



## Student Performance Q&A:

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

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

The DBQ is a skills-based question requiring interpretation, analysis, and synthesis. To obtain a base score of seven, the student must construct an explicit thesis and defend it using at least six of the seven given documents. The essay must substantively discuss change over time in and comparison of attitudes toward merchants and trade in both Islam and Christianity from their origins to 1500, using appropriate grouping and/or interpretation of the documents. The student must demonstrate an understanding of the six or seven documents used, misinterpreting no more than one. In addition, he/she must identify point of view in at least two documents and suggest an additional kind of document needed to assess the consequences of these Islamic and Christian attitudes on trade. If all of the above are done successfully, an additional one or two points may be added to the core score for excellent responses.

*How well did students perform?*

Overall this question was successful in allowing students to demonstrate their ability to construct a meaningful essay based on documents. The question is clearly stated, and overall, the documents are accessible. Almost all students, therefore, could construct an essay that met at least some of the scoring criteria. Most students were successful in formulating theses and in grouping at least some of the documents to support their arguments, especially in making comparisons between Islamic and Christian attitudes toward trade. Outside information was not required, and almost all students made a serious attempt to answer the question based on the documents. Some students wrote exceptionally strong essays but neglected to include the additional kind of document and/or point of view. This prevented them from fulfilling the seven core requirements, hence they were ineligible for the expanded core points that they might otherwise have earned.

*What were common errors or omissions?*

The most serious problem was that, as noted above, many students omitted the required, additional kind of document and/or point of view. Even essays indicating capable, knowledgeable students with the ability to think historically sometimes lacked one or both of these requirements. When asked to analyze the documents, some students only paraphrased them. The documents most often misinterpreted were the ones by Thomas Aquinas and Ibn Khaldun, followed by the one on Godric by Reginald. The treatment of Islam and Christianity in the essay did not have to be equal, but a number of students successfully discussed the question from the standpoint of Christianity but failed to substantively analyze Islamic attitudes. While most essays included acceptable comparisons, fewer addressed the issue of change over time well.

*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?*

- Most importantly, concentrate on teaching students to function as historians.
- In regard to the DBQ, present a variety of types of documentary evidence before your students and have them interpret, group, and analyze the documents to argue a thesis.
- Teach students to view documents in terms of point of view, bias, and context: that is, as products of their times, and have them work with multiple interpretations and conflicting evidence.
- Help students set aside their personal beliefs and prejudices when analyzing historical documents.
- When arguing a thesis, they should ask questions and consider what information or points of view would help them better answer them.
- Habituate students to look for change and/or continuity over time.
- Use a rich mix of content to work on the above with students.

Specific outside information was not required to answer this question, but an understanding of the development and spread of religions and the changes in trade patterns in this period enabled some students to discuss the question more fully and meaningfully.

## **Question 2**

*What was intended by the question?*

This question gets at the first two themes as described in the Course Description: “Impact and interaction among major societies (trade, systems of international exchange, war and diplomacy” and “the relationship of change and continuity across the world history periods covered in this course.” It also presents students with an opportunity to demonstrate that they have internalized one of the AP World History habits of mind: “Seeing global patterns over time and space while also acquiring the ability to connect local developments to global ones and to move through levels of generalization from the global to the particular.”

Students needed to choose two of the specified regions and show how each of these regions’ relationship to global trading patterns changed from 1750 to the present. To do this, students had to write an explicit thesis and support it with historical evidence that was both accurate and connected to global context. The essays needed to present a three-stage framework that showed each region’s relationships to global trading patterns in 1750, change(s) between 1750 and the present, and present relationships to global trading patterns. Analysis of why the change(s) occurred had to be included.

### *How well did students perform?*

Most students had at least a rudimentary thesis that stated the regions chosen and the notion of global trade patterns changing over time. Students did not usually develop an analytical thesis. More sophisticated students were able to compose a thesis that periodized the topic. In describing regions, students tended to make broad generalizations and did not always discuss specific places (countries or empires) or they would discuss only one place within a region. Most students did identify key events relating to global economic patterns. There was a tendency to list events as snapshots in time rather than showing how they flowed from one to another.

