral skills to do well in the discussion section of the examination. Students are reminded that they may start with a brief introduction to the subject (e.g. what is it or who is the person selected, the relevance of their choice and the reasons for having chosen the topic).

Many students found it challenging to express their opinions beyond a minimal response. Most students answered questions by repeating or adding new information rather than with a personal evaluation or reflection. Some students failed to produce any personal assessment about the topic researched or provide (when appropriate) a personal conclusion. Students are reminded that expressing opinion plays a part in the assessment for this section, and that students are expected to be able to analyse and summarise information, rather than just reproduce it.

Students are reminded to bring the 'In-depth Study Outline for Oral Examination' form to the oral examination as this helps examiners to organise the order and flow of their questions.

Talking about their own learning posed a challenge for many students, and most of them would not elaborate beyond expressing admiration for how much they had learned along their research journey or praising their topic of research for its potential use in their future careers. Students should keep in mind that they need to demonstrate some ability in handling abstract topics, mainly by expressing opinions with some degree of elaboration. Teachers may help students to prepare for this aspect of the discussion by practising relevant structures in Spanish that are common in this kind of language (e.g. *es importante (porque ...)*, *en consecuencia*, *por otro lado*, *de manera similar*, *me interesa (que)*).

Written Examination

Overall students performed well in the written examination. As in previous years, there were some outstanding performances and a few insufficient responses, but most students managed to successfully extract information, relate concepts, and summarise content in Spanish.

Although it was clear that most students were capable of understanding the factual contents of the texts, the depth and breadth of responses varied extensively when requested to identify, connect, and summarise features such as the expression of emotions, intentions, and relationships. Also, cultural aspects conveyed in the texts and the overall purpose and tone of some texts were, at times, challenging for many students. Most students showed a partial understanding of such features, but only a few students managed to include these features thoroughly in their responses. It is important for students to be familiar not only with essential features in different text types, but also with all kinds of discourse markers in Spanish.

Although it was pleasing to note efforts by students to introduce more sophisticated structures in Spanish (e.g. *espero que + subjunctive*), many students tended to overlook the importance of punctuation and spelling when conveying subtle indications of tone to their responses. In some instances, the style used in responses did not quite reflect the required level of formality or casualness. In the same way, students sometimes did not detect subtle indications of tone and intention in the listening texts.

Although students demonstrated a good understanding of texts, they did not always provide sufficient relevant evidence in their responses. Students should remember that, when requested, justifying their responses with evidence from the text is an essential part of many questions in order to obtain full marks.

Finally, some students provided partially or completely incorrect answers to some questions as a direct result of having misinterpreted the question wording in English. Students are advised to take some time to plan and organise their responses before putting pen to paper, in order to avoid such unnecessary errors.

Section 1: Listening and Responding

There were five texts in Spanish, all of them varying in length and nature. At least four questions asked about the purpose or tone of the verbal exchanges included in

the texts, a task that required interpretative rather than translation skills. As in past years, most students answered in general terms, but a minority demonstrated that they understood the specific information. More importantly, the most successful responses addressed what each specific question required, and provided not only relevant supporting evidence from the texts, but also some degree of elaboration and synthesis.

Some questions required more thorough elaboration from the students; that is, a more exhaustive scanning of both the content and language features in each text. This section of the examination will include a variety of spoken texts and teachers should ensure that students are exposed to a wide range of spoken Spanish during the teaching and learning program.

Question 1

The first text consisted of a tour guide announcement. Most students managed to answer correctly the two questions about the purpose of the announcement and the particular characteristics of the park (i.e. being the biggest butterfly reserve in the world and hosting over 3000 different species of birds), with only a few responses struggling to identify the specific features that made the park unique. Some students mistook the announcement for a radio advertisement promoting the park and failed to grasp any references to the road trip.

Question 2

Text 2 was a telephone dialogue taking place between a clinic receptionist and a patient's relative. The dialogue contained precise details about the patient's coming appointments, health tests, and specific items required for one of the tests. While the vast majority of students managed to identify the reason for the clinic calling the patient and to list all or most of the tests the patient would have done by the time of his next appointment, it was surprising to note that a small but significant number of responses listed the items to be brought to the tests and not the names of the tests themselves. Students are reminded to read each question carefully before attempting their response.

