



Student Performance Q&A:

2002 AP[®] Spanish Language Free-Response Questions

The following comments are provided by the Chief Reader regarding the 2002 free-response questions for AP Spanish Language. *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.

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

What was intended by the question?

This section tests discrete language items in context. The first section consisted of a paragraph with blanks that needed to be filled in with an appropriate form of the base word. This year's items called primarily for noun/adjective agreements, spelling changes, and pronoun forms. The second section centered on verb usage and contained 10 separate sentences with a blank to be filled in with the necessary form of the verb. This year's items included several subjunctives, *seguir* + gerund, a command, the preterite of *saber*, etc.

How well did students perform?

This is often a difficult section for students since the responses must be very precise. There were few perfect scores on this year's exam.

What were common errors or omissions?

- Using accents erroneously (omitting where needed, including when not necessary).
- Giving two or more responses for an item.
- Writing *cualquiera* instead of *cualquier*, giving various incorrect forms instead of *veintiuna*, and missing some of the subjunctives.

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?

- Tell students to read the instructions carefully. Only one word is allowed in the paragraph completion section; one or more words are permitted in the verb fill-ins if they are a tense of the verb in parenthesis (*habíamos salido/salir*) or a reflexive verb and pronoun (*me levanté/levantarse*).

- Instruct students not to write two responses for an item. Where there are two or more responses, the item will be marked wrong unless all the responses are correct.
- Help students master the conjugations, spelling changes, agreements, and the use of accents.
- Tell students to read each item carefully to see the context of the word that is being tested.
- Instruct students to read the entire paragraph carefully before responding.
- Practice the commands, the subjunctive, and non/adjective and subject/verb agreements.
- Review the rules for identifying the gender of nouns and for forming the masculine and feminine plurals of adjectives.

Part A-2. Composition

What was intended by the question?

The prompt stated that some people think success consists merely of accumulating material goods. Students were asked to write an essay of at least 200 words discussing their own idea of success and to justify their opinion.

How well did students perform?

Performance was similar to other years except that some students did not understand the words *éxito* or *bienes materiales* and therefore wrote essays that were somewhat off topic. Students at the higher range of the scoring scale used a variety of verb tenses, had control of complex structures, wrote with some insight, and constructed well-organized essays.

What were common errors or omissions?

- A failure to discuss the topic fully (or the essay wanders from the topic).
- Restatement of the topic without adequate development of ideas.
- Lack of a clear introduction or a thesis statement.
- Poor organization.
- Few insights and little originality.
- Use of informal, oral language instead of a more formal writing style.
- Narrow range of vocabulary and use of only very basic structures of the language.
- Excessive repetition of ideas, vocabulary, and structures.
- Many grammar, spelling, and vocabulary errors.
- Use of many anglicisms.
- Failure to apply appropriate strategies for understanding the prompt.

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?

- Tell students to use the time allotted for thinking about the essay before starting to write.
- Help students understand that the content of their essay is very important, and that they are using the language to express their ideas.
- Discuss the concept of the audience and teach techniques for communicating with the reader.
- Help students develop interesting introductions and conclusions that do more than merely repeat the prompt.
- Practice writing conclusions that are not simply restatements of the introduction.
- Practice with students so that they are used to writing 200 word (or longer) essays in the time allowed.
- Train students to edit their own work.
- Work with students so that they become skilled in the conventions of the written language such as spelling and accents.
- Teach students how to organize their writing bearing in mind that it is not necessary to write a standard five-paragraph essay.
- Practice circumlocution.
- Make sure that students have a repertoire of connecting and subordinating expressions and know how to use them: *por eso, entonces, sin embargo, por otra parte*, etc.
- Practice writing complex sentences with subordinate clauses.

Part B-1. Picture Sequence

What was intended by the question?

The aim of this question was to elicit a sustained narrative, with emphasis on vocabulary pertaining to cultural topics such as art, libraries and television.

How well did students perform?

Many students performed quite well on the picture sequence. Most high school programs seem to give high priority to oral production, and this emphasis is apparent in the ability of students to narrate. The picture sequence produced a good spread of scores.

What were common errors or omissions?

- Typical vocabulary errors such as not knowing which word to use for “picture” or “painting” (“pictura” is not a Spanish word and “dibujo” was not appropriate), *librería* vs. *biblioteca*, etc.
- Trouble changing tenses when appropriate.
- In some cases, description prevailed over narration, especially in students who lacked vocabulary that could help them link the frames.
- Rapid, superficial narration that indicated a lack of linguistic resources for providing a sustained narration.
- Choppy, hesitant speech.

- Inability to link sentences and ideas with appropriate expressions.
- Poor pronunciation.
- Very simple structures, limited vocabulary.

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's important that students learn to narrate, that is, to tell the story they find in the picture sequence. Simply describing each picture or listing the items in the drawing is not narration.
- Practice the exam format, especially as the exam date approaches. Students should have a good sense of how much they need to speak in the two minutes provided for their narration.
- Tell students to study all the pictures during the two-minute prep time so that they have a good understanding of the story line.
- Give students tasks during the year that require extended discourse (presentations, story telling).
- Work to increase vocabulary.
- Practice complex structures.
- Practice "if clauses."
- Practice circumlocution as a technique for students to use if they do not know the appropriate vocabulary.
- Provide and practice vocabulary to help students make the transition between drawings and to link their ideas.
- Test the equipment shortly before the exam to make sure everything is working correctly.
- During the exam, be sure that the room is quiet and that students are not distracted by hearing other students speak.
- Make sure that the person who administers the exam has a thorough understanding of the format and knows when to stop and start the tapes.

Part B-2. Directed Responses

What was intended by the question?

The directed responses test students' ability to use Spanish in a simulated conversational situation. The topic this year was film.

How well did students perform?

Most students had something to say in response to the questions, although performance was weaker on questions 3-5, which were intended to elicit a higher level of thought and linguistic skill.

What were common errors or omissions?

- Failing to develop ideas when asked (*¿Por qué?*) or even when not (*¿Crees que las salas de cine desaparecerán en el futuro?*)
- Misunderstanding or not recognizing vocabulary (*vida actual*).
- Omitting one or more questions.
- Making many errors in basic structures (verb conjugations, agreements, possessives, *gustar*).
- Failing to answer questions thoroughly.
- Using only a small part of the 20 seconds for the responses.

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?

- Practice with the equipment that will be used on the day of the exam so that students and the exam supervisor are all familiar with how it works.
- Find a suitable place in which to administer the exam, without distracting noises such as bells and announcements.
- Separate the students so that they are not distracted by hearing each other speak.
- Practice the format of the exam.
- Practice filling the time (it's only 20 seconds).
- Help students master verbs and vocabulary beyond the most basic level.
- Practice circumlocution.
- Help students practice saying something in response to the question even though they may not have understood it perfectly.
- Provide many situations in which students need to think on their feet in Spanish, i.e., situations requiring spontaneous but thoughtful responses.
- Expose students to a variety of voices, speakers and accents.