
3 – Reading

General Hints

A number of the hints given for listening (see page 9) apply to the reading component, but the most important will be repeated below.

In your Spanish reading examination you will have a range of different exercises, some requiring answers in Spanish, some in English. You will also be required to match statements to short extracts, pick the correct answer from alternatives and so on. Usually at Foundation Tier it is purely your understanding of Spanish texts that is being tested, but at Higher Tier, in addition, you are required to identify opinions and emotions and draw conclusions.

The material may consist of simple signs, instructions, magazine and newspaper articles or letters. Texts may be printed, handwritten or in a word-processed form. You will see a range of examples in the following pages.

Here are the main points to bear in mind when doing the reading exam:

- **Watch the time!** You will have 45 minutes (Foundation Tier) or 50 minutes (Higher Tier) to answer questions on several exercises, worth 50 marks in total. Time can go quickly and you need to work efficiently. Remember that the later exercises will generally be more difficult and will therefore take up more of your time. If you find a particular question difficult, leave it and move on but be sure to make a note that you will need to return to that question in any spare time that you have at the end of the exam. It is a good idea to have a quick look through the paper before you start so that you can see how many exercises there are.
- **Study the instructions and examples.** At the start of each exercise you will read instructions about what to do. These should be familiar to you but don't panic if you can't quite understand what is meant, because the example, which always comes before the questions, should make it clear what you have to do.
- **Read the material through first.** Read the whole text, letter etc. before trying to answer the questions. Read it quickly, without worrying about words that you don't understand (there are likely to be some) then look at the questions and try to locate the required information in the text.
- **Read the questions carefully!** Use a highlighter pen to emphasise key words such as question words. Note how many marks are available for each question and how much space is provided for your answer. Look out for questions asking for more than one answer such as "what two things does he say about school" or in Spanish "¿Qué dice de su instituto? Menciona dos detalles".

- **Give full, but concise answers.** The examination tests your understanding of written Spanish, so you need to demonstrate how well you understand. However, there is no need to write long answers if brief ones are sufficient. Don't bother about writing complete sentences and express numbers in figures (e.g. 25) rather than words (twenty-five/*veinticinco*) but do be sure to write down everything you understand that might be relevant to an answer.
- **Beware of including incorrect information.** Despite the above point, do be careful not to add incorrect details to your answers. If you give a correct answer and then add information which is not in the text you are likely to lose the mark.
- **Answer in the correct language!** Every year there are candidates who answer in English when Spanish is required or (just as frequently) in Spanish when English is asked for. Even though your answer might show that you have understood, you will not be awarded the mark if you have used the wrong language.
- **Write in understandable Spanish.** As long as your Spanish is understandable, where answers in Spanish are asked for, you will not lose marks for errors such as poor spellings, missing accents etc. You do not, therefore, need to spend too long checking the accuracy of your Spanish, though it does need to be good enough to be understandable.
- **Write neatly and clearly.** This is an obvious point and applies to any written examination, of course, but you must write clearly enough for the examiner to know what you mean. It is particularly important to make any changes clear. If you change your mind, be sure that you cross out the answer that you do not wish the examiner to mark (don't simply bracket it). If examiners see two answers, they are instructed to mark the one on or nearer to the line. Be particularly careful with answers requiring a letter to be written in a box; careless handwriting can make an E look like an F or a C like a G, for example. Beware! If the letter you have written looks as if it could be interpreted in two ways, examiners are again instructed to mark such an answer wrong.
- **Guess sensibly.** However efficiently you have learned vocabulary, there will almost certainly be words in the exam texts that you don't know. Don't worry! It is quite possible that knowledge of a particular word is not tested in the questions anyway. However, your ability to understand gist, and to make a sensible guess of the meaning of a word from the context (i.e. what is around it) is an important skill of language learning and this will be tested in the exam.
- **Learn vocabulary during the years before the exam.** You are not permitted to use a dictionary in the examination, so regular learning of vocabulary during the years leading up to the examination is vital. You can access the core vocabulary on the OCR website at <http://www.ocr.org.uk> and you will no doubt have lists of words in your textbook. Test yourself regularly on the meanings of the words, or ask friends or relatives to test you. Work with friends preparing the same examination and test each other.

Now let's look at some example exercises. You will probably find the first few quite easy, but they become progressively more difficult. Try them for yourself then check your answers to see how well you did. If you do well on the Foundation Tier exercises, try the Higher Tier ones. This could help you decide which Tier to attempt when you do the exam for real. Read the tips carefully and note the advice!