Question 3

The third text was a dialogue between two exchange students returning from two different South American countries. Students talked about their different experiences and opportunities to practice their Spanish, and discussed briefly about language differences between the countries each of them visited. Most students could properly describe the linguistic nature of such differences, but many struggled to identify the word *amalaya* as *quechua* and categorised it as slang or an ancient term, despite the origin of the word being explained in the passage. Most students, however, successfully explained how one of the speakers learnt the term.

Question 4

Text 4 consisted of an excerpt from radio or TV news program updating the listeners/viewers on latest developments concerning a flood after a river swelling. As expected of a passage containing some technical vocabulary and questions worth a number of marks each, responses varied greatly in accuracy, detail, and elaboration. Most students managed to appropriately summarise the duties of the fire brigade during the event, but many struggled to find linguistic elements in the passage that illustrated the change of tone towards the end of the passage. It is advisable for teachers to coach students in identifying different language features (e.g. word choice, register) as these are an important part of the specific feature IR2 (Analysis and language in texts).

Question 5

The last text consisted of a dialogue between a customer and a waiter in a restaurant in Mexico. The waiter explained the reasons for a salt shaker being missing from the table. Most students provided correct responses for Question 5(a) and Question 5(c) and clearly described the customer's feelings. Question 5(b) was answered with a range of detail about the reasons for the initiative. Most importantly, students' responses varied greatly in the evidence provided in support of responses for Question 5(b) and Question 5(c). It is advisable for teachers to remind students to support their answers with evidence from the texts, as requested in the questions.

Section 2: Reading and Responding

Part A

This section consisted of two texts: a short article introducing a Dominican entrepreneur and her locker business, and a blog entry in which a sports person shares career news and thoughts with his fans. The current affairs article dealt with the woman's success story and the nature of the business. The blog entry dealt with the personal reflections of its author on sport and life in general.

Question 6

Overall, all four parts of Question 6 were adequately addressed by most students, with the supporting evidence ranging widely across responses to Question 6(d). Successful responses noted the fact that the embassy is never short of applicants for American visas, and recognised that this indicated economic hardship in the country.

Question 7

Most students successfully answered all three parts of this question. The single challenge for a number of students, given the digressive nature of the text, was avoiding the repetition of the same idea in their responses to parts of Question 7(b) and Question 7(c), which both required a list of items. In particular, many students identified resilience and honesty as two qualities valued by Pau, but did not identify other qualities such as self-belief, open-mindedness, self-sacrifice, or ambition, which were also evident in the text. Students are encouraged to compare, analyse, and contrast different parts within texts, in order to elicit the core ideas contained in them as opposed to other, more superfluous or expressive, elements.

Students are advised to take time before attempting to answer the questions in this section so they can clearly identify the context and intention of each text. It is also essential for students to read each question carefully and decide on a strategy to build their response. Most responses need some degree of comparing, connecting, interpreting, and summarising different parts of the text, often across the whole text. Students are also expected to answer many questions in their own words, and refer to the original text to support their response, rather than extract a few disconnected words from the original text as a way of response.

Part B

Question 8

Text 8 consisted of a press advertisement for a local council calling for entries to a mural art contest. The advertisement offered some background information about the communal nature of the contest, gave some basic information on rules and prices, and included a brief on possible topics for the murals. The task for students was to write a formal letter to their school council, persuading them to participate in the

contest. This is a Reading and Responding task which requires students to base their arguments on information included in the text.

The text managed to prompt many personal responses, which varied greatly in nature, style, and complexity. There were, overall, a large number of appropriate responses, with a high number of students achieving high grades, although the task proved to be challenging for some students. A small number of responses contained fewer words than were required for the task.

Most students showed a good understanding of the text features required for the task (i.e. formal register, with heading and farewell, etc.); however, many students found it difficult to maintain a coherent register and tone while addressing an entity rather than particular people; more specifically, most students seemed confused about which pronouns to use to refer to the council as a whole and mixed *ustedes* with *lo* and *él*.

The pertinence and soundness of responses varied extensively, from the most articulate and well organised to a sequence of basic information and personal preferences. More responses than usual for Section 2, Part B, were limited to barely linking unchanged chunks of the text. The most successful responses, on the other hand included a full range of arguments and suggestions for the murals with a profusion of interesting details.

