



Student Performance Q&A:

2002 AP[®] Music Theory Free-Response Questions

The following comments are provided by the Chief Reader about the 2002 free-response questions for AP Music Theory. *They are intended to assist AP readers 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. Readers 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?

The purpose of this question was to test melodic dictation in the context of the challenges posed by a minor melody, written in bass clef. The melody was very accessible — being written mostly in scalar motion — but did have a few specific challenges, notably the leap of a perfect fourth, a dotted rhythm and a raised leading tone.

How well did students perform?

This question proved to be a little harder for students than was intended. They generally were able to correctly notate the first measure of the melody and the final note, but had difficulty in the second and third measures. Many students forgot to write the accidental needed for the leading tone and received no points for the first half of the last measure.

What were common errors or omissions?

The most common errors included forgetting to write in the accidental necessary for the raised leading tone in measure four, missing the skip in measure one and missing the dotted rhythm and skips of measure three.

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?

Reminders to students:

- Don't forget to raise leading tones in minor keys.
- Listen to see if melodies return to the tonic at cadences.
- There are no rests in the melodies.
- Enharmonic equivalents do not count, so use appropriate accidentals.
- Listen to scale degree function, especially when leaps are encountered.

Question 2

What was intended by the question?

Question 2 was intended to test dictation in the major mode and in compound meter. Also, it was intended to test recognition of the most common chromatic note, the leading tone to the dominant pitch.

How well did students perform?

Considering that this melody was intended to be more difficult than Question 1, many students had trouble with the challenging aspects of the melody, but there were also many who notated the melody correctly or nearly correctly.

What were common errors or omissions?

The most common errors included: missing the chromatic note, writing a scale segment instead of a triad outline, and missing dotted rhythms such as dotted eighth-sixteenth-eighth due to inexperience with common rhythmic patterns found in compound meter.

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?

- Emphasize careful notation.
- Emphasize common rhythms in compound meter.
- Practice singing and hearing pitch patterns that will help students discriminate between triad outlines and scalar passages.
- Students who have great difficulty with either pitch or rhythm might be well advised to complete first what they do well. A small amount of credit is given to students who have all pitches or all rhythms correct.

Question 3

What was intended by the question?

The purpose of Question 3 was to test melodic (soprano and bass lines) and harmonic (chord analyses) dictation skills. Both melodic lines were very accessible, being composed of mostly scalar passages with few skips. The harmonic material was entirely diatonic and includes only one seventh chord (root position dominant seventh) and the cadential six-four chord. It also included a deceptive resolution (V to vi) and the fine discrimination between ii6 and IV.

How well did students perform?

In general, students performed with greater success on the melodic lines than on the harmonic analysis. Many students missed the initial skip in the bass line, which threw off much of the bass for the first two measures. Happily, many heard the deceptive resolution from measure two to measure three and were able to salvage the second half of the bass and, often, the harmonic analysis.

What were common errors or omissions?

The most common errors included missing the skip of a third in the bass in the first measure, confusing IV and ii6, missing the seventh on the V7 (even though the seventh was in the soprano) and not identifying correctly the cadential six-four.

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 should use pencil, not pen, to complete the test questions.
- Teachers should emphasize good, careful manuscript. Stems were sometimes not used, and accidentals were observed on the wrong side of the notes they were supposed to alter.
- *Teachers should be aware that the soprano line, the bass line and the Roman numeral analysis are scored separately.*

Question 4

What was intended by the question?

The purpose of this question was to test the student's ability to separate outer voices and notate them correctly, and the ability to analyze chords aurally. In addition, it tested the student's ability to hear and identify more complex issues such as inverted seventh chords, less common secondary dominants, and the common cadences, specifically the Phrygian cadence.

How well did students perform?

Most students attempted the question. Considering that Question 4 was intended to be the more difficult of the two harmonic dictation questions, it posed some challenges to students. Many missed the raised leading tone in measure two but successfully navigated the lowered seventh scale degree in measure three and were able to complete the soprano line. Some students had difficulty with the chromatic bass line in measures three and four.

What were common errors or omissions?

