



GCSE

Spanish

8698/WH Writing (Higher)

Report on the examination

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General comments

This has been the last year of the current GCSE Specification, and the new Specification will be examined for the first time in 2026. This report comments on the questions from this year's examination and then gives advice to students for the 2026 paper, based on the experience of this year. The standard of students' responses this year varied enormously, but the vast majority were able to answer all three questions and to score at least some marks on each. Some of the responses were exceptionally good, containing a lot of complex, accurate Spanish.

Question 1

For this question, there were 10 marks for Content and 6 marks for Quality of Language. Students were required to write approximately 90 words in total about four different bullet points. All bullet points had to be covered, but there was no need for equal coverage of the bullets.

Students were able to achieve full marks by writing approximately 90 words. Many did this, but others lost marks for Content because they wrote around half that amount. Others wrote too much and made more errors in so doing. This affected the mark for Quality of language and also the mark for Content, when the language became unclear.

Students who wrote concisely and accurately were able to score full marks, although many did write much more than was necessary.

Content

The criteria for assessment focus on four elements: coverage of the bullet points, the amount of information conveyed, clarity of communication and expression of opinions. Coverage of bullet points was key, as misinterpreting or omitting even one meant that the award of a mark above 6 was impossible, given that for the award of marks in the range 7 – 10, all aspects of the task must be covered. In addition, although students had no difficulty in developing ideas and expressing opinions, there were occasions when inaccuracy led to a lack of clarity of communication (referred to as 'lapses' in the criteria) and this had an impact on marks awarded. Therefore, students who conveyed information in relation to all four bullet points did not necessarily score a mark of 9 or 10. Lapses in clarity may have been sufficient in number to mean that a mark lower than 9 was more appropriate. In order to score in the top band for Content, the criteria state that 'a lot of information is conveyed'. The recommended number of words was 90, so a student who wrote approximately that number of words, and who wrote clearly, had access to full marks. This was deemed to be 'a lot of information' for this question.

Question 4.1

Of the two optional questions, this one was by far the more popular choice, with around 80% of students choosing it. There was a wide range in the standard of the work produced. The first bullet point caused some difficulties when it came to using a past tense. The second and third bullet points were done very well and most students were able to give plenty of opinions

here. The fourth bullet point was usually done well, but some students did not say what they were going to study, but where.

Question 4.2

The first and third bullet points were done very well. In the third one, any festival in any country was accepted, with two of the most popular choices being La Tomatina and Glastonbury. The topic of the environment is one which many students find difficult and that was sometimes the case here when the second bullet point was attempted. As with question 1.1, the past tense bullet point caused problems with tense formation.

Quality of language

The key features of the criteria for assessment here are variety of language, attempts at complexity, time frames and accuracy.

Each of the bullet points for both questions required students to use a variety of vocabulary because of the different nature of each task. Each one allowed students to choose language which they could use confidently.

In order to score in the top band for Quality of language, there had to be successful reference to events in the present, past and future. One task in each of the two questions required the student to refer to a past event and another one to a future event. The response to the past event task varied, according to how well the student could communicate using a past tense or tenses. Usually this was done successfully through use of the preterite tense. As far as the future events were concerned, each one asked what the student was going to do and included a phrase in the immediate future with a time marker (*el año próximo* and *en el futuro*). The majority of students were able to change the person of the verb and begin their response to this task by saying: *El año próximo/En el futuro voy a* plus an infinitive.

Complexity in this question was achieved through the use of subordinate clauses; infinitive constructions; longer sentences formed by using connectives; negatives; the use of *lo* in phrases such as *lo bueno/malo es que* which was used by some of the better students.

As far as variety of language was concerned, many students enriched their writing by using idiomatic phrases such as: *es pan comido*; *somos uña y carne*; *es la leche*. This is to be encouraged, provided such phrases are used sparingly and in an appropriate context.

The other strand in Quality of language is the accuracy of the writing. The more common, major errors were with verbs, either with the wrong person or the wrong tense of the verb. Poor tense formation was an issue for many students, in particular with the present being used instead of the preterite tense in the first and fourth bullet points of the respective questions. At this tier there were a high number of minor errors, which cumulatively contributed to a lower mark for Quality of language. Sometimes, substandard spelling also had an effect. Illegible handwriting sometimes made it impossible to tell with any certainty how a word was spelt.

Question 2

For this question, there were 15 marks for Content, 12 marks for Range of Language and 5 marks for Accuracy. Students were asked to write approximately 150 words in total about two different bullet points. Both bullet points had to be covered, but there was no need for equal coverage of the bullets. Students wrote a good amount for whichever of the optional questions they chose.

There was a wide variation in the quality of work in the two questions. The mean mark for 2.2 was nearly two marks higher than the mean mark for 2.1.

Content

Many students exceeded the recommended 150 words and some wrote more than double that amount. This usually resulted in more errors being made which often had a negative effect on the marks awarded for Content, if mistakes were ones that affected communication. The reference to 'a lot of information' in the criteria for assessment is in connection to the recommended number of words. So, a response of around 150 words, where information is clearly conveyed, could get full marks for Content.

Question 2.1

Both bullet points were addressed successfully by most students. The first one enabled students to write extensively about problems for the health of young people, with most picking out problems with diet, lack of exercise, smoking and alcohol or drugs. Occasionally the second bullet point was not conveyed successfully because the student missed or misunderstood the word *saludables* in the question and wrote about a future holiday, for example, with no reference to healthy activities.

