For effective DELE / SIELE / OPI Exam Prep, know the curriculum

Are you familiar with the DELE exam curriculum? (which is shared by its new online twin, the SIELE exam). Or the very similar curriculum of their American equivalent, the OPI, if you are prepping for that?

Ask yourself: Do I really know what the curriculum of the DELE / SIELE, or the OPI for my level contains? In other words, what I will be tested about? Do I know the goals of these communicative exams, as set out in the Common European Framework of Reference for Language policy document? (Goals and assessment criteria that make these exams very different from school or college language testing!). Can I really prepare effectively if I don’t know what content is prescribed, plus what skill sets will be tested, and how?
To illustrate – if you are thinking of doing the B-level exam, do you know which of the tenses of the Subjunctive mood you need to know for B1, and which additional ones for B2?

Now ask yourself – how can I prepare myself sensibly – that is, knowing what to prioritize – if I don’t first become familiar with the exam curriculum and goals?

It is unfortunately true that very few students (and their tutors, sadly) give much attention to the curriculum. It seems that some students just assume it will be the same as school or college exams. Or perhaps worse, it seems that it is often thought that one can kind of muddle through with one’s “street Spanish”, without prepping in a properly structured way, since these exams are practical tests of one’s ability to actually communicate in Spanish in real-world scenarios (i.e., without there being direct, college-style exam questions on Spanish grammar, spelling, culture etc.).

The truth, though, is that the way in which the four communicative competencies are tested, do assess whether you possess the required knowledge and skill sets as specified in the curriculum – even if indirectly. Those four competencies are of course very broad (listening and reading comprehension, plus oral and written expression). So is the sheer scope of any language. Therefore – unless your are game to prepare for anything and everything to possibly crop up – the only way to make your task more manageable is to know to what specific knowledge and skill sets examiners are limited. This is stipulated in the curriculum for each level.

There is an additional problem, though. Those students who do go to the considerable trouble of locating the voluminous curriculum document in the hidden recesses of the world-wide web, then encounter a formidable obstacle. The official DELE / SIELE exam curriculum is huge and complex, written in high Spanish – by academics, for academics.
At **DELEhelp** we have translated the relevant curricula content into English. We have summarized the curricula as part of our FREE in-house **Workbook #9: DELE / SIELE Exam Orientation and Acing Tips**. This one-of-a-kind DELE / SIELE exam preparation book of 96 pages is available to you, entirely FREE and without any obligation, by simply asking for it; use our convenient **contact information form** by clicking on the image above. Apart from the curriculum, this comprehensive DELE / SIELE exam preparation book covers the nature and goals of the DELE / SIELE system, the exam format, the scoring criteria that are applied, plus our top tips for acing the DELE / SIELE exam. *(If you are prepping for the OPI / OPIc Spanish test, simply ask for our Workbook #8, **Prepping for the OPI**).*

What follows here-below, is a brief introduction of these topics. For the more detailed treatment of these important subjects, do not hesitate to ask for our free DELE / SIELE exam preparation book. Because the DELE and the SIELE use the same curriculum, I will from this point on refer only to the DELE, merely for convenience – everything applies equally to the SIELE.
The DELE diploma goals: To understand what one must prepare for, it is essential to be familiar with the DELE system’s goals. At its outset, the official Common European language framework (CEFR) states about its policy document that: “It describes in a comprehensive way what language learners have to learn to do in order to use a language for communication and what knowledge and skills they have to develop so as to be able to act effectively. The description also covers the cultural context in which language is set.”

The Common Framework assessment system has as goal the certification of a candidate’s practical competency at using Spanish as language-in-action. The exam therefore simulates actual communication formats within a real-world, everyday social and economic context. It views the candidate as a living actor (“social agent”) in a foreign-language environment, who has tasks to perform – which he/she cannot accomplish without competency at communicating in that language. This practical approach defines communication as the ability to comprehend the received spoken and written word, and to comprehensibly convey meaning in turn, both orally and in writing.

The Policy Framework describes the level of communicative competency required at, as an example, the B1 level as follows: “(The candidate) can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.” (We are using Level B as reference here, because it is situated at mid-point in the range and students at A or C will thus be able to relate to it – the full curriculum inventory is just too voluminous to treat every level within the
For Level B2, this is the policy document’s description of competencies: “(The candidate) can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of different options.”

Now it stands to reason that the clear step-up seen between B1 and B2 will require a broader field of knowledge and enhanced skills on the part of the candidate. But more knowledge of what, exactly? The DELE curriculum inventory document details what this knowledge should consist of. We will illustrate its scope and focus with examples taken from the B-level inventory.