The most common errors included missing the skip of a third in the bass and the fourth in the soprano in measure one, incorrectly identifying the second chord as iii instead of I6, incorrectly identifying the inversion of the seventh chord in measure two, incorrectly identifying the secondary dominant in measure 3 (or missing the chromatic line which implies the secondary function) and missing the voice exchange in measure four which leads to the Phrygian cadence.

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?

- Emphasize to students which chords are more likely (iii highly unlikely, vii not very likely). These questions test standard material, not uncharacteristic progressions rarely found in music.
- Emphasize that the student should know and expect to hear common progressions.
- Emphasize that the vi and iii are usually not inverted.
- Emphasize the importance and likeliness of conjunct lines.
- Emphasize the full range of possible cadences.

Question 5

What was intended by the question?

The purpose of this question was to test the ability of students to analyze a figured bass line and then to write an appropriate four-voice harmonization of it. This specific question featured a minor melody with root and first inversion chords, two dominant chords which require raised leading tones, and a Phrygian cadence.

How well did students perform?

Students were fairly successful with this question. Most were able to get all or most of the points for the Roman numeral analysis. Many students forgot to raise the seventh scale degree on the two dominant chords and lost points for chord spelling and voice leading.

What were common errors or omissions?

By far, the most common errors were the missing D sharps on the two dominant chords. Parallel octaves and augmented seconds were common between ii6 and V in the first measure. Hidden fifths were common between iv6 and V in the last measure. Chord spacing was a problem for several 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?

- Students should use pencil, not pen, to complete the test questions.
- Clear notation and correct placement of accidentals are essential for students to be able to receive full credit for their work.
- Chord spelling is especially important because, if a chord is misspelled, voice leading is not considered at all.
- Smooth voice leading is a goal for success in this type of exercise. Students should practice singing chorale exercises and doing keyboard work in class to have a tactile experience with smooth voice leading.
- Since the addition of non-harmonic tones frequently creates voice-leading errors that would not be present otherwise, teachers are encouraged to advise their students to keep their answers simple and not add extraneous information.

Question 6

What was intended by the question?

This newly added question was intended to test the student's ability to correctly spell diatonic and secondary dominant chords from Roman numerals (including writing a bass line that correctly reflects the given inversions), correctly resolve diatonic seventh chords and secondary dominants and successfully partwrite a harmonic root sequence of descending fifths (vi V7/V V I).

How well did students perform?

Students performed somewhat less successfully on Question 6 than they did on Question 5. Many students forgot the accidental needed for the V7/V or, if they spelled the chord correctly, resolved it incorrectly. Several students wrote an incorrect bass note for the ii 6/5.

What were common errors or omissions?

The most common error was the missing B natural on V7/V. Other common errors included incorrectly spelled chords and an incorrect bass note on ii 6/5. These mistakes resulted in the loss of voice leading points in addition to chord spelling points. Other common errors included incorrect resolutions of sevenths and the leading tone when in the soprano, fifths by contrary motion, doubled leading tones and parallels between chords with roots a second apart (V to vi).

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 should work on correct chord spelling, careful notation in pencil only, logical voice leading (for example, start in closed position and remain there) and careful selection of notes to be doubled.
- Urge students to read and follow instructions carefully.
- If possible, begin study of secondary dominants earlier in the second semester so that students will be more familiar with them.
- Urge students to avoid adding sevenths and non-harmonic tones unless specifically requested in the instructions or question, since incorrect usage of these is quite common.
- Encourage students to think linearly instead of vertically and emphasize stepwise motion over leaps.

Question 7

What was intended by the question?

Question 7 was intended to test a student's ability to creatively synthesize all the various components (aural, logical, melodic, harmonic and contrapuntal) that have been studied in AP Music Theory into a short composition. The entire soprano line was provided with a given bass line and suggested harmonization for the first one and one half phrases. The student was asked to continue, in a style consistent with the given material, the bass line and suggested harmonic analysis through the remaining two and one half phrases. The question, in addition, tested knowledge of cadences, secondary functions and modulation.

How well did students perform?

Students seem to have made a greater effort to attempt the challenges of this question this year. Many students achieved great success, being able to produce a bass line and harmonization which nicely fulfilled the demands of the soprano line. Others successfully handled the remaining half of the second phrase, did less well with the third phrase and then recovered with an appropriate fourth phrase.

