



Student Performance Q&A:

2002 AP[®] Human Geography Free-Response Questions

The following comments are provided by the Chief Reader about the 2002 free-response questions for AP Human Geography. *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?

This question tested students' depth of knowledge of a topic widely covered in introductory human geography courses at the college level. The item tested their ability to differentiate three key terms in political geography (nation, state, and nation-state), give valid examples for each term in two different regions (one of which is widely discussed in texts, another less so), and construct a succinct, accurate, process-based application of the concept of "nation-state ideal." In general terms, this question tested depth and analysis.

How well did students perform?

Students performed well on this question (mean 40 percent). Points were near-normally distributed with more 0-1 point scoring (on a 10 point scale) than higher (7-8) point scoring. Students who scored 3 or below typically offered no evidence of geographic training; i.e., they might have provided examples from current events knowledge and/or other school courses). The best answers were distinguished by both depth of knowledge and the ability to write cause-and-effect arguments.

What were common errors or omissions?

There was a lack of depth in the definition of state. A large number of students were unaware of the meaning of the term in political/human geography and defined it as a smaller part of a whole (for example, states of the union). For those who were aware of the definition, many saw states as countries rather than, more precisely, as sovereign governments with a politically organized territory.

To a lesser extent, there was also a basic lack of knowledge of the definitions of nation and nation-state. Students had difficulty in locating a correct example of a nation-state in region B (Israel, Armenia, Iran, Turkey).

Some students gave examples from the 1940s and 1950s in response to the prompt “late twentieth century” (after 1970).

Many students gave an inappropriate response to the instruction to **explain** in part (c). Many repeated the question prompt by asserting that the nation-state ideal had led to conflict without explaining **how** conflict had arisen (for example, through land disputes.)

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?

The following is a summary of ideas that were generated in discussion and collaboration with the readers of the 2002 AP Human Geography Examination. They thus represent the collective wisdom of a group of people with both first-hand expertise of the challenges students faced on the exam, and direct experience of regularly offering the course. Some comments apply to just this question and some may apply more generally.

- Refer to the AP Human Geography Course Description booklet for guidance on which topics and concepts students need to study in depth.
- Familiarize students with the full definitions of relevant terms, definitions, and concepts. It is important to bear in mind that, as with any discipline, there is some variation in usage of terms between authors. This is reflected in the content of many textbooks. As the AP Program has a policy of not endorsing textbooks, it is recommended that teachers consult with as many texts as possible when formulating definitions.
- Encourage students to explore, delimit, and understand concepts by applying them using contemporary real-world examples.
- Use a variety of texts and content sources to formulate lesson plans. AP Central will expand the number of links to relevant geography pages.
- Encourage students to develop successful tactics for responding to the “structured response” items on AP Human Geography tests. This includes answering questions in the way they are structured (points are allocated for sub-parts of the question and not for the overall answer as in some other subjects); dispensing with context-setting introductory paragraphs; paying careful attention to the specific instruction (define, explain, discuss, etc). Practice writing 15-20-minute responses.

Question 2

What was intended by the question?

This question tested how well students could develop a series of process-based arguments in response to a specific stimulus. To be successful, students needed to recognize that the question was neither solely about religion, nor solely about cultural landscapes. As with many topics in the course, this question considered the interrelations between the two elements, and in particular the ways in which components of religion can be linked to outcomes for cultural landscapes. The question was intended to test understanding of content material from the culture section of the course, although arguments could be successfully applied from the industrialization and economic development (globalization) and population (movements) sections of the course as well. This question also examined students’ ability to conceptualize a system of linkages. More than a definition was required for a full score. For example, in part (a), students needed to correctly recognize the function of sacred sites in religion in order for them to successfully argue how such sites have consequences for cultural landscapes.

How well did students perform?

This question generated the highest mean on the 2002 exam (50 percent) and scores were normally distributed. Students whose responses only detailed examples rarely scored 4 points (on an 8 point scale) while those in the middle range were able to give several examples and develop an appropriate linkage argument in one or two situations (for example, burial sites). The best answers were those that were able to conceptualize the question correctly, had a depth of understanding of religion, cultural landscapes, and how the two might be linked (i.e., they thought geographically), and were able to identify an appropriate argument for the place names prompt.

What were common errors or omissions?

Students displayed a lack of depth of knowledge of religion, cultural landscapes, and how cultural landscapes change. This was especially true in the context of place names.

