Harris Academy Advanced Higher Modern Languages

Specialist Study Unit

As part of your Advanced Higher Spanish you will have to prepare and submit to SQA a piece of writing of 1200-1500 words in English, on a topic taken from Literature, Media texts, or Language in Work. This piece of writing will be worth 30 marks, or 15% of your final mark. You will also have to plan and research this, and write a report on your preparation as a Unit Assessment.

* The Specialist Study is the unit assessment which guides you through the process of planning your portfolio.
* The Portfolio is the completed piece of writing (finished after the Specialist Study Unit Assessment) which is submitted to the SQA for marking in April.

The following activities will guide you through the process of planning and researching your specialist study. We will discuss choosing an area to work in, then how to identify a focus and create a plan. We will provide guidance on selecting and analysing evidence, and show you how to retain evidence of your processes to allow you to demonstrate that you have met the criteria for the Unit Assessment. We also offer a simple outline record which you can fill in as you go through the whole process, allowing you to accumulate the evidence you need for the Specialist Study Unit.

First of all, you need to decide whether to choose to work in literature, media or language in work.

There are several factors to take into consideration. You will need some support from your teacher in working through both the specialist study and the portfolio piece, so your first step is to seek their advice and see what they would recommend, and what resources they have you can make use of in your study and portfolio. You should also take your own strengths and knowledge into account.

If you have a Higher in Business Management, then you might find that you have the knowledge and ability to write a good piece of work analysing, for instance, a Spanish company or an issue affecting industry in Spain. You could also write about issues to do with language in work, such as translating and interpreting, international e-commerce, or language use within the European Parliament. This might suit if you are planning to go to a university next year where the focus of the teaching is on languages and business, or translation and interpretation.

If you have a good Higher in English and enjoy reading and thinking about literature, you will have developed the skills you need to tackle a portfolio piece based on a book, play or collection of poetry. If you enjoy watching films, then this might also be a good topic area as you can combine the study of a film with a written text, either the book of the film, the screenplay, or a related piece of literature.

If you have a Higher in Music, Art, Modern Studies or History, then the use of a selection of Media texts on a specific topic might well be your best choice, as you will have had to research and report on a specific topic for your Higher. The difference now is you would have to identify some texts in Spanish which you can use to support your research. These could be factual texts, extracts from fiction, or a screenplay of a film.

If you are currently studying for an Advanced Higher in any of these subjects, then that would be an additional support to you.

You should also consider what others in your class are doing, as working with other people on a common topic is often a great support.

There is guidance in the Employability context on Language in Work, and in the Culture context you can find guidance on both Literature and Media texts. You might want to look at this to help you make up your mind on what to choose.

Finally, make sure you note down your thoughts and discussions on which area to choose, as this is the first step in identifying a focus. It will form the first part of your unit assessment.

Once you have chosen a focus for your Specialist Study, you should try to identify the sources you will use to base your work upon. At least two of these sources should be in Spanish. They could be written texts from magazines, newspapers, the Internet, textbooks or company literature, for example. Remember using Spanish when you go into a search engine will normally provide you with resources in Spanish, as will adding *.es*

You can also use texts in English as sources; you just have to remember that at least two of the texts you use should be in Spanish. Once you have selected texts, remember to write up the process you went through along with reasons for selecting and rejecting potential sources to keep your Specialist Study assessment up to date. Keep a list of all the sources you used, as this will be invaluable when you have to produce a bibliography after you have written your portfolio piece.

What you decide to use will depend upon the precise focus you intend to use. For this, you have to have some idea of the title of your portfolio piece. This should be a title which permits an evaluative report. The SQA guidance refers to:

* *An analytical/critical approach, with reasoned and relevant arguments.*
* *A consistent demonstration of an understanding of the focus of the study.*

Once you have chosen a title, you can identify how each of the sources you have chosen will be useful to you. Decide on the conclusion you are aiming for, and identify arguments and counter arguments to allow you to come to that conclusion. If you have identified questionnaires or interviews as something you want to use, decide on who you will ask and what kind of questions. Look at the evidence you have, identifying things which support and things which challenge your conclusion, so you can analyse and evaluate them to see how they fit your plan.

* Now see if your conclusion is justified, and whether you need more information to justify your conclusion, or whether you need to modify either your question or your conclusion. It would also be useful at this point to have an idea of which bits of the Spanish texts you intend to use as quotations in your Portfolio piece. Remember to add your decisions and your evaluation of these to your record.

If you have filled out the Specialist Study record, then you have all the evidence you need for your presentation. Discuss with your teacher which format they would like, a presentation and discussion, handing over your record along with copies of the resources you have identified, turning your recorded notes into a written report, or something else. Once you have done this, if your teacher is happy with your progress, you are ready to work on your portfolio. It might well be worthwhile having the presentation and discussion with your teacher on your Specialist Study in Spanish, as this will help you prepare for the oral assessment you will have with the external examiner.

