



Student Performance Q&A: 2001 AP[®] Spanish Language Section II

The following comments are provided by the Chief Faculty Consultant regarding the 2001 free-response questions for AP Spanish Language. *They are intended to assist AP workshop consultants as they develop training sessions to help teachers better prepare their students for the AP Exams.* They give an overview of each question and its performance, including typical student errors. General comments regarding the skills and content that students frequently have the most problems with are included. Some suggestions for improving student performance in these areas are also included. Consultants are encouraged to use their expertise to create strategies for teachers to improve student performance in specific areas.

Part A-1. Paragraph Completion and Discrete Sentence Fill-Ins

What was intended by the question?

The paragraph completion of the fill-ins requires attention to context and knowledge of specific grammatical elements such as adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, articles, verbs and nouns. This particular exercise was intended to test students' ability to use grammatical rules in context; specifically, noun-adjective agreement, subject-verb agreement, the gerund and the use of past participles as adjectives. Careful reading and comprehension, in order to identify referents and arrive at the proper form of the words in parentheses, was central to the successful completion of this exercise. Students are instructed to insert only ONE Spanish word and to write the word on the line, even if no change is required.

The discrete sentence fill-ins test students' control of verb forms through a series of individual sentences that are independent from the paragraph completion series. Students are expected to complete each blank with the correct form and tense of the verb given in parentheses based on the context provided by the sentence. The instructions clearly indicate that in some cases more than one word may be needed to complete a given blank: a simple verb (*visitaría*, *satisfacer*, *creyendo*), a compound verb (*hubiera vuelto*, *has oído*), or when a reflexive is given in parentheses, a pronoun and the conjugated verb (*me di*, *se dio*, etc.) **Progressive constructions and infinitives in periphrastic constructions (such as *estoy cantando*, *voy a cantar*, *tenemos que salir*, etc.) are not accepted as correct.** This particular exercise was intended to elicit students' accurate use of the gerund, imperfect and pluperfect subjunctive, preterite and future tenses.

A note to this year's exam: Because there can be many correct answers to question #11, this item was not scored and adjustments were made at grade-setting time so as not to affect the overall score of the exam. For future reference: Although a question dealing with demonstrative

pronouns did not appear in this year’s exam, the AP Development Committee wants to make Spanish teachers aware of the decision made by the Real Academia de la Lengua regarding accent marks on demonstrative pronouns: as always, demonstrative adjectives (*ese, este, aquel*) and their feminine and plural forms are not accentuated. **Demonstrative pronouns generally no longer require accent marks.** There are a few exceptions to this rule, but students at this level hardly ever encounter these exceptions. In the future, if a question appears on the AP Spanish Examination in which students are asked to produce the correct demonstrative pronoun, answers with or without accents will be accepted as correct.

How well did the students perform?

Generally speaking, students performed well in this part of the exam.

What were common errors or omissions?

In the **paragraph completion** section of the fill-ins, students’ answers evidenced some problems with the use of the past participle as an adjective in #10: “quemados” and with the use of the past tense in #9: “pesqué.” By and large, the problem in the first case (#10) had to do with the proper gender identification of the referent “turistas” and, in the second (#9), a misunderstanding of the time reference which required the use of the past.

Students performed well in the **discrete sentence** section of the fill-ins. The required use of the reflexive pronoun (“**me** di, **se** dio, **nos** dimos, **se** dieron”) in sentence #14 presented some problems for students in this section. Several students answered the question using the correct form of the reflexive pronoun and placed it in parentheses. Although such cases were marked “correct” by the readers, this use of parentheses brings up the issue of whether students understand that the use of the reflexive pronouns in certain cases is not optional but mandatory.

How can students improve their performance in this area?

- Students must pay close attention to the directions given in the exercise. With respect to the paragraph, students can only write one word in each blank; with respect to the sentences, students are instructed that they may write one or more words which means: a simple tense, a compound tense, a reflexive pronoun + conjugated verb, in the case of a reflexive construction.
- Students must know the different parts of speech that constitute the sentence in Spanish (pronouns, adjectives, participles, prepositions, etc.), their function, and the grammar rules that govern them
- Students should practice reading paragraphs and analyzing different parts of speech in context; i.e., reading exercises should be used both for the purpose of acquiring vocabulary as well as for establishing connections between different parts of speech, identifying referents and relations between words, establishing time references, and applying grammar rules.

