

**C A R I B B E A N E X A M I N A T I O N S C O U N C I L**

**REPORT ON CANDIDATES' WORK IN THE SECONDARY EDUCATION  
CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION**

**MAY/JUNE 2008**

**SPANISH**

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**GENERAL PROFICIENCY EXAMINATION**

**MAY/JUNE 2008**

**GENERAL COMMENTS**

There were varying levels of performance ranging from excellent to poor with the overall performance being comparable to that of 2007. Several candidates demonstrated high levels of linguistic competence, fluency and accuracy.

It is important for candidates to be exposed to as many real-life situations as possible. Teachers are encouraged to be innovative and creative in teaching their students the difficult aspects of the language. Learning through dramatization, simulation and other fun-filled activities facilitates much retention and the development of communicative and other skills. Visits to Spanish-speaking countries and weekend intensive practice sessions should be organized by teachers.

**DETAILED COMMENTS**

**Paper 01 - Multiple Choice**

This paper, which comprises two sections, tests candidates' ability to listen to and understand a number of aural items in the target language and to read and understand a number of written items. Both sections require candidates to have sufficient mastery of essential grammar and vocabulary. Candidates performed satisfactorily on this paper, a performance that was comparable to those of previous years.

**Paper 02 – Free Response**

**Section I - Directed Situations**

This question demands that candidates identify the function for which the situation forms the context, and demonstrate their control of appropriate grammatical structures and knowledge of relevant vocabulary in clearly worded, concise responses. The better candidates were able to satisfy these requirements. Candidates' performance on the whole ranged from outstanding to occasions when no attempt was made to respond to the situations in the section. The majority of candidates scored at least 20 marks out of the maximum 30.

- 1. You watched a movie which you found to be very exciting. Send a note to your friend telling him/her what you liked best about the movie.**

Candidates performed fairly well on this question but many of them did not realize that the question required the use of the past tense, using *me gusta* more frequently than *me gustó* or *me encantó*. The word for film also posed a problem as quite a significant number used *el cine*, *la movie\** or even *le film\**.

- 2. Your mother has to attend a function and leaves a note instructing you to do a particular task. What does the note say?**

Candidates handled this question fairly well. The problems identified for this question include the incorrect use of the familiar command, the use of the familiar for the possessive adjective *tu*, vocabulary and spelling. There was a problem using *querer que* along with the subjunctive; *Lavar* was rendered as *llevar*; for the spelling *lavar* was constantly written as *llavar\** and *labar\**.

**\* An asterisk represents an incorrect item**

3. **Your favourite television programme has been discontinued. Send a text message to your friend expressing your disappointment.**

In this situation some candidates failed to mention both their disappointment along with the fact that the program was discontinued, which caused their responses to be only partially appropriate. The words for ‘discontinued’ and ‘disappointed’ proved to be difficult as well and many candidates wrote *mi programa favorita\** incorrectly, making the noun feminine. The position of noun and adjective was a challenge for a few candidates.

4. **Your school choir has performed exceptionally well at a concert. The music teacher invites suggestions as to how best to reward the choir. What suggestion do you write?**

This question was generally well done. The outstanding problematic areas were the use of the imperative along with object pronouns, the use of *tomar* instead of *llevar* and the use of the subjunctive after the verb *sugerir*.

5. **The students at your school are unhappy about a number of problems at the school. The Students’ Council request that each student indicate in writing his/her complaint. What do you write?**

The majority of the candidates did fairly well on this question. The problem that surfaced was that they did not identify the specific problem, but merely said they did not like a particular thing in the school. For example a response of *no me gusta el baño*, only gained two marks while the candidate who wrote *no me gusta el baño sucio* would be given marks for a fully appropriate response.

6. **You are unable to attend a meeting with the members of your club. Write the email you send to them apologizing for not being able to do so.**

This situation required an apology and some of the candidates gave the excuse without the apology. The use of *asistir* was also a problem – many failed to follow it with the preposition ‘a’ or misspelt it (*assistir*)\* or used *atender* instead. There was also some confusion with the use of *lo siento*, *siento no* + the infinitive. For example, a noticeable number of candidates wrote *Lo siento por no asistiendo la reunion\**.

7. **While your family is out, your friend returns an item which he/she had borrowed. Write the note he/she leaves informing your family where he/she has placed it.**

On the whole, this question was handled fairly well. Many of the candidates identified both the item that they borrowed along with its location. Problematic areas proved to be the use of *ser* and *estar*, for example *el libro es en la mesa.\** In terms of vocabulary, candidates used *salir* for *dejar* and had difficulties with *prestar* and *pedir prestado*. In addition, *salir* was used for *dejar / regresar / volver / revolver*.