Change was a difficult idea for students to discuss. Analyzing why an event happened and how the event induced change continues to be a challenge for students. Writing change over time essays is clearly a new task for students and they were not generally effective in using transition words to show change. Many clearly developed at least three stages that showed the regions circa 1750, a middle period of changes, and the present. At times, students wrote “then and now” essays that left out that middle stage showing change. This kind of essay, among others, often showed an overall weakness in chronology, not demonstrating a knowledge of what came first and what came later. Students were able to include some very broad, rather loose connections to the larger global context but did not always successfully link events such as the world wars to the specific regions or to the question of trade.

Expanded core points were most often given to the essays that demonstrated: strong connections to global trading patterns; regional differentiation (more than one place was mentioned within a region); good analytical thinking; and accurate sequence and chronology.

There was a sense among readers that the good essays (8-9) were very sophisticated and analytical but the weak ones, in greater numbers, were lacking significantly in analysis and content. Surprisingly, readers had the perception that overall organization was stronger within the change-over-time essays, perhaps reflecting student attempts to organize a question with so many tasks.

### *What were common errors or omissions?*

The wide range of regional choices and the multiple tasks that students had to complete made this a very challenging question. By requiring them to choose two regions and show their change over time, students could (and did) in essence write two parallel essays showing no connections between the two. By having to connect each region to global trading patterns students were required to communicate an understanding of world history, however many students answered the question by making only very broad generalizations about each region. For example, students might write that “sub-Saharan Africa did this” and “North America did that,” which often led to superficiality and regional stereotyping. In some cases, students would equate the United States with North America or China with East Asia, neglecting regional variation. Specific weaknesses found in many student essays included the following:

- Eastern Europe was described as western Europe. Since western Europe was not one of the specified regions, this could not get credit as a region.
- South and Southeast Asia were often confused with East Asia. Since both were specified regions, a student could receive credit, despite a lack of geographic understanding.
- Students described a series of events but did not explain or analyze what changed from one event to the next. They provided a snapshot essay which did not explain change over time or connect these events to the larger global context. Or they wrote a “then and now” essay which explained the world in 1750 and the situation presently but did not show a middle stage showing change.

- Lack of an explicit thesis.
- Needed more transition words to show change in time.

*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 change-over-time essay is a new writing task for many students. Students might approach the question in several ways. Teachers should encourage their students to read the question closely and identify the specified tasks. Students need to then make sure they address each task adequately.

Improved change-over-time writing should include attention to how time is being discussed. Students use *transition phrases* like “as time moved on” and “as time progressed.” Better language might be, “over time,” “as things evolved,” “in the 19<sup>th</sup> century,” or “then comes the period of time when... industrialization.”

It was also clear from student responses that significant work still needs to be done to bring the insights of the academic field of World History into Advanced Placement classrooms. World history asks us to consider the big picture and to be able to see long-term patterns. While some students are very good at discerning these longer trends and incorporating appropriate information from earlier times into their essays, there are also some common mistakes that are made. For example, a surprising number of students stated that East Asia had never been part of the global trading network prior to 1750. They then asserted that China and Japan isolated themselves and it was not until the west opened them up that they were connected to the global economic network. While these inaccurate assertions did not count against a student in scoring, the overall impression was that students did not communicate their understanding of the historical past and trends. Workshop Consultants should help AP World History teachers increase their own knowledge of recent world history research through, for example, familiarity with the *Journal of World History*.

To the extent that answers to this question often dealt with issues of imperialism and relations between Western and non-Western peoples, many students used a tone that could be distracting to the reader. World history is about discovering the similarities and differences of many places and growing to appreciate that there are different interpretations of history. In many essays we saw ardent anti-imperialism as well as Western triumphalism. Students used words like “us” and “them” that pointed to their own lack of objectivity in assessing historical trends. The same tendencies were also sometimes apparent in the other two free-response questions. Workshop consultants should refer AP World History teachers to the “habits of mind” section of the Course Description to consider how these pitfalls might be avoided.