Part A-2. Composition

What was intended by the question?

In selecting topics for compositions, the Development Committee makes every attempt to focus on areas of relevance and interest for AP students. This year’s topic was: “¿Qué persona ha influido más en ti y cómo te ha afectado? En un ensayo bien organizado, explica la importancia de esta influencia en tu vida”. By offering a topic that was both open-ended and yet close to the students’ individual experiences, the Committee intended to elicit responses that were easily accessible and of importance to the individual writer. In this sense, this year’s topic was

successful overall, because it generated interesting and varied essays. From a more formal perspective, the intent of the question was to elicit a well-organized essay, with ample vocabulary and control of complex structures, as well as strong command of conventions of the written language (orthography, sentence structure, paragraphing and punctuation). Relevant and thorough treatment of the topic was also expected.

How well did the students perform?

The open-ended nature of the topic allowed for a variety of levels of performance. In this sense it was a good question because it discriminated well among the high, middle, and low performers.

What were common errors or omissions?

The question was able to elicit a variety of tenses and verbal moods as well as appropriate vocabulary. The open-ended and accessible topic (while a positive element of the question overall) may have encouraged students to write too much while, at the same time, losing focus and organization. Common errors included superficial or inconsistent treatment of the topic, lack of coherence and overall organization, and inconsistent command of verb conjugations and moods. Also, the lack of complex structures or, conversely, the use of mostly simple, “familiar” lexical and verbal structures kept many students from obtaining higher scores. Some students were apparently confused by the use of the word *afectado* (which often carries a negative connotation) in the prompt and may have written limited, perhaps inauthentic, essays that affected their overall coherence and depth of treatment.

How can students improve their performance in this area?

- Students should be exposed, on a regular basis, to readings where a higher register of vocabulary is learned and incorporated into their own writing.
- As in previous years, we continue to see errors in basic structures, while at the same time certain “memorized” ability to reproduce more complex structures, such as an occasional imperfect subjunctive or other memorized patterns of the conditional and subjunctive. Students must progress systematically from basic to more complex structures; i.e., must show solid command of basic structures (such as present and past tense conjugations in the indicative) before venturing inconsistently into more complex areas of the language.
- Attention to organization (premise or thesis statement>elaboration of thesis>conclusion) and to the conventions of the written language must also be part of the teaching/learning process at the AP level.
- The area of content or relevance and thorough treatment of topic must be understood as an important element in the writing process as it is in the grading criteria. It is important to recognize that “thoroughness” implies not only length (at least 200 hundred words are expected) but also depth. A certain level of abstraction, beyond the reference to the immediate, familiar experience (although clearly stipulated in this question) is encouraged to attain the higher scores. In this sense, thorough treatment, wide range of vocabulary, complex structures, organization, and conventions of the written language should be viewed as closely interrelated.
- One final word: students tend to perform better in the oral sections of the exam than in the written parts. This may be due to a number of variables that include more exposure to the spoken language throughout the US, focus of instruction, and increased travel. While this is all very laudable in the context of desired functional ability with the language, teachers must continue to place equal, if not more, emphasis on other skills, such as reading and writing.

Part B-1. Picture Sequence

What was intended by the question?

The Picture Sequence seeks to elicit a speech sample sufficient to permit a global evaluation. Students are instructed to answer as fully as possible within the allocated two minutes. To achieve a top score, students are expected to demonstrate a **sustained** level of performance with regard to command of language structures, vocabulary usage, fluency, narration, and pronunciation. In very specific terms, this exercise is designed to elicit both description (naming and describing activities within each frame) as well as narration (recounting the story in a coherent way and using the necessary parts of speech to provide cohesiveness). Use and control of complex structures, ample vocabulary, good pronunciation, and thoroughness of narration are expected at the higher levels of performance.

How well did the students perform?

Students generally perform very well in this part of the exam and this year there were more perfect scores than in past years.

What were common errors or omissions?

