

SPANISH

Written exam

Vocabulary, translations and structure

Learn plenty of vocabulary, know all the tenses and prepare systematic answering approaches

Section B

We will now focus on section B. Many students find this section of the written exam, which includes the opinion piece, (written in Spanish) particularly challenging and it is advisable to prepare your opinion piece well in advance. It is of course vital that students prepare fully for sections A and C of the written exam as well.

COMPREHENSION TEXT (100 marks)

The comprehension text is usually longer than the journalistic text. You will find questions in both Spanish and English. Remember answer them in Spanish if they're written in Spanish and English if they're written in English.

Preparation tips

- Know your vocabulary. You need to know a lot of vocabulary for the Spanish written exam. Make a note of words that come up frequently and learn them off.
- Learn all the tenses. Become familiar with the endings of different verbs, especially the irregular ones. Be able to recognise if a verb is in present, past, future, conditional, subjunctive or if it is a command.
- Practice past exam papers frequently.
- Try not to learn words directly translated from English to Spanish. Instead, become familiar with synonymous words. This becomes useful when you are asked to rephrase a sentence provided in Spanish or to pick out similar phrases.

Example phrases

Here are some examples from the 2013 paper and papers from previous years:
Percibir = ver – to see
Esconder = ocultar – to hide
Realizar = hacer = ejecutar – to make/to carry out
Compañía = empresa = firma – company
Atascos = embotellamientos = mucho tráfico – traffic jam
Ser consciente de = darse cuenta de = notar – to realise/to be aware
Recientemente = últimamente = en las últimas fechas – recently

Permanecer en el puesto de trabajo = quedarse en su trabajo – to stay in the office
Disminuir = descender = bajar – to decrease
Aumentar = ascender = subir = incrementar – to increase/to rise
Un desastre = un accidente = una catástrofe = un siniestro = una tragedia – a catastrophe
El día = la jornada – the day
Ayudar = auxiliar = socorrer = dar apoyo – to help
Descuento = rebaja – discount
Encontrar = hallar – to find
Después de = tras – after
Huir = escapar = fugarse = salir corriendo – to flee

Questions in Spanish

■ Questions 1 and 3 – you are asked to find equivalent phrases from the text. Normally, if the phrase provided is in a certain tense, the phrase you are looking for is in



Try not to learn words directly translated from English to Spanish. Instead, become familiar with synonymous words

the same tense. Look for similar words in the paragraph. If the phrase is singular, look for a singular sentence or noun. If the adjective is plural, look for a plural adjective. If it's infinitive, you should look for an infinitive. Similarly with present, past and future tenses.

Here are some examples from the 2013 paper:
Phrase provided – answer
De verdad – en realidad
Gente en gran peligro – (grupos que son) su-



Work out a structure before you begin to write.
Above: La Sagrada Família, Barcelona, Spain

jetos de mayor riesgo
Escapar de la casa – Huida del hogar
Potencian el crecimiento – Favorecen el desarrollo
Permanece en la oficina – Se quede en su puesto

Questions in English

Read each question carefully and then go to the paragraph that's indicated to find the answer.

■ Question 2 – you are asked to explain in English the meaning of certain sentences from the text. Never translate the sentence word for word. A direct translation from Spanish to English never makes sense in the context of the text. If you don't know a word in Spanish don't leave a gap when

translating. This will show the examiner that you don't understand. Try and get the general meaning of the sentence. If you need more than one sentence to explain the meaning in English don't worry. The most important thing is that when the examiner reads the answer it makes sense in English so read it back over.

■ Question 4 – if no instruction is provided in the question as to how much information is needed in the answer, give at least three main points. If you see more, write more, but as a rule of thumb there should be at least three.

■ Question 5 – opinion piece (50 marks, 20 minutes). In this question you are given two statements from which you choose one to write your opinion on. Usually you argue either in favour of the statement or against.

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SPANISH

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Live the language

Doing well in anything is made much easier by being interested in it. I immersed myself entirely in the language. Read your favourite books and watch your favourite movies in Spanish. Read the Spanish news on the bus. Change your phone/Facebook settings to Spanish. Do anything that makes the language relevant to you.

Preparation and planning

- Get familiar with the layout of the exam: compulsory questions, how much to write per question, etc.
- Practise doing full exam papers for timing. It will be worth it.
- Decide what questions you plan to answer and focus on them.
- Choose questions that apply to your strengths. Some questions appear to be harder but are marked more objectively.

Oral

- Learn the roleplays now. If you know them well, it'll be easier on the day.
- Practise. Find someone to do mock orals with. Speak Spanish whenever possible.

■ Prepare answers to the common questions. Record yourself, or someone fluent, reading them and put them on your iPod to study on the go. Do the same for the roleplays.

Aural

- Practise exam papers to familiarise yourself with the different accents.
- Listen to Euronews, especially the weather segment as it's a definite question.

Written

- Keep a vocabulary notebook. Write down and learn any unfamiliar words.
- To obtain high marks in the opinion piece, it's important to use the "subjunctive" tense. Learn off a few phrases in the subjunctive that you can use on the day if you're stuck.

Relax

Do things that make you happy. Fit in hobbies and friends. I continued figure-skating during the year which allowed me to unwind. Plus, it definitely counts as studying if you listen to Spanish music on the way there.

