

MIKE THACKER INTERVIEW

1. Do you have any tips or advice on how best to engage students in the classroom?

My background is in university teaching. I have worked more extensively in examining for secondary level than in teaching.

Advice for candidates preparing for A level Spanish

AS examination

Listening: From Day 1 of the course, listen to spoken Spanish (recordings/radio/TV/ native speakers ...) for about ten minutes each day; little and often is the golden rule. In this way you will tune in your ear to Spanish.

Reading: Read passages for gist first and then for detail. When answering questions, don't lift from the passage; learn to answer questions in Spanish in your own words.

Speaking: Make sure that you are aware of the correct pronunciation of Spanish words and of intonation patterns in Spanish, to ensure that your Spanish sounds as authentic as possible. Practise every day to build up your confidence and to make sure that you acquire the necessary skills.

Writing: Many basic writing errors are made in the AS exam. To avoid such mistakes, make a special effort to get your verbs right. For example, learn how to use *gustar* correctly, how to distinguish between *haber*, *estar* and *ser* and between the imperfect and preterite tenses.

A2 examination

Listening: Continue the listening habit you began in your AS year, developing your concentration further by extending the length of extracts and using material of greater depth that challenges you more.

Reading: To prepare for the examination, become more independent in your reading. Read lengthier passages with more substantial content than at AS. Newspapers and magazines (on paper or online) with articles about contemporary topics are good material. It is important to read as widely as possible in the cultural/historical/literary topic(s) that you have chosen for the exam.

Speaking: Confidence, accuracy and fluency are the keys to success. It is essential to develop fluency, preferably by frequent contact with native speakers of Spanish; this can be done by visiting to Spain and/or by meeting up with native speakers in the UK.

Writing: The A2 exam requires a very good degree of accuracy in the handling of Spanish grammar and vocabulary. Build up your topic-related vocabulary so that you are able to write convincingly about the more advanced topics in exam. Make sure that your syntax does not follow English patterns and structures; the more authentic your Spanish, the better.

2. What other books/articles have you written?

Relevant publications

2009	I am series editor of 3 GCSE Modern Languages textbooks (Spanish/French/German) published by Philip Allan: <i>¡Mola!, A plus!</i> and <i>An der Spitze (second edition)</i>
2009	(with M. Landívar) <i>Exam Practice for A level Spanish</i> . Hodder
2008	(with S. Bianchi) <i>AS/A2 Question and Answer Guide, AS and A2 Spanish</i> . Philip Allan
2008	(with S. Bianchi) <i>Exam Revision Notes: A level Spanish, second edition</i> . Philip Allan
2008	(with M. Morcillo) <i>¡Ponte al día!, second edition</i> Hodder Plus Dynamic Learning edition of book
2008	(with M. Morcillo) <i>Edexcel Spanish for A level</i> . Hodder Plus Dynamic Learning edition of book
2006	(with P. Muñoz) <i>A Spanish Learning Grammar</i> , second edition. Hodder-Arnold
2005	(with S. Bianchi) <i>A2 Spanish Resource Pack</i> . Philip Allan
2004	(with S. Bianchi) <i>AS Spanish Resource Pack</i> . Philip Allan
2003	(with M. Morcillo and F. Pérez Cos) <i>¡Ponte al día!</i> Hodder
2003	(with S. Bianchi) <i>Exam Revision Notes: A level Spanish</i> . Philip Allan
2001	(with P. Muñoz) <i>A Spanish Learning Grammar</i> . Arnold/OUP
1999	(with D.Mee and S. Spencer) <i>¡Al tanto!</i> Examination Listening Nelson. Student Book and Teacher's Book
1998	<i>Campo libre 1</i> . Contemporary texts for the development of reading skills. Aris and Phillips. Student Book and Teacher's Book
1996	(with D.Mee) <i>¡Al tanto! Nueva edición</i> (substantially revised) Nelson. Student Book and (new) Teacher's Book
1991	(with D. Mee) <i>¡Al tanto!</i> Macmillan (course book for A level Spanish)

Articles

I have written a number of articles over the years, mostly concerning syllabus change at A level in Modern Languages.

I have given several papers on the use of Virtual Learning Environments for language learning.

I have written many reports on GCSE and A level examinations, in my role as Chair of Spanish for Edexcel.

3. What external changes have influenced the way Languages are taught in schools and colleges today?

- Changes in emphasis in the specifications of the English Awarding bodies
- Computer –assisted language learning and the advent of the Internet
- The greater availability of reading and listening materials from foreign sources (electronic and paper)
- Educational initiatives such as “Assessment for learning”
- The biggest influence on language teaching over the past 3 decades has probably been the work on notions and functions carried out by the Council of Europe in the 1970s

4. What is the future of GCSE/A level Language?

The future is unclear because the Government tends to change its mind frequently about important issues concerning public examinations. In my view GCSE and A level will continue much as at present, with some specific differences, as follows:

- The Internet and, probably, VLEs will play a much greater part in the learning process
- The recent changes at A level will have the effect of lessening the significance of the examination (e.g. for University entrance) because the number of modules has been reduced from 6 to 4. Speaking and listening skills were likely to be at a premium, given the emphases of the new specifications. Grammar will remain an important factor
- At GCSE, the recent changes are probably less significant than they appear to be: teaching/learning is likely to be along similar lines, with some specific differences, such as:
 - A greater emphasis on the world of work
 - The dropping of formal examinations in writing and speaking and listening skills, which is likely to give greater importance to the examinations in listening and reading skills
 - More supervised testing (in writing and speaking).
 - Changes in the emphasis of oral tests, away from structured role-plays etc. and towards a more open format

5. Are there any links that you think that Languages teachers may find useful?

[Please also refer students to the Student cassette that is supplied free of charge with ¡Ponte al día! for detailed websites on Spanish topics.]

Useful websites:

Instituto Cervantes (varied resources): www.cervantes.es

El País (newspaper): www.elpais.com/

El Mundo (newspaper): www.elmundo.es

BBC Mundo: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/spanish/news/>

Spanish travel podcasts: <http://travel.guardian.co.uk/audio/languages/page/0,,1792101,00.html>

Useful UK Spanish resources on the web:

www.lang.ox.ac.uk/langlinks/indivlangs/spanish.html

<http://college.hmco.com/languages/spanish/resources/students/links/index.html>

<http://weblearn.sheffcol.ac.uk/links//Languages/Spanish/>

Google in Spanish: www.google.es

Wikipedia (free online encyclopaedia): <http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portada>

Terra España (search engine): www.terra.es

Tourism in Spain: <http://www.spain.info/>