Geography is another point of concern. In the Course Description geography is specifically incorporated into the Foundations section. However, it is impossible to teach the course without integrating geography throughout. We found that many students, perhaps under test conditions, confused east and west. As a result, they chose Eastern Europe as a region but wrote about Spain, Portugal and Britain. Another common error involved the South and Southeast Asia being confused with East Asia so China became part of South Asia. In addition, an understanding of the importance of geographic factors to history does help students to explain change (location, human environment interaction, natural resources).

As mentioned in reference to the DBQ, the concepts of chronology and change over time are very difficult for many students to master. One suggestion might be for students to practice sequencing within a theme and/or unit. For example, a teacher might periodically compile a random list of 10 events related to trade (or gender, technology, labor systems). Students might then sequence these lists in the correct chronological order and write a paragraph discussing and connecting larger global processes (e.g.: industrial revolution, conflicts, imperialism, opening of trade circuits). While specific dates do not need to be included, students do need to have a basic understanding of sequence-- what happened first and what was happening at the same time as larger global processes.

Finally, it is helpful (though not required) for the coherence of a student's essay if key terms are defined. For example, global trading patterns might be defined as economic connections or interactions, or the exchange of goods and services between and among different global regions. Patterns could be defined to be as broadly as global trade markets/ globalization or as specifically as the movement of drugs, sex trafficking, and the arms trade. The reader then can clearly assess if the student related evidence to these patterns rather than trying to guess the student's intention.

### **Question 3**

*What was intended by the question?*

The intent of the question was to invite students to examine the differing ways in which the people of China and Japan responded to western intrusion in the nineteenth century. To do so satisfactorily, students had to state an explicit thesis, address four of the five parts of the question, provide at least two examples each of relevant evidence from China and Japan in support of the thesis, and make at least one direct comparison between the Chinese and Japanese responses.

*How well did students perform?*

In general, students appear quite capable of dealing with comparison in world history. However, the answers to this question were often too brief and too lacking in substance to be satisfactory. It should be noted that this question was the last one on a long and quite demanding exam. Students need instruction and practice in allocating their time properly so that they do not compromise their performance on the final free-response questions

*What were common errors or omissions?*

Many of the students were able to formulate a satisfactory thesis but fewer of them were able to address at least four parts of the question. The most common part of the question that was omitted from the essays was analysis/explanation. This is the part of the question that called upon the students to address the issue of causation: why did the west penetrate China and Japan in the nineteenth century and/or why did the Chinese and Japanese responses to the west differ?

A second weak spot in many essays was the lack of relevant and specific evidence in support of the thesis. Some of the evidence that students provided was not relevant because it did not relate to the nineteenth century, ca. 1780-1914. In many other cases the evidence provided was too vague to be considered accurate.

A third area where students frequently had difficulty was the comparative part of the question. Many of the essays made at least one basic comparative point but the evidence to substantiate the point was often insufficient. When this was the case, the student lost the point.

Finally, as with the other free-response items, students sometimes misread the question. As already mentioned, this misreading sometimes had to do with chronology (“the nineteenth century”). Another common mistake of this type was for student to misplace their emphasis. The question asks about “*the differing responses of China and Japan*” in the context of “Western penetration.” Many students put their emphasis on the latter rather than the former, indicating an inappropriate Eurocentric emphasis as well as the inability to answer the question as it was asked.

*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 encourage your students to read the question carefully so that they will be in a position to address all its parts.

Continue to help your students sharpen the skills needed to formulate and state a clear and comprehensive thesis.

Continue to help your students develop the skills needed to assemble and deploy relevant and clear examples of historical evidence in support of their thesis.

Continue to help your students to understand the importance causation for historians. In this regard, continue to help them develop 1) the skill of looking for causation in their research; and, 2) the skill of addressing this issue in their writing.

Continue to help your students develop their sensitivity to chronology. Historians know that correctly sequencing events is important because it opens the way to an understanding of causation. Moreover, while we obviously do not want to encourage students to memorize long lists of dates, when they do include certain key dates in their essays (e.g. for the Opium War and the Perry Mission), they provide evidence of their appreciation of the importance of chronology as an aid to understanding the human past.