The DELE B-Level Curriculum Inventory: The official curriculum inventory for DELE Level-B is divided into ten main chapters. Because DELE exams simulate real life, the scope and number of
knowledge fields involved are as wide as life itself. In these exams, no-one is going to be required to write college-style essays on phenomena of grammar or forms of Hispanic socio-cultural celebration. However, it is undeniable that comprehension of a language depends as much on knowledge of its cultural context as on knowledge of vocabulary or grammar rules.

Just looking at the titles of the different curriculum inventory chapters, gives one a good feel for the width of the curriculum’s scope. They are: (1) Grammar; (2) Pronunciation; (3) Spelling; (4) Functional Language Usage – i.e., the “can do” statements of communicative tasks that a student must be able to perform; (5) Tactics and Pragmatic Strategies; (6) Genres of Discourse and Textual Products; (7) Generalized and Specific Notions; (8) Cultural References; (9) Socio-Cultural Knowledge and Behaviour; and (10) Intercultural Dexterity.

The Level-B grammar inventory alone runs to thirty small-print pages. It differentiates in detail the knowledge required for B1 and B2. An example of this is the specification regarding the tenses of the Subjunctive mood a candidate needs to know – for B1, it is only the present subjunctive, whereas for B2, three more tenses of the subjunctive mood are added: the perfect, the pluperfect and the imperfect (at Level A, knowledge of the Subjunctive is not required).

It probably didn’t come as a surprise to you that there is a formal curriculum inventory for grammar, nor that it exists for spelling or pronunciation. What most students are surprised by, is that the curriculum goes far beyond these stock aspects, to include a wide range of functionalities as well as knowledge about social mores, traditions, Hispanic history, geography, economy and the like. You will better understand the need for this when you read about the science behind doing well in listening and reading comprehension in our Reading Comprehension blog post or in the free Workbook mentioned earlier.
It is well established that comprehension depends largely on the ability to relate events / words to the broader context of their setting, and to make correct inferences – thus to the depth and width of one’s reference framework of relevant general and cultural knowledge. As it was succinctly put by one of the experts in the field, Prof. Hirsch: comprehension depends of one’s knowledge of words and of the world – in the DELE’s case, of the Hispanic world in particular.

To give you a feel for the level of detail provided in the curriculum inventories, I copy here our brief summation in English of their content on Orthography (spelling) and Pronunciation:

**Pronunciation (B1 & B2 same)**

- General characterization of Spanish pronunciation;
- intonation (melodic units and their relationship with punctuation, posing of questions, courtesy, giving orders);
- the syllable and accents (identification, relationship between spoken and written accents);
- rhythm, pauses and timing;
vowel phonemes;
- consonant phonemes;
- grouped sounds.

Spelling

Vowels:

- (B1) diphthongs, triphthongs, hiatuses;
- (B2) protective “e” in front of foreign or Latin words starting with “s” (espectáculo, estadio, estatua, estándar);

Consonants:

- (B1 & B2) words with letters b, v, w / c, k, q, z and digraph ch / g, j / h / y and digraph ll / s, x / t, d;

- use of capital letters – in entire acronyms (ONU), at beginning of words, after punctuation with a colon (:);
- use of lower case letters at start of word – acronyms converted into words (módem, sida), converted proper names for regions etc. (un [vino de] rioja);
- use of cursive letters – titles of literary works and publications, insertions into text of foreign language;
- hyphenation – long words after syllable, maintain original spelling of non-assimilated foreign words, expression of numbers, dual form words (Si no estudias nunca aprobarás. / No es antipático, sino tímido);
- use of Accents – general rules, tilde;
- Punctuation – full stop, comma, colon, semicolon, ellipsis, question & exclamation marks, brackets, square brackets, quotation marks, hyphen, underscoring, forward slash, umlaut;
- use of Acronyms and Abbreviations, Symbols.
The aspects of **functional use of language** specified for Level-B fall under the main headings of: Ask and Give Information; Express Opinions; Express Preferences, Desires and Wishes; Influence the Interlocutor; Relate Socially; and Structure a Discourse. **Relate Socially** is, for example, further divided into: greet, return a greeting, direct yourself at someone, present yourself to someone, respond to a presentation, ask about the necessity for a presentation; solicit to be presented; welcome someone; respond to a welcome; excuse yourself; respond to an excusing; thank someone; respond to thanks; present your sympathies/condolences; propose a toast; congratulate; express good wishes; respond to congratulations and good wishes; pass on greeting or wishes for better health; respond to being wished; and take your leave of someone (the other sub-headings have much more ample lists of situations).

