



## Student Performance Q&A:

### 2002 AP<sup>®</sup> European History Free-Response Questions

The following comments are provided by the Chief Reader about the 2002 free-response questions for AP European History. *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.

#### Question 1

*What was intended by the question?*

In the document-based question (DBQ) students were asked to “identify the issues raised by the growth of Manchester and analyze the various reactions to those issues over the course of the nineteenth century.” The question led students to find a multitude of issues (working conditions, living conditions, health and mortality, economic, moral, aesthetic, and economic concerns, etc.) in the historical background and in the eleven documents provided them, and then to explain that observers had very different reactions to these issues. Students were instructed to write and support a thesis, using those documents, to analyze them by grouping them in as many appropriate ways as possible and to find point of view in the documents. There was no specific instruction about change over time this year, but the documents did allow students to see and report that as well.

*How well did students perform?*

Compared to their performance on past DBQs, students did relatively well this year. The topic was accessible to the students, and the question and the documents were more straightforward than previous DBQs.

It would appear that this year it was difficult for the readers to find scores of 1’s or 2’s. Almost all students “earned” core point 3 (“supports thesis or answers question with appropriate evidence from at least one document”). The great majority provided an acceptable thesis and used at least four documents while committing no more than one major error (point 4). The DBQ Question Leader and those who helped set standards thought we could expect standards to achieve a good distribution of scores from 4 through 9 with a bit of a hump at 5 (usually because students failed to provide point of view, less commonly to find and support two groups). The table tallies I examined suggest that the hump at 5 was higher than we had hoped and that the distribution beyond 6 tailed off, as it usually does, but more than we hoped.

*What were common errors or omissions?*

The core scoring that was applied this year (as it was the previous two) looked particularly for a thesis, the accurate use of documents, grouping, and point of view. As usual the last two points were much more difficult for students to address. The question lent itself to creating two major

groupings (pro and con industrialization or its consequences) or a variety of other pairs of groupings (working and living conditions; terrible conditions and improvement after 1844; economic and political concerns), maybe with additional sub-groupings, so standard setters placed the grouping requirement relatively low, at 2. Thus it was not as difficult as in some past years for students to clear this hurdle. The Question Leader thought that the documents would allow students to easily find point of view, but their performance here was disappointing. We dropped this hurdle from 3 (our draft standard) to 2 for this area of the scoring rubric. A lot of students wound up tripping here nonetheless, hence the hump at 5.

This year's DBQ did not have any one particularly troublesome document that led to misinterpretation.

*Based on your experience at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that could improve the performance of their students on the exam?*

Point of view is not simply a synonym for opinion. It is an explanation for why a certain person or document expresses a certain view or an evaluation of the reliability of a source. There are several ways in which it can be accomplished. Teachers should study the AP Course Description (Acorn) booklet, access AP Central, or in any other way they can learn what point of view means in a DBQ essay and teach it to their students. Year after year this is the most difficult part of the DBQ task for the students.

## **Question 2**

*What was intended by the question?*

The question asks students to discern similarities and differences in the religious policies of two of three important female rulers who reigned in the period c. 1450 to 1600. The emphasis on religious policies encompassed matters of faith as well as political considerations, implying not simply what these religious policies were, but why and how they were pursued. The question required students to possess some mastery of the historical information pertaining to the topic and an ability to frame the comparison/contrast thematically.

*How well did students perform?*

Overall, the readers found a high level of student performance on this question. Most students possessed some command of relevant historical information. This made it necessary to evaluate the essay carefully in order to determine the level of analysis that each brought (or didn't) to sorting out similarities and differences.

*What were common errors or omissions?*

The most common omission on the part of some students was a failure to make any attempt to discern a similarity in the religious policies that they examined. As this constituted the omission of a major task, these essays were scored as weak. Another common problem was the treatment of Catherine de Médicis by those students who selected her as one of their two examples. Presenting Catherine de Médicis as a fanatical Catholic bent on exterminating Protestants, as seen in the St. Bartholomew's Day massacres, gravely misconstrues her policies, which aimed to promote the dynastic interests of her sons. Most textbooks devote little sustained coverage to Catherine, which may help to account for students' perceptions of her. Lastly, there occurred occasional problems with chronology, since the three figures are presented alphabetically, which also happens to be in reverse chronological order.

*Based on your experience at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that could improve the performance of their students on the exam?*

It is essential for AP teachers to make sure that their students understand that “compare and contrast” requires that similarities and differences be analyzed. Other than that, we believe that, for the most part, the students who answered this question showed a high level of preparation and a surprisingly strong command of the historical material.