Here are some examples of groups you can blame:

- La gente* – the people
- La policía* – the police
- El gobierno* – the government
- La juventud* – the youth
- La sociedad* – the society
- La familia* – the family

Be careful when assigning blame. Avoid saying "I blame the government". Rather use the present subjunctive to make your point. Here are some useful phrases:
Es una vergüenza que + present subj. – It is a shame that.../it is a disgrace that...
Es urgente que + present subj. – It is urgent that...
Es absurdo que + present subj. – It is absurd that...
No creo que + present subj. – I don't think...
Dudo que + present subj. – I doubt...
Es increíble que + present subj. – It is incredible that...

Or you could use the imperfect subjunctive;

Verb

Me gustaría que

Nouns + tense

- el gobierno + imperfect subj.
- la sociedad + imperfect subj.
- la juventud + imperfect subj.

Examples

Me gustaría que la sociedad se diera cuenta de lo importante que es tener diferentes actividades y deportes.

Verb

Me encantaría que

Nouns + tense

- la gente + imperfect subj.
- los padres + imperfect subj.
- la sociedad + imperfect subj.

Example

Me encantaría que los padres pasaran más tiempo con la familia en vez de en el trabajo.

Common errors

- Don't use the plural of the verb with gente, gobierno, or sociedad.
- The only double consonants in Spanish are LL, RR, CC.
- Do not forget that although some nouns end in "a" they are masculine. These may be useful in your opinion piece to show the examiner that you know that they are masculine.

Choose the sentence you understand better. There are 25 marks for content and communication, and 25 marks for the language used.

In the opinion piece you should be familiar with general topics. Prepare vocabulary on broad topics like climate change and renewable energies, cyber-bullying, and physical child abuse in the home.

Before you start writing

- Think about what you are going to say.
- Work out a structure to your argument.
- Look out for helpful vocabulary in the text that maybe used. Do not transcribe the text verbatim.
- Refer to your own personal experience.
- Above all ensure you write about the chosen topic and not about something else.

Helpful tips

- The language you use will be informal. You are writing as if you are talking to a friend and expressing your point of view.
- If you're not comfortable with opinion pieces and you don't think you have the vocabulary necessary to fully express your views, it is best to write simple and short sentences about the topic and your experience.
- This is your opinion, so whether the examiner agrees or disagrees with you is irrelevant. They'll respect your opinion either way. You will be marked on how you express your opinion, the content, your grammar and the vocabulary used.

STRUCTURED ANSWER

If you're comfortable with opinion pieces in Spanish, structure your answer into

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three paragraphs.

Paragraph 1: Write about the topic in general based on your own experience.
Paragraph 2: Blame the responsible party.
Paragraph 3: Try to give a solution or how to make the situation better based on your own experience.

Paragraph 1

Here are some general verbs you can use to talk about the topic:

- Creo* – I believe
- Pienso* – I think
- A mi me parece que...* – It seems to me that...
- Estoy de acuerdo con esta afirmación* – I agree with this statement
- No estoy de acuerdo con esta afirmación* – I disagree with this statement

To show the examiner the full extent of your Spanish, you could also use impersonal expressions which require the present subjunctive. For example:

- Es necesario que + present subj.* – It is necessary that...
- Es triste que + present subj.* – It is sad that...
- Es bueno que + present subj.* – It is good that...
- Es lamentable que + present subj.* – It is a pity that...

Paragraph 2

Blame someone. Blame the responsible parties. For example, if your piece is on climate change you could blame society. Keep in mind that the responsible parties are all singular.

Written exam at a glance

Total marks: 220 (55 per cent)

Total time: 2 and a half hours

Section A – 70 marks, 50 minutes
(Attempt both question 1 and 2)

- Question 1 – 50 marks, 35 minutes
- a) Prescribed literature or
- b) Journalistic text
- Question 2 – 20 marks, 15 minutes
- Two short comprehensions

Section B – 100 marks, 60 minutes
(Attempt all questions)

- Comprehension – 50 marks, 40 minutes
- Opinion – 50 marks, 20 minutes
- Section C – 50 marks, 40 minutes
(Attempt both question 1 and 2)
- Question 1 – 30 marks, 20 minutes
- a) Dialogue construction or
- b) Letter writing
- Question 2 – 20 marks, 20 minutes
- a) Diary entry or
- b) Note

Examples

- El problema/un problema/este problema* – the/a/this problem
- El sistema/un sistema/este sistema* – the/a/this system
- El tema/un tema/este tema* – the/a/this topic

Paragraph 3

In the final paragraph you should try and give a solution to the problem. What do you think will solve the problem or make it better? The following phrases could be useful:

Verb

Espero que

Noun + tense

- el gobierno + present subjunctive
- la sociedad + present subjunctive
- la juventud + present subjunctive

Example

Espero que la juventud dedique tiempo al trabajo y también a sus actividades

Ojalá que + noun + present subjunctive

Example

Ojalá que los padres pasen más tiempo con sus hijos practicando deportes

Present indicative + if + future

Example

La sociedad no sufrirá de estrés si comparte el trabajo con los pasatiempos.

If + imperfect subjunctive + conditional

Examples

Si los adictos al trabajo dedicaran más horas al ocio estarían más contentos.
Si yo no hiciera deporte estaría muy aburrido/a