As is the case in most languages, there exist stock formulations or politesse’s for each of the above situations in Spanish, which one has to learn as essential “can do” communicative skills. But without getting familiar with the curriculum first, how would you know that this may be expected of you in the exam?
The chapters in the curriculum inventory on the history and socio-cultural characteristics of the Hispanic world are also very detailed. This is our brief summation of the section on history, as prescribed for LEVEL-B:

**History of the Hispanic World – events and protagonists of past and present**

**Legendary personalities and events:**

- **Milestones of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries:** Spain – the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera; the Second Spanish Republic; the Spanish Civil War, the concept of “two Spains”; Franco; the Spanish transition to democracy: Personalities and important events, importance and place of King Juan Carlos in the Spanish transition; Governments of the democratic era: Prime Ministers, prominent personalities, values that Spaniards attach to the monarchy and its role in society.
- **Revolutions in Latin America:** Mexican revolution, Cuban revolution; revolutionary personalities in Latin America; dictatorship and democracy in Latin America.
during the second half of the twentieth century; prominent personalities and events.

- **Contemporary guerrilla movements in Latin America**: [Sendero Luminoso/Shining Path (Peru), Sandinista Popular Liberation Front (Nicaragua), FARC (Colombia), ELN (Bolivia)]; Importance and place of the guerrilla movements in the society of some Latin American countries.

**Important events and personalities of social and cultural life:**

- **sport** – hosting Mexico Olympics in 1968 and Barcelona 1992; Miguel Indurain, winner of five Tours de France; Argentina, winner of the World Cup Soccer 1986, and Spain, winner in 2010;
- **Awards for Literature and the Arts** in Spain [the Cervantes (novels, poetry, plays, essays ...), Goya, Max teatro, Onda]; Awards for Literature and the Arts in Latin America [Juan Rulfo Literature Prize (Mexico), National Novel Prize (Bolivia), National Plastic Arts Prize (Cuba)];
- **film festivals** [Festival Internacional de Cine de San Sebastián, Seminci, Festival de Cine Iberoamericano de Huelva (España); Festival Internacional de Cine Mar de Plata (Argentina); Festival de Cine de Cartagena (Colombia); Festival del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano de La Habana (Cuba); Festival Internacional de Cine de Guadalajara (México)];
- **Nobel Prize for Literature** [José Echegaray, Jacinto Benavente, Gabriela Mistral, Juan Ramón Jiménez, Miguel Ángel Asturias, Pablo Neruda, Vicente Aleixandre, Gabriel García Márquez, Camilo José Cela, Octavio Paz, Mario Vargas Llosa];
- **Nobel Peace Prize** [Carlos Saavedra Lamas, Adolfo Perez Esquivel, Alonso García Robles, Oscar Arias Sanchez, Rigoberta Menchu Tum];
- **Nobel for Chemistry** [Luis Federico Leloir, Mariano J. Molina];
- **the Prince of Asturias Awards.**

The above is probably enough for one day – this brief introduction to the curriculum is not intended to cause you to obsess about it, or to abandon your DELE / SIELE aspirations right here and now. However, clearly one cannot prepare intelligently for the exam without being familiar with the curriculum requirements. To make this quite vast and “high Spanish”, academically-written document accessible, we have prepared a comprehensive summation, in English, as part of the FREE Workbook referred to earlier. You will also have noticed, above, that we’ve published a number of blog posts about specific aspects of the DELE / SIELE curriculum.

The curriculum is, of course, not the only foundational document that one has to be familiar with, in order to do well in the DELE exam. Its twin is the official set of four scoring criteria that will be used by examiners to assess your performance in the written and oral expression sections of the exam. This is the subject of other posts here on our blog, and is also covered in our free workbook mentioned earlier.

To obtain your free copy of our 95-page *Workbook 9.2 DELE / SIELE Exam Orientation and Acing Tips*, (in download .pdf format from DropBox) please use the convenient contact info form by clicking on the relevant image above.

Obviously, should you enroll with **DELEhelp** for personalized, expert one-on-one guidance and practice via Skype, you will receive our full range of workbooks specific to your examen DELE level, as free study material (we charge only for the actual Skyping time, at US$12 per hour – please see our site: [https://edele.org](https://edele.org)).

*Salu2*

Willem
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