Narrow range of vocabulary and lack of cohesion and thoroughness in the narration were the most prominent errors among low performers. As in past years, lack of control of sometimes basic, and definitely complex, grammatical structures (use of “ser” and “estar,” proper verb conjugations and noun-adjective/subject-verb-agreement) still appear frequently.

How can students improve their performance in this area?

Students are reminded to listen carefully to the instructions in this exercise. They are instructed to answer as fully as possible within the allocated time. This means, once again, description and narration.

- Practice with elements of speech that enhance cohesion (prepositions, conjunctions, relative pronouns) as well as listening exercises from a variety of sources and registers (to expand vocabulary, gain awareness of complex structures and improve pronunciation) are highly recommended.
- At the higher levels, thorough and detailed narration is expected. To enhance their chances to obtain the higher scores in this exercise, students should attempt to complete the sequence of frames. Remember that the exercise is not only about description, but narration as well.

Part B-2. Directed Responses

What was intended by the question?

The series of Directed Responses (5) are usually organized around a central topic and the scoring is based on comprehension of the questions as well as the appropriateness, grammatical accuracy, and pronunciation of the response. Thoroughness of the responses is expected at the higher levels of performance. This year’s series was organized around the topic of “money”: personal possessions, materialistic view of life, and choices to make if one has money. The practice question (not scored) asked whether it is necessary to have money in order to be happy. These questions are intended to put the students in a typical question-answer situation where they must answer appropriately and accurately.

Q1: *¿Cuál de tus posesiones valoras más y por qué?* (Which is your most valuable possession and why do you consider it valuable?) The question intended to elicit the use of precise and accurate vocabulary, agreement between nouns and adjectives (description) as well as a coherent explanation.

Q2. *La última vez que recibiste dinero, ¿ en qué lo gastaste y por qué?* (The last time you received money, how did you spend it and why?) This question elicited the use of the past tense as well as a coherent explanation in which sentence structure, joiners, and a good range of vocabulary were present. The use of opinion and support of that opinion and control of the present subjunctive as well as present tense indicative may have also appeared.

Q3. *¿Crees que hoy la gente es demasiado materialista?* (Do you think that people today are too materialistic?) The intention of this question was for students to demonstrate the necessary range of vocabulary to support opinion and their ability to control verb forms, indicative or subjunctive.

Q4. **Convence a un amigo de que te preste dinero para comprar algo que necesites.** (Convince a friend to lend you some money to buy something that you need.) This question was intended to measure students' ability to persuade or convince in Spanish, while using subjunctive or command forms and appropriate vocabulary.

Q5. *¿Qué es lo primero que harías si de repente recibieras mucho dinero?* (What's the first thing you would do, were you to suddenly receive a lot of money?) A thorough response as well as good control of the imperfect subjunctive and the conditional was intended by this question.

How well did the students perform?

There was a good, ample distribution of the scores indicating that this exercise was able to discriminate well among the different levels of students' ability. By and large students performed fairly well in every question, except for Question 1, which was either not understood or misunderstood by a significant number of students: the word "posesiones" was understood either as "posiciones" or "profesiones." This lack of understanding (or misunderstanding) generated a higher than usual number of irrelevant or incomprehensible answers. With respect to Question 5 a number of students replied using the past tense, which often rendered the answer irrelevant.

What were common errors or omissions?

Subject-verb and noun-adjective agreement remain a common and recurring problem. Errors in verb conjugations (especially irregular verbs) and in the use of the subjunctive were also evident. Misunderstanding of some of the questions was a more common occurrence than in the past. Unnecessary "borrowing," or repetition of the words in the question itself, rendered some answers incomplete or meaningless (because the student was unable to answer within the allotted time).

How can students improve their performance in this area?

- Students should focus on the topic at hand and be able to deliver thorough responses in precise vocabulary.
- Close attention to agreements and control of verb conjugations should be part of regular class reviews as well as training students to speak "in (short) paragraphs," i.e., beyond the sentence level.
- Although this is an exercise in oral production and functionality, understanding the question accurately is an essential component of the exercise. Exposing students to different registers of the language (newscasts, conversations or dialogues, mini-presentations) followed by some instrument to quickly evaluate comprehension would be helpful.