### **Question 3**

*What was intended by the question?*

This question addresses witchcraft persecution, a social history topic that has been included in most textbooks. In 1980, witchcraft persecution was the topic of a DBQ. In its use of the word “analyze” the question requires that the student do more than simply NAME two factors accounting for the rise and two factors explaining the decline of the witch-hunts. Students must provide some exploration or discussion of these factors.

The question avoids the notion of direct causality. So many factors have been suggested for both the rise and fall of witch hunting that it is helpful that students are not obliged to argue causality, but rather to identify and examine contributing factors, first for the rise and then for the decline. Since some of the textbooks include conflicting factors, students were not held to higher standards of explanatory power than may be found in the textbooks.

The periodization of the question (“1580 to 1750”) focuses students on the height of witchcraft persecution in (late sixteenth century and seventeenth centuries) and allows them to bring in the first half of the eighteenth century during which witchcraft beliefs and persecutions diminished sharply or disappeared in Western Europe (c. 1660), and finally in Eastern Europe (c. 1750).

Witchcraft persecution is not a major focus of the AP European History course, but students can tie in what they know about major topics such as the Reformation and the Scientific Revolution to this less “mainstream” topic, *provided they focus on connections to witchcraft persecution*. The scholarship on witchcraft persecution is currently in flux; clear explanatory factors for either the rise or the decline are not agreed upon. Texts suggest different hypotheses, but several make the point that *historians are not in agreement*.

*How well did students perform?*

Students struggled with this question. The major difficulty lies in the fact that textbooks offer a number of different and sometimes complex factors contributing to the rise and decline of witchcraft. Also the tasks set by the question required writing about FOUR factors – two for the rise, and two for the decline, of witchcraft.

Two positive aspects of student performance were an awareness of misogyny and its relationship to witchcraft persecution — women formed 75 to 80% of the accused — and the fact that students were aware that belief in magic, witchcraft and the devil was a normal part of early modern life, not an aberration.

*What were common errors or omissions?*

A common mistake was an imbalance or unevenness in the essays so that the factors for the decline were not addressed as effectively as those for the rise. Sometimes students failed to analyze all four factors, two for rise and two for decline, as required specifically by the question. Not all students clearly differentiated between each factor in the discussion of both the rise and the decline. Even a sophisticated handling of the rise could not rescue an essay than did not give enough attention to the decline.

*Based on your experience at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that could improve the performance of their students on the exam?*

Social history questions need to be addressed carefully. Students should try to respond to all parts of the question and to argue thoughtfully. This question was particularly challenging because the textbooks cite a variety of factors and there is no clear synthesis. However, a student who addressed the question and included four factors, analyzing them with some degree of effectiveness, could do well. Students should avoid presenting evidence in an essay that suggests they are answering a different, but perhaps related, question such as the Reformation or the Scientific Revolution.

#### **Question 4**

*What was intended by the question?*

The majority of the readers viewed this question as mainstream and important. The time period 1919-1939 is considered clear and appropriate to the question. Members of the Test Development Committee confirmed the fact that the intent of the question was to require that students analyze the artistic/intellectual and social changes that occurred throughout Europe as a result of the Great War. The readers felt that students were not overwhelmed by too many tasks, and many readers were pleased that the test offered students the opportunity to discuss artistic and intellectual topics and rewarded students who could incorporate knowledge from other disciplines into their responses. Some readers argued that the question could have been improved if students had received some additional direction with the terms **culture** and **society**. Members of the Test Development Committee present at the Reading indicated that the test designers expected students to focus on social topics under the broad category **society** (gender, class, race). Too many students, unfortunately, interpreted the term broadly, including political, economic, and diplomatic information that the standards did not recognize as fulfilling the requirements of the question.

*How well did students perform?*

Judging by the standards set by the QL and the TLs, a majority of students displayed a lack of understanding of the intent of the question. Many students omitted discussion of culture altogether, while many others seemed to ignore the terms culture and society and instead took their cue from the dates 1919-1939. As a result, a lot of student responses appeared to answer a question about the rise of Hitler and Mussolini, or the causes of World War II, or the causes of the Great Depression. The outstanding efforts displayed a depth of conceptual understanding and richness of their documentation. The standards rewarded a wide variety of student responses.

*What were common errors or omissions?*

1. Many students either misunderstood the meaning of the terms **culture** and **society** (especially the latter) or wrote about other aspects of the interwar period.
2. Many students — and perhaps their teachers — appear to have a very hazy understanding of what the charge **analyze** demands.
3. Many students failed to support valid generalizations with any kind of supporting evidence, despite the fact that such instructions are emphasized in the directions to the FRQ.
4. Too many students appear to do their thinking as they are writing their essays. As a result, a sophisticated thesis statement only appeared in the closing paragraph. The prewriting component of analytical essay writing is apparently still neglected by a significant percentage of students.

