



Student Performance Q&A: 2004 AP[®] European History Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2004 free-response questions for AP[®] European History were written by the Chief Reader, George E. Munro of Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia. They give an overview of each free-response question and of how students performed on the question, 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 provided. Teachers are encouraged to attend a College Board workshop to learn strategies for improving student performance in specific areas.

Question 1

What was the intent of this question?

The intent of this document-based question (DBQ) was to see how well students could use and analyze 11 documents to discuss “attitudes toward and responses to the poor in Europe between approximately 1450 and 1700.” Students were instructed to organize the documents in as many appropriate ways as possible, to analyze bias and point of view, and to use a majority of the documents. Each of these tasks carried a basic core point on the scoring guidelines.

The DBQ had 10 prose documents and 1 visual, a Rembrandt etching. The documents were created by a wide variety of authors: priests, town councils, rulers and high government officials, a doctor, a merchant, and a humanist; one of the documents was a poorhouse regulation.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 5.3 out of a possible nine points. Although about 40 percent of the essays earned scores of 6, 7, 8, or 9, most of these scores were either 6 and 7. Few students (12 percent) earned scores of 0, 1, 2, or 3, as is typical for the DBQ using the basic core section of the scoring guidelines. This was particularly the case this year because this DBQ was easily accessible to most students.

The Readers’ overall impression was that students generally provided more attribution and more discussion of authorial point of view (bias) and that they wrote longer essays this year than last year. More students had an easy time with providing three groups and in presenting an acceptable thesis statement. Students who lost basic core points generally lost them for failing to have three acceptable groups, neglecting to address point of view appropriately in three documents, or making more than one major error.

What were common student errors or omissions?

The most common omission was the failure to specifically address the issue of point of view in the documents. Because each document in this particular DBQ provided students with opportunities to perform this task, the basic core section of the scoring guidelines held to the standard that is articulated in the Course Description; the core point for point of view was awarded only to those essays that addressed the issue in at least three documents. Many students offered collective analyses of point of view (e.g., the two priests or the two town councils), each of which was accepted as one instance toward the minimum of three.

The failure to find as many as three groups was much less common because this DBQ provided a plethora of grouping possibilities. Most students managed to delineate three groups; many found four or more. At times, they organized the documents into two groups with a legitimate subgroup within one of the two larger groups.

There were a surprising number of misinterpretations of documents in the essays. Most of the documents were straightforward and easily comprehensible. Errors sometimes occurred as students tried to categorize a document in such a way as to make it fit into a group to which the document did not really belong. There were four more complex documents (Charles V, Richelieu, Mallefer, Vives), which students sometimes interpreted erroneously, but students also made errors when describing or analyzing easier documents.

Based on your experience of student responses at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?

- Under the current scoring guidelines, the magic number for groupings and for discussing point of view is three: three documents for which authorial point of view is addressed and appropriate identification of three groups.
- Attribution is no longer sufficient for demonstrating understanding of authorial point of view. Students must perform actual analysis of a document's bias, reliability, tone, or intent, or an evaluation of the connection between the author's class/position/religion/nationality and the content of the document. This type of analysis should be taught as offering an explanation as to the "why" of a document, in contrast to description, which focuses on the "what."
- Students need more practice in the correct analysis of documents. It must be emphasized that not all interpretations are valid.
- Thesis statements should be explicit, address the question directly, and refer to the documents in some specific way. A strong thesis statement can be a great help to an essay.

Question 2

What was the intent of this question?

This question required a working knowledge of how the French and Russian revolutions resulted in changes in the status of women in each country. More pointedly, the question stipulated four interrelated tasks: (1) a discussion of women's participation in the French and Russian revolutions; (2) a discussion of changes in women's status that resulted from the revolutions; (3) comparisons (similarities) between the French and Russian revolutions regarding changes in the status of

women; and (4) contrasts (dissimilarities) between the French and Russian revolutions regarding changes in the status of women.

The principal terms of the question are “compare” and “contrast.” The Course Description defines the term “compare” as the examination of issues “for the purpose of noting similarities and differences”; it defines the term “contrast” as an examination of issues “in order to show dissimilarities or points of difference.” Since the prompt directed students to both compare and contrast, essays had to discuss at least one point of comparison and one point of contrast in order to earn a score in the high category (6–9).

Students were given the *explicit* task of analyzing how the status of women in each country was affected by the course of its revolutionary era. *Implicitly*, however, the question called for an understanding of whether each revolution did in fact alter the status of women, and if so, why, and if not, why not. It therefore was permissible for students to discuss the roles of women in the French and Russian revolutions, along with their motives and goals and the extent to which their aspirations were realized. Yet another implicit charge of the question, one that was specifically related to the verb “changed,” was to show at least a minimal understanding of the status of women in each country before the revolutions. However, the most important aspect of the question was change.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 2.7 out of a possible nine points. Thus, student performance on this question was rather weak.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Student errors and omissions fell into two categories. With respect to the French Revolution, students showed little knowledge regarding the role of women. Most students provided a general survey of the revolution, here and there adding a few references to the roles of prominent women. Few students knew any particulars regarding advances in the status of women. Far more glaring, and more widespread, was students’ poor state of knowledge in general about the Russian Revolution and an almost total absence of knowledge in particular about either the role or the liberation of women in that revolution.

Based on your experience of student responses at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?

- Pay special attention to the detailed thematic scoring standards that are provided for this question on AP Central® (apcentral.collegeboard.com).
- Note carefully the scoring guidelines for this free-response question, which can be found on AP Central.
- Consider offering a more thorough approach to both revolutions and to the place of women and their aspirations within the revolutionary efforts. This should be relatively easy to accomplish vis-à-vis the French Revolution.

Question 3

What was the intent of this question?

