

CARIBBEAN EXAMINATIONS COUNCIL

**REPORT ON CANDIDATES' WORK
IN THE SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION
JANUARY 2009**

SPANISH

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GENERAL PROFICIENCY EXAMINATION**JANUARY 2009****GENERAL COMMENTS**

The levels of performance varied from excellent to poor. This is comparable to the 2008 performance. Several candidates demonstrated high levels of accuracy and fluency in all questions.

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. The performance on this year's paper was comparable to that of previous years.

Paper 02 – Free Response

This paper comprises four sections and tests the reading and writing skills of candidates. Overall performance was satisfactory.

Teachers need to pay special attention to the functions required in the syllabus so that students would be able to manipulate structures and vocabulary as required in a variety of tasks. It is recommended that teachers focus on the specific skills required for the contextual announcement and the contextual dialogue using a variety of tasks throughout the students' study of Spanish to provide them with the necessary practice and confidence to respond adequately to the demand of these tasks.

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 answer the questions in the section.

Candidates are reminded that they must relate their responses to the situation provided. There is a tendency for candidates to write general responses which do not fulfil a FUNCTION which relates to the specific situation given.

Situation 1

Candidates pluralized the 'lo' in 'lo siento' and there were several instances where 'que' and 'por' were used after the expression instead of simply 'siento que/por'.

Situation 2

The invitation part of the situation was ignored by too many candidates who obviously misinterpreted the situation. Combinations of the date and venue or individual parts were given. The use of 'en' with dates was also widespread, for example, 'en sabado/en lunes', as well as after time.

'Estar' was also used in place of 'Ser/Tener lugar'. Additionally, with time, 'son' was used too frequently in the expression 'son las ocho'.

Situation 3

The main errors were (i) the confusion between 'tener razon' and 'estar/ser correcto' and (ii) the use of 'acordarse (me acuerdo)' for 'estoy de acuerdo'.

Situation 4

Many candidates did not write the conditions to be given permission to go, they simply stated what they should do. It was heartening to see the use of the expression 'con tal que' and subjunctive.

Several candidates misspelt the word 'lavar'-(llavar) and omitted the 'que' in the expression 'tener que'.

Situation 5

Many candidates simply gave the message instead of informing that a call had been made. Several candidates also used 'para tu' instead of 'por ti' in their responses.

When trying to use 'decir/querer', candidates did not use the subjunctive. They either used the infinitive or the present tense.

Situation 6

Many candidates tried to express 'should' in their responses and used the conditional tense instead of the verb 'deber' and infinitive (estudiarías).

Situation 7

Many candidates displayed difficulty in selecting the appropriate verbs to be used here. They used 'tratar', 'llevar', 'dar', 'venir'. Those who used 'traer' had difficulty with the spelling of the verb form (traie/traga)*.

Some candidates did not make a request to bring the item, and simply stated where they left the item or just asked for help.

*An asterisk indicates an incorrect form, spelling or structure

Situation 8

Many candidates did not give a negative command and too many commands were not given in the plural form.

The use of 'no' and infinitive also occurred too many times. In several instances many candidates simply used 'no' and noun (*no fiestas*). The misspelling of 'jueguen' 'juegen'* was also very common.

Situation 9

Misspelling was a common error in this situation (telephone/cellular/mobile). These three words were misspelt often. Some candidates also did not say why they disagreed with the ban.

Situation 10

Many candidates did not use the formal form and were willing to contribute items such as food/clothing/electrical items ...

The use of 'yo' with the 'gustar' structure was also used by several candidates.

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.

The levels of performance on this paper varied, with few instances in the excellent range, most in the middle, with a few examples of poor competence. Scripts with many grammatical errors still demonstrated a fairly wide range of vocabulary. Candidates showed interest in both tasks, with an increase in the number of candidates attempting the composition, compared to past years. This may have been due to the fact that they were able to relate well to the topic. Almost all candidates were able to fulfil the length requirement. However, candidates must make sure they attend to each cue presented in the question.

Outstanding grammatical errors included:

- Incorrect formation of the future tense
- Incorrect formation of the present perfect tense – '*tengo queriendo*'*, '*tengo nunca fui*'*
- The incorporation of 'ti' with the use of 'gustar' - incorrectly writing '*te lo gustaría*'*
- Confusion over '*por*' and '*para*'
- Possessive adjectives – '*nostros playas*'*; '*suguiremos nos viaje*'*; '*es sueño de mi*'*
- Object pronouns – '*mirar a tu*'*

Some common errors in vocabulary included:

- '*mientras*' vs '*un rato*' for 'a while'
- '*ese*' vs '*que*' as a relative pronoun
- '*a*' vs '*en*' – '*mis padres coleccionarán al aeropuerto*'*
- '*saber*' and '*conocer*' confused

*An asterisk indicates an incorrect form, spelling or structure

- 'porque' instead of 'a causa de'
- 'excito*', 'éxito', 'emocionante' for 'excited'

Student practice in the use of several tenses within the same task is advisable. Structured practice of sentence formation will also be useful for students. Students must be cautioned about lifting entire portions of the reading comprehension in use in this section as marks will not be awarded for such inserts.

Section III – Contextual Announcement / Contextual Dialogue

This section requires candidates to write on one of (i) a Contextual Announcement or (ii) a Contextual Dialogue Completion. Cues are given in English for both options initially. However, since the Dialogue is in Spanish, the initial clues are included within the context, but in Spanish.

Responses to (i) demonstrated a fairly good effort generally, while responses to (ii) while largely satisfactory, indicated in a few instances where candidates ignored the instructions and composed an entire dialogue.