*Based on your experience at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that could improve the performance of their students on the exam?*

1. Train students in the process of analytical writing more thoroughly and methodically. Provide students with the list of charges provided in the Course Description (Acorn booklet). Post the terms and their meanings in the classroom, and go through the process of analytical writing with the class (either the entire class or small groups) before assigning an individual effort. Use the examples of outstanding student responses posted on the Web or distributed in the training packets to familiarize students with the demands of analytical writing.
2. Make the prewriting phase of essay writing compulsory at the beginning of the year by requiring students to spend 5 minutes organizing a response before they begin to write.
3. Take advantage of the vast resources available on the Web. Many teachers have generously posted lesson plans, student activities, and links to subject matter that may assist their students when they take the exam.

### **Question 5**

*What was intended by the question?*

This question requires students to focus on effects that the system of European absolutism had on the nobility. The focus is on absolutism's effects, not on the system itself. One is largely restricted to the 1650-1750 period, and the successful student must examine both power and status effects in at least two countries, and these countries must be areas where absolutism was dominant in this period: France, England, Prussia, Russia, and Austria, all to varying degrees.

*How well did students perform?*

While there were many outstanding essays in which the students showed knowledge of the period and good interpretive skills, too many responses were in the weaker category.

*What were common errors or omissions?*

We can discern four areas where students had difficulty: failure to analyze the effects of absolutism on the nobility; confusion about the meaning of the concept of status; the chronological dimensions of the question; and tracing the nobility in England where absolutism gives way to constitutionalism.

*Based on your experience at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that could improve the performance of their students on the exam?*

It is recommended that the students prepare well to read the question carefully and address the tasks as they are expressed. Words are so important, and most questions require more than a passing comprehension of the terms of the prompt.

### **Question 6**

*What was intended by the question?*

The question put forward the task of assessing the validity of historical interpretations that emphasize the decline of nationalism in Europe, from the period, 1945-2000, a topic which has been included in most textbooks. In its directive "evaluate the validity" of these interpretations, the question makes clear the requirement of providing specific political and economic examples in assessing such interpretations. However, through the directive, the question also invites students to challenge the basis of this particular interpretation, and allows students to make the

opposite claim. Nevertheless, in assessing the validity of the interpretation, students must provide political and economic examples to support their respective arguments.

*How well did students perform?*

The stronger essays discussed the validity of the interpretation; some challenged the premise upon which the question was based. Though many students performed below average, hundreds of brilliant and thousands of good essays were read. The inordinate number of weaker essays may be attributed to the wording of the question and that it deals with more recent historical events.

*What were common errors or omissions?*

Essays that were written on anything pertaining to contemporary events: Arab/Israeli conflict, Afghanistan War/terrorism, September 11, capitalism vs. communism, US/USSR, the decline in imperialism. Others confused “nationalism” with “individualism” and “liberalism,” dictatorship and democracy.

*Based on your experience at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that could improve the performance of their students on the exam?*

Continue to teach the European history course beyond 1945, as do the textbooks.

### **Question 7**

*What was intended by the question?*

Students were asked to examine both foreign policy goals and achievements of Metternich and Bismarck and to note similarities and differences.

*How well did students perform?*

Generally, students performed well. This is a mainstream topic that is covered adequately in European history texts, and there was nothing in the wording of the question that might unintentionally lead students astray. Though the question was chosen by a relatively small percentage of students, many students who responded to this question seemed comfortable with the subject matter. Thus, it was not difficult to find strong essays.

*What were common errors or omissions?*

One common error found in the essays was that Metternich was succeeded by Bismarck. Similarly, some students were unsure of Metternich’s address; it was not uncommon to see him identified as Prussian, German, or even Italian. Typically, students discussed Metternich in 1815 (Congress of Vienna) and Bismarck through 1871 (Unification of Germany) and ignored later goals and achievements, such as Metternich’s intervention policies or Bismarck’s alliance system. Some students also had difficulty identifying similarities between the two figures.

*Based on your experience at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that could improve the performance of their students on the exam?*

Students would benefit from more instruction about the task words used in AP question prompts. Based on responses to this question, students need more practice developing substantive comparison/contrast arguments. Some students took simplistic approaches to this aspect of the question, often treating this part of the task as an afterthought with a sentence or two in the conclusion. Typically, students emphasized differences and saw only superficial similarities. While a balance was not necessary, the task words “compare and contrast” as described in the AP Course Description booklet require recognition of both similarities and differences.