8. **On your way to school you pass a man with a sign in his hand protesting about a hole in the road. What does it say?**

Candidates tended to write answers that were too general and did not address the information it seemed that the situation required. For example – *Queremos justicia* and *¿Dónde está el gobierno?* were clearly protesting, but because there was no mention of the hole or street these types of answers were penalized.

In addition, too many of the candidates gave **warnings** instead of **protests**.

9. **You see an old man sitting at the side of the street. He is holding a note requesting assistance. What does the note say?**

\* An asterisk represents an incorrect item

Most candidates demonstrated good use of grammar and structure in this question. The main problems stemmed from the use of the infinitive instead of the command; *asistir*\* was often substituted for *ayudar*.

**10. Your brother who is away studying would like you to send an item he left behind. Write the email he sends explaining where you can find it.**

Candidates' responses to this item were good. It was quite similar to question 7 so the incorrect use of *ser* and *estar* was the common error.

## Section II – Letter/Composition

This section is intended to assess the candidates' ability to produce written language within the parameters set out by the syllabus. In addition to mastery of relevant vocabulary, idiom and language structure, the ability to express ideas clearly and coherently is emphasized. The two options given were the letter and the composition, each of which was marked out of 30.

Overall, the performance of the candidates was fair, and candidates supplied information for the majority of cues.

### Letter

Most candidates chose the letter component of the question but, although the cues given should have been within the reach of the average candidate, many of them struggled. With few exceptions, most of the candidates fell within the fair to moderate category.

Some candidates also used pulled phrases/responses/ideas from the content of the contextual dialogue. This needs to be given serious consideration.

### Areas of difficulty for candidates

Many candidates faced difficulty in presenting the information required for cues (ii) and (iii).

### Common errors

**1. Grammar: *ser* vs *estar***

This year, the comparison between the uses of *ser* and *estar* was worse than in previous years. The main weaknesses were (a) ignorance of the uses of *ser* for statement of facts and (b) uses of *ser* for permanent qualities

Other common examples: *Mi familia fue esperanda.\**

**2. The Subjunctive**

*Quiero tú venire* for *Quiero que tú vengas*

*Te quisera paser la vacación* for *quisiera que pasares la vacación/las vacaciones\**

**3. Verbs of Emotion**

Poor use of verbs such as  
*gustar, encontrar, amar*  
*yo amor tu familia ...\**

\* An asterisk represents an incorrect item

4. Commands

*Dice tus padres hola para mí\**

5. Adjectives and Nouns

Use of conjunctions: *Las personas son amables y interesantes*

Use of *por* and *para*, for example, *por mí*

Pluralization of *la gente*, *son simpáticas*

6. Vocabulary

Many candidates seemed not to know the difference between the noun *diversión* and the adjective *divertido*. They were frequently confused, for example, *tuve mucho divertido\**

*Buen vs Buena (el viaje fue bien)*

*Preguntar vs pedir (pregunta a tus padres si puedes)*

*Por favor / de nada vs gracias*

*Sobre vs a eso de\**

*Bajo vs corto*

These were observed to a lesser extent.

Areas handled well by candidates

Opening and closing lines

Varied vocabulary for example *pródigo*, vocabulary for aeroplane context / airport context

Description of activities – vocabulary

Conclusion

Some letters were brought to a proposed conclusion with the following...

- *Saludos a todos en casa...*
- *Espero que me contentes y te voy a estar esperando...*
- *Recuerdos a toda tu familia...*
- *Te echo de menos mucho y escribeme pronto...*

**Composition**

Overall, this was poorly handled by the candidates. There were numerous cases of poor vocabulary: birthplace, national hero. There was also repetition of information, that was frequently reflected in responses for cues (i) and (iv). The Preterite Tense was used poorly.

Areas handled well by candidates

There were a few outstanding pieces. Some candidates were able to give details of the person's contribution to the society, as well as a vivid description of the birthplace.

Some candidates used good expressions like the following...

- *Espero que todo vaya bien...*
- *Espero que te encuentren de buena salud...*
- *Espero que al leer mi carta estás muy bien...*

\* An asterisk represents an incorrect item

- Acabo de regresar a mi país sano y salvo...
- Te invito para que pases la Navidad en mi casa...
- Eran varias vacaciones de alegría, amor y mucha paz...
- Siento por no haber escrito, arden, pero recibí tu carta con mucha alegría...