They also showed a lack of depth of knowledge of appropriate examples. Jerusalem, chosen by some students as an example of a sacred site, is considered a sacred site for more than one religion; further elaboration was required (for example, a location within Jerusalem.)

Students also failed to recognize and then operationalize the intended tasks of the question. An understanding of religious elements had to be applied to receive credits in this question.

Many also did not apply relevant ideas and content from across the course to the question. Students did not make the most of the knowledge they had acquired in the course.

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- As with the 2001 administration, the second question calls for skills of conceptual thinking, synthesis, and development of process-based arguments. Depth of knowledge was a prerequisite for a good answer and, in and of itself, was insufficient to guarantee a high score. Give students opportunities to practice their conceptual skills in response to specific question prompts (for example, diagram cause-effect relationships).
- It is incumbent for students to make the most of the diverse materials they have acquired in the course in an exam setting. Build their confidence by stressing the interlinked nature of the course.
- Encourage students to develop accurate and contemporary examples for all sections of the course.
- Encourage students to develop successful tactics for responding to the “structured response” items on AP Human Geography tests. This includes answering questions in the way they are structured (points are allocated for sub-parts of the question and not for the overall answer as in some other subjects); dispensing with context-setting introductory paragraphs; paying careful attention to the specific instruction (define, explain, discuss etc). Practice writing 15-20-minute responses.

Question 3

What was intended by the question?

This question tested synthetic, analytical, and critical skills with an emphasis upon geographic application. The spatial distribution of different population groups is an important concern in Human Geography. This particular question tested students' ability to explain why households headed by females (female-headed households including women living alone with or without dependent children) are concentrated in two areas of a hypothetical urban area. Use of the term "concentrated" in the question implies that, among all the households headed by women in the urban area, there are particular clusters in particular places (i.e., zones X and Y). The question is intended to test students' ability to correctly interpret the map for appropriate clues/evidence of processes that might have led to this relative clustering. The second part of the question assesses the ability of students to assess (positively or negatively) the applicability of a well-known model of urban land-use. In general terms, the question tested critical geographical analysis and synthesis skills.

How well did students perform?

This question generated a very low mean of 12 percent. Only one fifth of students taking the exam scored 3 or more points (11 were allocated to the question). Answers to part (a) (zone X) were mixed, with few students able to identify a second socioeconomic factor. Answers to part (a) (zone Y) were weaker still, with very few students able to articulate any relevant socioeconomic factors. Answers to part (b), which offered the chance of points even if part (a) had been missed, were also disappointing, with many students describing rather than applying the Hoyt model.

What were common errors or omissions?

Many students conflated the term "households headed by females" with heterosexual dual parent household.

Many students misunderstood the geographic term, concentration.

Some students misunderstood the term, socioeconomic.

There was incorrect map interpretation. A large number of responses interpreted map items (the school, the Air Force Base) as direct, infallible evidence.

Answers to part (a) tended to assert (for example, being based on stereotypes of women choosing locations near malls because they like to shop), rather than construct arguments based on geographic reasoning.

Although most students seemed to be familiar with the Hoyt model, many were unable to apply its concepts to the scenario they were presented with.

Few students took advantage of their knowledge of concepts they had learned from elsewhere in the course to answer this synthetic question. As in question 2, students often misrepresented their true ability. What may appear to be an "urban" question, to be answered from the "urban" part of the course, is a general human geography question with an urban stimulus, to be answered from across the course.

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?

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- As with the 2001 administration, the third question calls for skills of critical geographical analysis and synthesis. It also turned on the correct interpretation of spatial information. Give students opportunities to practice working with, reading, and becoming discerning (but confident) consumers of maps.
- It is incumbent for students to make the most of the diverse materials they have acquired in the course in an exam setting. Build their confidence by stressing the interlinked nature of the course. Almost by definition, geography test questions will mirror the interlinked nature of the material they are assessing. Get students comfortable with the idea of linking together geographic ideas.
- Encourage students to develop successful tactics for responding to the “structured response” items on AP Human Geography tests. This includes answering questions in the way they are structured (points are allocated for sub-parts of the question and not for the overall answer as in some other subjects); dispensing with context-setting introductory paragraphs; paying careful attention to the specific instruction (define, explain, discuss, etc). Practice writing 15-20-minute responses.