Question 2.2

As with 2.1, both bullet points were usually conveyed successfully. Where there was a difference in quality between coverage of the bullet points, it tended to be the second one which was better and it seemed that a past activity like this was something for which students were very well prepared.

Range of language

The key features of the criteria for assessment here are variety of language and an ability to produce complex sentences confidently. Reference is not made to time frames or tenses in the criteria, but the use of these were considered as attempts at complexity. In terms of variety of language, most students were able to produce a good range of connectives: *porque*, *ya que*, *dado que*, *así que*. Many students extended their sentences and added to the complexity of the language by using subordinate clauses introduced by words such as *que*, *cuando* and *donde*. Infinitive constructions were used confidently by most students, although there were those who found them difficult and would, for example, follow *gustar* with a conjugated verb. Successful use of object pronouns was less common, but they added precision to the writing when they were used well. Although only two time frames were targeted in the two bullet points of each question, many students used a wide range of tenses as they developed their response. There were also examples of good use of the subjunctive. A good range of idiomatic phrases was evident, and these were usually used in an appropriate context.

Accuracy

In order to score two marks for Accuracy, the writing must be 'more accurate than inaccurate'. A good number of students scored this mark because the language was only just worthy of that descriptor. The criteria refer to verb and tense formations and how correct these are. Although there was some excellent work as far as verb usage was concerned, there were also examples of substandard usage, which is surprising at this tier. There are references in the criteria to major and minor errors. A major error is one that impairs communication, whereas a minor error does not have a bearing on communication, such as incorrect adjectival agreement or gender.

Question 3

For this question, there are 6 marks for Conveying key messages and 6 marks for Application of grammatical knowledge of language and structures. Given that the level of demand of the messages was aimed at covering Grades 4 to 9, the question differentiated well, with the vast majority of students able to score some marks. There were some excellent translations which were error-free, although there was usually at least one key message that was not conveyed because of a major error.

Conveying key messages

The passage was divided into 13 key messages, as in the table below.

I like to spend	This was generally done very well, but some students did not convey the message because they used <i>gastar</i> , rather than <i>pasar</i> .
time with my sister	This was done very well.
because she understands me.	This proved challenging because the object pronoun was either placed after the verb or omitted altogether.
After school	This was done well, mainly because the omission of <i>de</i> did not prevent the message being conveyed.
she helps with homework.	Provided the student knew the verb <i>ayudar</i> , this was done well, but a good number did not know it.
Last Saturday	This was done very well, although it was not uncommon to see <i>domingo</i> .
we went out together	This was done quite well and it was pleasing to see that most students knew <i>juntos/as</i> .
and we had a good time.	There were two main problems here. One was that many wrote <i>lo pasé bien</i> , presumably because it is well known as a phrase; and the other was when students tried to be literal and wrote <i>tuvimos un buen tiempo</i> .
Next year she is going to work	This was done well.
as a volunteer,	This proved challenging because many seemed not to know <i>de</i> or <i>como</i> , which was needed for the message to be conveyed.
but I think that	This was done very well.

it is better	This was done well. The main problem was when students wrote <i>mayor</i> or <i>major</i> , rather than <i>mejor</i> .
to have a salary.	This was done very well.

Application of grammatical knowledge and structures

If one of the key messages contained a minor error or errors, it was still credited. For example, *después colegio*. However, an accumulation of such errors had an overall effect on accuracy which could be reflected in the mark for Application of grammar. Nevertheless, there was usually a direct correlation between the two marks.

The 2026 examination

The change in Specification for next year means that the Higher Writing examination will be different. One of the main differences is that all instructions and question rubrics will be in English. However, there are a lot of similarities between it and the 2025 paper. This is what the 2026 paper will look like:

- Question 1. A translation from English into Spanish of sentences totalling a minimum of 50 words. This is also what happened in 2025 in question 3.
- Question 2. Three bullet points, each one targeting a different time frame, about which students write a total of approximately 90 words. This is similar to the 2025 question 1, but three bullet points, rather than four.
- Question 3. Two bullet points about which students write approximately 150 words. Each bullet point will target a different time frame, so very similar to the 2025 question 2.

The new examination has a very similar feel to the 2025 paper, as regards layout, apart from the order in which the questions appear. What follows is advice to students when they answer each of the questions in the 2026 paper.

Question 1 (2026)

- Check carefully that you do not miss out any parts of the translation by accident.
- If you are not sure how to translate something, have a go as it may score you a mark; leaving it blank will not.
- Check verb tenses and endings.

Question 2 (2026)

- Aim to write roughly the suggested number of words.
- Mention all of the bullet points. Attempt to write something about them rather than omitting them. Tick off the bullet points on the question paper once they have been covered.
- Identify which bullet points target the different time frames and check that your verb formation is accurate.
- Write clearly, so that the examiner can read exactly what you have written.

Question 3 (2026)

- Aim to write roughly the number of words required.
- Read the bullet points and the scene setting carefully, ensuring you know exactly what they require in terms of response.

- Ensure that what you write relates to the bullet points in some way.
- If you have time at the end of the exam, check that your verbs and spellings are accurate.
- Try not to write things that are really difficult or for which you do not know the vocabulary. It is better to be simple and clear than complex and unclear.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.