Teachers must ensure that their students read the cues first in their entirety before attempting to complete the dialogue. The completion should indicate the students holistic understanding of the dialogue. Attention should be paid to the consistent use of either the formal or informal personal pronouns (tú and usted)

Contextual Announcement

1. This question had limited appeal for the candidates probably due to
 - (i) their limited knowledge of the relevant vocabulary
 - (ii) their limited command of the grammar that would produce better sentence structures, for example, the subjunctive - (i) (ii) and (iv) as in
 - Vengar a la reunion...*
 - Quiero que participar ...*
 - Es importante que...*
 - (iii) candidates' uncertainty re formatting/presentation of the announcement.
 - (iv) the fact of unfamiliarity with such clubs since these are not a feature of many schools.
2. Candidates were inconsistent with the use of the register *tú/vd(s)*. They may have practised the familiar form more in class and the announcement may have required more of the polite form(s).

Contextual Dialogue

1. In the first cue, many candidates used names without reference to the female name that followed. (for example, *es, soy Maria/Juan*)

Candidates also failed to observe subject/verb agreement , for example,.
¿Cómo están la familia?
¿Cómo está todos?

*An asterisk indicates an incorrect form, spelling or structure

2. In the second cue, *¿Estás bien?* elicited similar responses in some cases to the third cue *¿Lo pasas bien?*
3. Candidates simply replicated the question in several cases, for example,
 - Sí, hablo(as) mucho español.*
 - Sí, me gusta la comida chilena.*
4. Candidates gave the following responses to indicate that they were homesick.
 - Me siento muy enfermo de mi casa**
 - Quiero venir a casa**
 - Estoy enfermo de hogar**
 - Echo mi familia mucho**
 - Quiero venir a casa**
 - No puedo esperar volver a casa**
5. Few candidates used the perfect tense in response to questions such as *¿Que has hecho?*
6. In many cases there were limited responses to queries *¿Hablas mucho español? ¿Te gusta la comida chilena?* For example, *La comida chilena es muy bueno.** Many did not use the correct structure for the weather. They wrote
 - Es muy frio en Chilena**
 - Estoy muy frío**
 - El cielo es negro y el tiempo es 8 en la noche**
 - Son las cinco de la tarde*

Many candidates did not use the first person form to ask *¿Puedo usar tu tarjeta?* Instead, they copied “*Puedes*” from the answer.

“*Tener cuidado*” was not often used in response to the final cue. When used, it was not often in the correct form.

For example, *Estaré cuidado**
*Soy cuidado en tu tarjeta**

Section IV - Reading Comprehension

This section tested candidates’ ability to read and comprehend a short passage in the target language. The questions on the passage and the candidates’ answers were in English.

The passage, “Mariela’s experience” on an airplane was on a topic that was of interest to candidates and who therefore drew from their own experiences to answer some of the questions. However, their own experiences did not always coincide with those of Mariela.

Teachers need to train their students to use both strategies of own experiences but also pay close attention to the vocabulary and structure of the target language used in the passage, in order to understand texts. Because of the conciseness of the passages used for testing comprehension, students need to practise at identifying key words or elements in the questions, even before attempting to look for the correct answers.

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Performance on this section was fairly good. Most candidates gained at least 12 out of the maximum 20 marks. Where candidates earned 16-19 marks, they omitted one element of a question.

The main problems encountered by candidates occurred in the following questions:

Question 4 : Many candidates did not know numbers, stating that there were 5, 7, 41, 60 or 61. Other candidates stated incorrectly that there were 50 students – not taking into account that this number excluded Mariela.

Some candidates responses were in full sentences while others were not.

Question 6: Vocabulary item '*en huelga*' proved to be a problem since candidates knew there was a problem with the airport workers but not what the problem was.

Question 10: Candidates understood the statement made that Mariela would never fly again but did not seem to understand '*siempre*' and therefore answered the question incorrectly.

Paper 03 – Oral Examination

This paper tested candidates ability to (a) produce appropriate responses in the target language in a number of simulations; (b) read aloud a short passage in the target language; and (c) respond in the target language to general questions based on 3 out of 6 topics indicated in the syllabus.

Section I – Responses to Situations

This section was, for the most part, well done. However, a few candidates showed a lack of understanding, while others lacked appropriate vocabulary to express themselves fluently.

Some of the common problems demonstrated by candidates included:

- Incorrect position of object pronouns
- Incorrect sentence structure
- Incorrect use of the present continuous
- '*Por*' vs '*para*'
- '*Ser*' vs '*estar*', for example, '*Soy* en el baño*'
- Inappropriate use of '*puede*' vs '*puedes*' [polite vs familiar]
- Use of '*ser*' in self-identification, for example, '*Es Pedro*' to mean 'It's me, Pedro' as opposed to '*Soy yo, Pedro*'

Section II – Reading Passages

Performance on this section was generally satisfactory. The main problems experienced in this section included the following:

- Intonation and general fluency
- Anglicized pronunciation
- Difficulty pronouncing consonants, for example, '*j*', '*g*', "*ll*"
- Diphthongs – for example, '*bautizó*', '*gauchos*', '*Uruguay*', '*sigue*'.

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Section III - Guided Conversation

This section also provided generally satisfactory performances by candidates. Many candidates understood the questions that were asked and made genuine attempts at conversation. They responded well to questions posed and used a variety of words and correct forms of verbs.

Main areas of weakness were in terms of:

- Fluency and spontaneity
- Elaboration of responses in required situations
- Variety of tenses
- Subject-verb agreement
- Use of '*gustar*'