### Section III – Contextual Announcement/Contextual Dialogue

This section of Paper 02 requires candidates to choose either to write (i) a contextual announcement or (ii) a contextual dialogue completion. Cues given in English were provided for both options.

#### Contextual Announcement

Many candidates presented the announcement using the format and language of an advertisement or a poster and as a result used words or simple phrases rather than complete sentences. A few candidates did not read the instructions carefully because they failed to mention the charity involved as well as two reasons persons should support the event. However, the majority of them attempted to use all of the given cues.

#### Contextual Dialogue

The majority of candidates elected to do the dialogue rather than the announcement. Many of the candidates' responses to this question were very encouraging. Many candidates responded comfortably in either a simple or more complicated way. Very few candidates rewrote the cues or parts of them as their answers but instead manipulated the language in various ways, using many and varying expressions to give their answers. Also, although very few candidates made up their own dialogues, they were not totally irrelevant as they still attempted to use some of the cues to make their responses meaningful.

Candidates demonstrated a lack of knowledge in different areas which would have affected their performance in this question. Some of these are:

- the use of the *su* or *usted* form when addressing the best friend, Lucia, instead of the familiar form, *tu* or *tú* – *Quiero oír su voz* instead of *Quiero oír tu voz*
- the noun *la gente* was often complemented by a plural verb (as opposed to a singular verb) as well as by masculine adjectives – *La gente son muy amigables y generosos\**
- the confusion of *saber* and *conocer* – *Yo conozco que eres mi mejor amiga\** instead of *yo sé que eres mi mejor amigo*
- the correct conjugation of irregular verbs *saber, querer, tener, poder*, whether in the present or past tense forms
- the negative *no* after the verb instead of before it
- the use of the second person singular of *gustar* in the conditional tense - *Te gustarías\** as well as the expression *me gusta* with more than one thing, as opposed to *me gustan*
- the verb *comer* to mean “come,” the use of *dar* instead of *decir* and *ganar* instead of *pasar*
- the inappropriate use of the object pronouns – their meanings and position
- the use of *demasiado* instead of *también*; *peor* for *pobre*; *belleza* (the noun) for *bella* (the adjective)

\* An asterisk represents an incorrect item

- *Bienvenida* to mean *de nada* or *no hay de qué*
- the use of *sympa* instead of *simpática* and *simpático* to describe a place or a thing (weather)

It was also noted that failure to read the instructions caused the candidates to ‘play’ Stephen’s role as if it were a female’s part, since some of them wrote that *Los chicos en Bogotá son muy guapos*.

### Conclusion

While the performance on this question showed an improvement over May/June 2007 and January 2008, it is clear that more preparation still needs to be done. There was still too much use of English and French insertions. Some candidates ignored the given instructions since they answered both questions and presented the announcement like an advertisement or poster. Candidates were penalized for disregarding the rubrics.

Some common grammatical errors were:

- the incorrect usage of *por* and *para* and *ser* and *estar*
- the use of *a el* instead of *al* and *de el* instead of *del*
- the use of the pronouns *mi* and *tu* instead of *me* and *te* respectively, with the verb *gustar*
- *tomar* for to take (carry)
- *soy muy bien\**
- *y* where *z* should be used
- *por tu* for *para ti*
- *las ropas*
- *con tu* for *contigo*
- *caliente* for *caluroso*
- *conozco* for *sé*
- *con no* for *sin*
- personal *a*
- problems with verbs like *gustar*, *encantar* *echar de menos*
- forms of *hablar* (the future)
- *ser* vs *estar*
- *por* vs *para*
- position of adjectives
- limited vocabulary
- use of *contesto\** for *competición* and *concurso*
- *más* for *mucho*
- confusion with *bien* and *buen(o)*
- Severe problems with accents (missing and misplaced)

### **Section IV – Reading Comprehension**

The performance this year was generally satisfactory. However, there is still room for improvement. Reading should perhaps be given more attention than presently exists. It is the basis for acquiring knowledge and building vocabulary. The acquisition of vocabulary skills would eventually lead to an excellent performance on this section. This year, poor sentence construction, poor understanding of Spanish vocabulary and poor penmanship contributed to some candidates gaining under 11 marks out of a possible 20.

#### Areas of concern

1. Reading well is a skill that must be taught and practised as thoroughly as any of the other skills. Hand in hand with this skill is the building of vocabulary – both English and Spanish. Although

\* An asterisk represents an incorrect item

we may, as individuals, be accustomed to our individual country's dialect and candidates may be accustomed to that as well as the dialect of youths, the use of Standard English in writing will aid in diminishing the ambiguity of some responses. Teachers are therefore urged to insist that their students write complete sentences that are clear and concise.