As part of your Advanced Higher, during February or March you will have a talking assessment with a visiting examiner. This talking assessment should last about 20 minutes, and will take the form of a conversation in Spanish about the areas you have been studying this year. It is worth 50 marks, or 25% of your final mark.

Part of the conversation will be about your specialist study and your portfolio work. You have to write both the specialist study and the portfolio in English, but you are expected to work from Spanish texts, and also to discuss them in Spanish. It is worth getting used to having at least some of the regular discussions about your progress with your teacher in Spanish, as this will help you prepare for the external examiner. It might also be worth having two versions of your notes and updates for your specialist study, one in English for the written work, but one in Spanish to give you an additional resource when preparing for the external assessment. It means you can discuss in Spanish what material you selected and why, and equally what you decided was not relevant. When writing your portfolio piece, have notes in Spanish based on your source materials about your main arguments and your introduction and conclusions, as they will be perfect material for the kind of questions you may be asked during the assessment. The quotations you are using in the portfolio are also worth noting and trying to remember, as they will be relevant to what you are saying, and are a good source of language.

The portfolio focus and title is agreed by you and your teacher within SQA guidelines and conducted under some supervision and control by your teacher, but is mainly independent work. The portfolio piece must be your own work, not copied and pasted from some source such as a text you found on the Internet! Your school will submit it to SQA for external marking.   
The work will be carried out over a period of time, and normally you would start it when you have completed most of the work on the Specialist Study Unit. It should be **in English** and be between 1,200 and 1,500 words, excluding quotations and bibliography. You should record your word count (excluding quotes and bibliography). If the word count exceeds the maximum by more than 10%, a penalty will be applied. It should be produced electronically, to allow you to edit it easily and maintain an overview of the word count.

Your teacher will have a supporting role, but you should take the initiative in the planning, researching, management and completion of the task. You can expect 'reasonable assistance'. Assistance may be given to the whole class or to a group of pupils, for example, advice on how to find information for your portfolio piece. It may also be given to you on an individual basis, if you need it or request it. You should expect some of the following while you are working: regular checkpoint/progress meetings with your teacher, short spot-check personal interviews, being asked to keep a checklists in which you record your progress, and being asked to keep an accurate record of the sources you have consulted to put into your bibliography.

Three main aspects of your portfolio piece of writing will be considered when it is marked. Let us examine these in detail, firstly for a discursive case study or argumentative essay, then for a report on a work experience or summer job.   
**Content:** understanding, analysis   
**Style:** use of critical terminology, quoting from sources   
**Organisation:** coherence, structure, clarity

A case study or argumentative essay

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| **Content:** understanding, analysis | This means your work should take an analytical/critical approach, with reasoned and relevant arguments and demonstrate an understanding of the focus of the study. The arguments should be based on material in your sources, and explain why you are using these pieces of information. There should be a clear introduction, explaining what the focus of the writing is going to be. The arguments and counterarguments should lead to a conclusion. |
| **Style:** use of critical terminology, quoting from sources | The language should be formal and appropriate to the subject. If you have a Higher in Business Management, the language you used in your case study is a good guideline. Otherwise, try to write like a serious journalist. It is important that you select relevant quotes in (Spanish!) from your Spanish texts and sources to support your arguments and explain their significance. You also must make sure to put in a bibliography, giving details of all the sources you worked from. There is guidance on this in the page on Bibliography. |
| **Organisation:** coherence, structure, clarity | Your work should be well structured, with an introduction, arguments and counterarguments (if you are doing a plan or a report on a work experience or summer job, reporting on both positive and negative aspects) and a reasoned conclusion with your opinions. All of the work should be relevant to the title, not just a bland report of what you have read or done, and it should be coherent throughout, following a series of arguments through to the end. |

It is essential that you include a bibliography with your work, as otherwise you will lose marks. You should have a list of all the sources you consulted for your Specialist Study Unit Assessment, so there is a good place to start. Add to this any other sources you consulted while you were actually writing your portfolio piece. Do not think you should restrict yourself to just two or three sources: put down as many as you actually did look at as part of your research.

There is no set format for the bibliography, but it makes sense to use standard academic conventions, as you will need to use these in any work you undertake in Further or Higher Education. The details in the bibliography should identify all the sources that you consulted, even if you do not quote from them directly. It helps show the depth of your studies and avoids the risk of you being accused of plagiarism.

The most common sets of conventions are those of the Modern Humanities Research Association (MHRA) and the Harvard and Vancouver Author/Date systems, full details of which are available from most libraries and a number of online sources. Here are some illustrations of how to cite common types of sources.

* A book would be cited as follows:   
  García Lorca, Federico, La casa de Bernarda Alba, Manchester University Press, 1996
* A film would be cited as follows:   
  Salles, Walter, Los diarios de motocicleta, 2004
* An article consulted on a website would be cited as follows:   
  Antón, Jacinto, “La casa de Bernarda Alba es como una fosa o un archivo”, elpaís.com, 28 April 2009, Available: <http://elpais.com/diario/2009/04/29/cultura/1240956005_850215.html>