What were common errors or omissions?

Some students did not start at the middle of the second phrase as was instructed; they probably did not read the instructions carefully. Many wrote a bass line in the third phrase which placed C naturals and C sharps in direct conflict with each other; they obviously missed the significance of the chromaticism. Some students used inappropriate second inversion triads; others wrote retrogressions or other incorrect chord progressions (V to IV or V/V to I). Many missed the significance of the last given bass note and chord (V 4/2) and the necessary resolution to I6. Several used nonharmonic tones that were ill-chosen and created unfortunate voice-leading problems.

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?

- Emphasize to students the limited uses of second-inversion triads.
- Emphasize that diminished triads are normally not in root position.
- Emphasize that iii chords are uncommon.
- Emphasize that the students can keep their answer simple and receive the full score. Adding inversions and nonharmonic tones, if they are not sure how to do so, is almost always disadvantageous.
- Suggest to students that if they are overwhelmed, they could just do cadences.
- Emphasize that a cadence is not the place for creativity.
- Emphasize that students should not alter the given material.

Sight-Singing Question 1

What was intended by the question?

The purpose of this question was to test the student's ability to sight-sing a major melody in simple quadruple meter. Mostly scale in construction, the melody did have a few skips that outlined either the tonic or dominant chords. It did include one skip of a major sixth from scale degree 5 up to 3 in the tonic triad. The rhythm was very accessible with only one dotted rhythm.

How well did students perform?

Students seemed to perform better than in previous years on this question. If a student missed an interval, there were several opportunities to get back to the correct pitches, primarily due to the fact that the tonic F appeared five times in the melody. The third measure, with the dotted rhythm and skip of a major sixth, proved difficult for many students, but a large number of them were able to recover and correctly sing the last two pitches. More students held the last note an appropriate length than in past years.

What were common errors or omissions?

The most common errors included the descending scale from degree 1 to 5 in the first half measure (frequently out of tune), missing the final eighth of the first half second measure, missing the major sixth (many sang a minor seventh and then missed the next note) and missing the two notes approaching the final tonic.

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?

- Have students warm up the voice during the practice period and not merely go over the melody in their heads. Begin by singing a major (in the case of the other melody) or a minor scale up and down from the given pitch, then work your way through the melody.
- Remind students to begin and end on the same pitch, and to hold the final pitch its full length.

- Encourage students to try to remember the sound of the tonic pitch throughout the melody so that it can be used as a reference point.
- Encourage students, before singing the melody for the exam, to take a good breath that will fill the voice's "tank" with enough power.

Sight-Singing Question 2

What was intended by the question?

The purpose of the second sight-singing question was to test the student's ability to sight-sing a minor mode melody in compound meter. It featured contrasting segments of triadic outlines with melodic minor scalar passages. In addition, the rhythm of the melody introduced two different dotted eighth-sixteenth note figures. The last measure moved from scale degree 5 to 1 but added the extra complexity of the leading tone of the dominant.

How well did students perform?

Students, in general, did somewhat less well on this sight-singing question. Many had trouble correctly singing the opening tonic triad in minor. The leading tone to the dominant was very difficult for many students. However, a large number sang the ascending and descending melodic minor scale fragment surprisingly well.

What were common errors or omissions?

The tonic triad outline in the first half measure proved to be very difficult for many students who either sang a major triad, a very out-of-tune minor triad or a scale pattern. The skip from scale degree 2 to 5 in measure two was also a problem. The neighboring leading tone to scale degree 5 was a major challenge to many students; a large number sang it as a whole step instead of a half step.

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?

- Encourage students to practice singing major and minor triad arpeggio drills, often starting from the same root but alternating between major and minor (major up and down, minor up and down, major up and minor down, minor up and major down).
- Then practice similar patterns alternating triad arpeggios with scale passages starting from tonic.
- Practice the different types of minor scales, emphasizing the differences among them.
- Practice singing major and minor seconds above and below a given note.
- Practice adding neighboring leading tones to different scale degrees, especially scale degree five.
- For additional suggestions, see notes for Sight-Singing Question 1.