

Spanish
GCSE

Module Two: Reading Comprehension: Introduction

Targeted Skills for Reading Comprehension

The reading comprehension examination paper contains graphical, pictorial and textual material in Spanish. Some of the material may be in original Spanish handwriting. As well as answering straight questions, you may be asked to answer multiple choice questions, complete gap-filling exercises, re-order words or pictures and fill in forms. You will be able to practise all of these techniques during the Tutor-marked Assignments set in this schedule.

Most questions will be in Spanish, and your answers should usually be in Spanish too, although a limited number of questions may require responses in English. As in all the examination papers, you should attempt all questions, however unsure of your answers you may be. You have nothing to lose in trying!

A further hint: do not neglect to do some timetable study - it can prove quite a tough exercise to extract information from a train timetable when working at speed in the examination room. The type of task concerned is usually a family or businessperson's calendar of the week which includes travel plans, but school timetables may also come up.

Communication Strategies

AQA recommends a number of 'communication strategies' which might help you during the examinations. In brief, they recommend the following concerning the reading comprehension paper:

1. **Ignore words which are not entirely necessary to complete the task successfully.** Try not to get distracted by the

unfamiliar words - you may very well not need to know all the words to be able to do the task.

2. **Use the visual and verbal context.** Take a look at the passage as a whole for clues as to its purpose and content. Its title, length, layout, typeface and any illustrations can give you extra information. If you get stuck on a particular word, read around it and its meaning may become apparent.
3. **Note grammatical markers and categories.** By looking at what sort of a word it is (e.g. verb, noun, adjective etc.) it will help you to make an intelligent guess as to its meaning.
4. **Use the social and cultural context.** Familiarising yourself with the Spanish way of life will inevitably aid comprehension of Spanish-language texts. You are not expected to be a great authority on all things Spanish, but a little background knowledge of the way people live, eat and work in Spain will help. You will have plenty of opportunity to absorb cultural information through your studies. Be sure to know the approximate value of the *euro* that has now officially replaced the *peseta*, and the way it is usually presented. (e.g. 2 *Euros* is a reasonable price for a sandwich).
5. **Use word patterns, cognates, near-cognates.** There are many Spanish words whose meanings you will be able to guess from their similarity to English or other Spanish words. This can be done by recognising word endings or beginnings or general patterns between Spanish and English. You must, however, beware of the notorious *false friends*, Spanish words which look very similar but whose meanings are quite different from the English. There are in fact very few *false friends*, so by noting the most common ones (such as *sensible* = *sensitive*, *largo* = *long*), you will probably be safe to translate other similar words to the English equivalent.

Remember: the communication strategies are very useful but will not conceal poor language and vocabulary learning!

The Examination

Both the Foundation and the Higher examinations are packed with exercises to do in the allocated time. You will need to develop a good technique to answer them all within that period. Do not forget that from 2003, you are *not* allowed to take your dictionary into the examination room; even so you can prior to the examination become accustomed to using

your dictionary efficiently (See "*Use of the bilingual dictionary*" at the beginning of this course).

Reading: Foundation Level

At Foundation Level you are expected to be able to understand short pieces, such as instructions, public notices, and advertisements, and longer material from brochures, guides, letters, newspapers, magazines and books.

This means you will be reading a varied range of styles, from advertising material to the more literary texts. You will need to understand past, present and future tenses, and cope with some unfamiliar language. Remember that the test is aimed at *general* understanding, and the ability to identify key points and messages. You are not expected to be able to understand every single word of the text.

Reading: Higher Level

At Higher Level, in addition to the tasks described for Foundation Level, it is necessary to deal with longer, more complex passages. The examination will comprise some complex and unfamiliar language in a range of styles, including non-factual and imaginative material. As with Foundation Level, you are not expected to be able to translate every single word, but you should be able to understand the main message of the texts, recognise opinions, attitudes, personal feelings and to draw conclusions.

Study Tips

This part of your GCSE course should be a source of enjoyment, so make your reading for it a really pleasurable experience, not merely something preparing you for an examination! Captions under pictures in a magazine or newspaper headlines, as well as eye-catching advertisements which intrigue you, are likely to introduce you to new vocabulary which will remain in your mind.

Reading short stories and fiction will give you valuable practice in the imaginative genre, but may be daunting at first. Try not to overuse the dictionary when confronted with so many unfamiliar words - follow the main message and look up words only when necessary. You may find books aimed at language students helpful. These include a series of parallel

Spanish/English texts published by *Penguin*, and novels with study notes and vocabulary, such as those published by *Grant & Cutler* or *Manchester University Press* (See *Reading List* for addresses). *Grant & Cutler* in London has a very wide range of language books of all descriptions, and they are well worth consulting.

Try to read as widely as possible, selecting items of real interest to you and which you feel will be of personal value for future encounters with Spanish and the Spanish way of life.

A Final Word of Encouragement ...

Students usually feel quite confident about this examination, and they will like to show themselves off to best advantage. Enjoy this part of the course in that knowledge!