As in previous years, successful responses showed a good command of syntax, verb conjugation, and the use of pronouns and prepositions. Common mistakes included inappropriate use of *por* and *para*; the use of *ser* instead of *estar*; improper choice of adjective or adverb, (e.g. *bueno* instead of *bien*); incorrect choice of the prepositions *pero* and *sino*; and the use of the indicative mood when the subjunctive was required. These and many other mistakes are to be expected; however, students lost marks when these mistakes hindered the natural flow of the text or affected the meaning of the message. Students are reminded that, in order to produce successful texts in, a sound command of verb conjugation is essential.

Markers also noted a substantial number of responses that, although using mostly satisfactory syntax, contained many punctuation and spelling errors, such as misuse of *b* and *v*, absence of *h*, and a lack of graphic accents. Students with some access to Spanish-speaking communities should be especially careful when transcribing language they have acquired orally (e.g. *deberdá* for *de verdad*, or *mi iho* for *me dijo*).

Section 3: Writing in Spanish

There were three topics for students to choose from: Question 9 required students to write a fictional narrative or real recount of a community event in which food and eating together would play a big part, in response to a short stories competition. Question 10 consisted of an informal letter offering a personal recount of experiences in a Spanish-speaking country, and specifically required students to refer mainly to some sort of voluntary work. Question 11 asked students to write a short article or public blog entry expressing their personal views on Australian schools' policies on compulsory use of hats during the summer season. Question 10 was the most popular (about 55%), followed by Question 9 (30%).

Markers were satisfied with the overall ability of this year's cohort to produce written texts and awarded many high marks for this section. The biggest proportion of top marks for this section was obtained for Question 10.

Most students, with only a few exceptions, managed to produce well-structured texts that showed relevant and coherent ideas, if sometimes lacking a little in detail and sophistication. Many students managed to write long, rich, and very interesting narratives for Question 9. It was also noted that for Question 11 many texts lacked some sort of progression and kept on repeating, not elaborating on, the same limited number of ideas.

As in Section 2, 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.

Grammar mistakes were similar to the previous section. Some common mistakes included:

- Absence of appropriate accents and other punctuation signs: *Espero que tu estas bien.*
- Use of present continuous after preposition: *Gracias por leyendo esta carta.*
- Improper choice of adjective versus adverb: *Mi vida es mal al momento.*
- Inappropriate verb regime: *Regresan sus casas.*
- Incorrect construction of 'back-to-front' verbs: *Los jóvenes les gustan ir a barbacoas.*
- Lack of correspondence for gender or number: *Tus pasiones es muy importante.*
- Wrong verb ending or conjugation: *Mi profesora siempre dije que ...*
- Improper use of Spanglish: *Todos somos individuales (individuos, únicos) / Hay mucha gente estereotípica (estereotipada, llena de tópicos).*
- Improper choice of past tense in narrations: *Recientemente leía una carta.*
- Improper choice of preposition: *Soy trabajadora con mis estudios / Todos de los países del mundo.*
- Absence of definitive article: *Jóvenes que compran mucho son muy aburridos.*
- Incorrect choice of indicative or subjunctive: *Aprender otra lengua es esencial para que los jóvenes pueden comunicar.*

Students are reminded to take some time to check punctuation, spelling, and syntax after completing their responses. It is also very important for students to have a basic but solid command of the use of the subjunctive, since this conjugation is constantly needed in Spanish for the expression of ideas and opinions.

OPERATIONAL ADVICE

In general, materials for moderation provided by schools were adequately packaged and organised. However, not all schools included clearly identifiable learning and assessment plans, with the addendum, where applicable. Occasionally a school did not include all assessment tasks for moderation or provide an explanation for this using the 'Variations — Moderation Materials' form. Schools are reminded to organise students' work by assessment type.

To ensure the consistency and fairness of the assessment across schools, it is essential that all students' material is easily accessible, clearly organised, and correctly labelled. Most importantly, all care should be taken when recording and

processing students' grades for each particular assessment type, to prevent clerical errors.

Spanish (continuers)
Chief Assessor