2. The reading of the comprehension question begins with the instructions. This year, too many candidates ignored the rubric which required that answers be in **English**. Some responses were produced entirely in Spanish and others in Spanglish.
3. Answering a question in Spanglish is unacceptable, and is therefore of no benefit to the candidate, for example, "Sebastian found Mauricio hiding en el armario." This does not answer the question. It indicates that the candidate clearly did not know that a specific location was called for.
4. Penmanship should not be ignored. Careless formation of letters create difficulties for the examiners and can therefore lead to fewer or no marks being awarded due to the illegibility of the answer.
5. It is recommended that candidates skip a line or two between each answer. It makes for a neater, more legible script.
6. Candidates should also be reminded that their answers should be numbered according to the question being answered (especially if it is not in the order in which the questions are being presented).
7. An outstanding feature of grammar that presented a problem for candidates was the preposition. There were two questions (#2 and #7) that highlighted this problem. In question 2, one of the activities was "throwing stones through the windows" (*tiraban piedras por las ventanas*). Invariably, "*por*" was interpreted as: "by"; "along"; "on"; "at"; "out". In question 7, where "Sebastian found Mauricio hiding in the closet" (*en el armario*). "In" was interpreted as: "on"; "under"; "on top of"; "by"; "behind".
8. Lack of knowledge of vocabulary was quite extensive among weaker candidates. Following is a list of items that presented problems for candidates, along with their interpretations:

- \* *Mauricio* – interpreted as a name belonging to a girl
- \* *traviesos* – ill-disciplined; bad-tempered; evil; *travious* (?); travellers
- \* *estaban metidos en problemas* – they were troubled/had problems
- \* *tiraban piedras por las ventanas* – they jumped through/damaged windows
- \* *dañaban las plantas* – they watered the plants
- \* *asustaban* – they assaulted
- \* *éxito* – exit; exert
- \* *pregunta* – pregnant
- \* *armario* – clothes set; armchair; armory; cemetery; rocking chair; closer
- \* *grave* – grave (as in tomb or cemetery plot)
- \* *cura* – cure
- \* *contestar* – contest
- \* *plantas* – plantains
- \* *piedras* – rocks; things

Please note that spelling is as important as penmanship

\* **An asterisk represents an incorrect item**

### Question 1

On the whole this question produced the correct answer from most candidates – “They were mischievous (naughty).”

NOT

- \* Mauricio is a girl and Sebastian is a boy
- \* They are evil
- \* They are traviuous(?)

### Question 2

The correct response was “They would throw stones through windows, damage the plants and scare the dogs.”

Incorrect responses included

- \* “Three activities that they would engage in are: tiraban piedras por las ventanas, danaban las plantas y asustaban a los perros.”
- \* “They would interfere with windows, water the plants and abuse the dogs.”

### Question 3

The correct response was “Their mother had heard that the priest was successful in disciplining children/boys.”

An example of an incorrect response received was

- \* “She heard that he had exit in disciplining Jesus.”

### Question 4

The correct response was “He agreed to speak with the boys” and NOT

- \* “He responded in a soft voice.”

### Question 5

The correct response was “Mauricio gaped at the priest and did not respond. When asked a second time he still did not respond/the priest wanted an answer.”

An example of an incorrect response received was

- \* “The priest thought that he was deaf and he wanted to frighten him or to make him behave.”

### Question 6

The correct response was “He left the office screaming, ran home and hid in the closet.”

An example of an incorrect response written by candidates is,

- \* “He shouted back at him, went home and sat in the armchair.”

\* **An asterisk represents an incorrect item**

### Question 7

The correct response was “He found him hiding in the closet.”

Among the incorrect responses produced by candidates, were

- \* “He found him in the armchair.”
- \* “He found him on top of a shelf.”
- \* “He found him behind the armchair.”

### Question 8

The correct response was “Sebastian wanted to know what happened” and NOT

- \* “Sebastian wanted to know if he really kidnapped Jesus.”

### Question 9

The correct response was “He thought he was being accused of kidnapping Jesus” and NOT

- \* “He thought that the priest was accusing him of killing/burying Jesus.”

This question, like question 1, was answered correctly by the majority of the candidates.

### Question 10

This question lent itself to a wide range of interpretations. In essence, the priest’s question was interpreted the way it was because he knew that they were always getting into trouble and he thought someone had kidnapped Jesus and that they were being blamed.

There were candidates who brought their knowledge of the Bible to this section especially when dealing with questions 6, 8, 9 and 10.

## **Paper 03 - Oral Examination**

The overall performance of candidates on this paper ranged from outstanding to weak. Most candidates made serious attempts at answering every question and were rewarded accordingly. Generally, responses rendered were fully appropriate, with the better candidates responding spontaneously, demonstrating mastery of the structures and vocabulary required, as well as creativity.

### Section I – Responses to Situations

There are still many candidates who seriously lack the skills to handle this section adequately. They exhibit deficiencies in structural competence and are unable to recall the appropriate functional vocabulary. Consequently, the quality of their presentation was adversely impaired.

Lack of appropriateness of responses was seen when candidates failed to capture the key words from the function, for example, ask, suggest, reassure, promise, request, offer ...

A number of candidates were penalized because of grammatical inaccuracies. The errors were varied, and reveal a severe lack of command of many basic grammatical elements. Common errors include the following:

- incorrect use of *ser* and *estar* e.g. *¿Dónde es el papel?\**

\* **An asterisk represents an incorrect item**

- omission of *que* in the expression *tener que* e.g. *Tengo ir al banco\**  
*Tengo estudiar\**
- incorrect usage of the verb *gustar* e.g. *No me gusto al jefe\**  
*Yo no men gusta\**  
*Mi no guste al zapatos\**
- poor use of the present tense
- incorrect use of the imperative
- not conjugating verbs and not being able to venture into other tenses other than the present
- subject/verb agreement
- noun/adjective agreement
- failure to use the infinitive when required e.g. *quiero voy a la playa*  
*puedo tengo...*  
*permíteme voy...*
- use of the infinitive instead of the conjugated verb e.g. *yo puedo cino*
- incorrect use of *por* and *para*
- incorrect position of object pronouns
- omission of the personal ‘a’

With regard to vocabulary, many candidates failed to remember words that they should have been familiar with, for example:

<i>emotioncante</i>	for	<i>emocionante</i>
<i>promiso</i>	for	<i>prometo</i>
<i>siguiero</i>	for	<i>sugiero</i>
<i>intrestante</i>	for	<i>interesante</i>
<i>es devertiste</i>	for	<i>es divertido</i>
<i>devolver</i>	for	<i>volver</i>
<i>dejar</i>	for	<i>salir</i>
<i>vez</i>	for	<i>tiempo</i>
<i>tener</i>	for	<i>haber</i>
<i>tratar</i>	for	<i>probar</i>
<i>regla</i>	for	<i>regalo</i>
<i>regresa</i>	for	<i>devolver</i>
<i>llevar</i>	for	<i>tomar</i>

Candidates’ performance on this section of the examination ranged from good to weak. Good candidates were able to respond appropriately to the majority of situations presented. Errors which occurred were mostly in areas of grammar and, to a lesser extent, vocabulary.

Some examples of grammatical areas were

- (i) agreement of nouns and adjectives – *ese blousa\**; *ese no es mi comida*; *en una minuto y una roja vestida*.

**\* An asterisk represents an incorrect item**

- (ii) the use of *ser* vs *estar* – *mi moneda es terminada, mi reloj es roto y ¿Dónde es mi bolsa?\**
- (iii) the use of infinitives after verbs like *poder, gustar, y que* after *tener*.  
*No puede vine;\** *¿Puedes ayudame?; Podemos hace...\**  
*gustar – me gusta come...\**
- (iv) *Que – Tengo.. compre...; Tengo... trabajar y tienes tareas... hacer.\** The relative pronoun *que* was omitted after verbs like – *Sugiero... Prometo... Espero... tengo éxito*. Errors also occurred with the use of irregular verbs in the Future Tense – *No venire a casa,\* Tenerás diversión,\* Deciré a mama que...\** On the other hand, however, some candidates mastered the use of the present tense, the preterite, the present subjunctive and the future. Some responses were of an extended level and candidates were awarded full marks. Idioms were also used.

### Section II – Reading Aloud

The performance in this section ranged from outstanding to limited. Some candidates did not demonstrate competence in the reading of the passage by presenting with inaccurate intonation and pronunciation and essentially breaking the sense of the passage. For the most part, the reading was moderate to good, showing some knowledge of the sound system.

Others had generally correct pronunciation, stress and intonation with some inaccuracy. They demonstrated an understanding of the passage.

### Section III – Guided Conversation

Some candidates did well in this area. For the most part, they understood the questions being asked and responded without undue hesitation. Vocabulary usage was moderate, as was pronunciation and intonation. Some candidates did very well responding readily to the questions posed with very good vocabulary and grammar. Pronunciation and intonation were also very good. Others had minimal presentations requiring frequent repetition and lacking in fluency and coherence.