This question required students to use their knowledge of the interwar period to explain how European dictators used technology and mass culture to increase their power. The question gave students the opportunity to show how the history of technology and social history (mass culture) connect with economic and political history. The question also gave the better students a chance to compare and contrast how dictators used technology and mass culture, though that was not a central charge of the question.

How well did students perform on this question?

This question had the highest mean score of Questions 2 through 7, with a mean score of 4.4 out of a possible nine points. Students demonstrated considerable familiarity with the interwar period, especially with regard to the aftermath of the Great War and the onset of the Great Depression. The majority of students showed that they were aware of a connection between technology and the ability of dictators to establish totalitarian governments, and that those governments had to use and mold mass culture to establish their unprecedented level of power. The level of specificity of evidence varied considerably. While most students conveyed that radio and film (and an often overestimated impact of TV) were crucial technological tools, few could go on to the next level of specificity, mentioning, for example, Leni Riefenstahl or Sergei Eisenstein in the realm of film. A substantial minority of students also failed to get beyond a generic description of how dictators used technology and mass culture, writing essays with no mention of specific dictators at all, or just listing a few names. A small number of students failed to meet the minimum requirements of the essay, either through a lack of understanding of what the question asked or a lack of adequate knowledge on this subject.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Students sometimes failed to include a thesis, despite the specific charge to do so in the directions for the free-response questions. Instead, many students simply restated the question without attempting to give an indication of how they intended to answer it.
- Students sometimes failed to tie their observations to specific dictators, producing, as a result, very generic essays that referred to “dictators” in general.
- Students frequently overestimated the impact of TV during the interwar period.
- Students often could not provide truly specific evidence beyond talking about radio, film, etc.
- Students sometimes had difficulty defining what “mass culture” actually was.
- Students sometimes failed to stay within the chronological parameters of the question, allowing their answers to become dominated by World War II issues.

Based on your experience of student responses at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?

- Teachers need to be sure that students understand what a thesis is and how it should function in a well-crafted essay.

- Students frequently do not display an understanding of what “specific evidence” means. They need models of essays that truly drive their points home with compelling and specific evidence.
- Students need training in close reading of questions. What does the question actually require them to do? What is the question’s time frame?

Question 4

What was the intent of this question?

This question asked students to identify and analyze the factors that encouraged and discouraged European unity from 1945 to 2001. The time period covered the immediate postwar period, the Cold War, and the decade or so after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score on this question was 4.1 out of a possible nine points. Scores covered the full range. Some students knew absolutely nothing, or almost nothing, about the topic: approximately 13 percent of the essays received a score of 0, and 16 percent received a score of 1. Similar percentages of essays (12 to 13 percent) received a score of 4, 5, or 6, indicating that many students knew a fair amount about the topic. Approximately as many essays received a score of 2 or 3 as received a score of 8 or 9, which indicates that relatively few students knew little about the topic. The balance of scores suggests that this question was an accurate test of student knowledge on an important topic.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Most students knew something about this topic, if only about the fall of the Berlin Wall or the introduction of the euro. Perhaps the most common error was not the omission of information but the omission of entire decades. Mid-range essays tended to jump from the aftermath of World War II (the Marshall Plan, the Iron Curtain, the formation of NATO and later the Warsaw Pact) to 1989/91 (the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union). A common omission was the 1950s through 1980s, although, to be fair, there were few dramatic events in those decades. Less common, but still frequent enough to be noticed, was the omission of a region, either Eastern or Western Europe.

Based on your experience of student responses at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?

Teachers should cover events up to the recent past. (This message should also be sent to textbook publishers; not all textbooks cover recent events with any detail.) Essays could not earn the highest scores if they did not at least acknowledge events after 1991. On a related point, students need to learn the postwar chronology. Some essays demonstrated a poor grasp of the sequence of events (e.g., identifying the formation of NATO as a response to the Warsaw Pact). Students also need to be reminded to respond to the question. In this case, they needed to cover the entire time period in order to get a score of 8 or 9. This question also rewarded those students who could recognize and address the complexity of questions. Mid-range essays presented a trajectory against unification to 1989/91 and then assumed that all events after 1989/91 tended toward unity, while stronger essays

noted factors encouraging unity even during the Cold War and factors discouraging unity even after 1991.

Question 5

What was the intent of this question?

The intent of this question was to get students to identify characteristics of humanism (revival of the classics, secularism, individualism, love of learning, dignity of man) and to relate them to three specific works of art (painting, drawing, sculpture, or architecture) of the Italian Renaissance.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 4.3 out of a possible nine points. While most students were able to identify and often describe three works of Italian Renaissance art, many had only a limited definition of humanism. A fair number of students did not focus on the humanist aspect of the question but got caught up in elaborate descriptions of new artistic techniques like perspective, sfumato, chiaroscuro, and so forth.

What were common student errors or omissions?

A large number of students failed to identify humanist ideas which could then be reflected in the works of art. Many began to contrast Renaissance art with medieval art and talked about Renaissance changes without linking them to humanism specifically.

Discussing artistic techniques with respect to painting proved particularly deceptive because, unlike sculpture and architecture, they are not really influenced by the Greeks and Romans because little painting of any significance from the ancient world survives. Thus, students who concentrated on this topic often failed to address the question.

Based on your experience of student responses at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?

As always, teachers need to instruct students to maintain their focus on the essay prompt and to respond to that. Clearly, teachers are doing a good job of teaching students about Renaissance art because many students could correctly identify and describe a number of important art works of the Italian Renaissance.

A fair number of students were able to successfully identify humanist ideas and link them in a persuasive way to Italian Renaissance art works. Some students identified works that were not Italian or were out of the period (Baroque or later).

Question 6

What was the intent of this question?

The intent of this question was to measure both students' grasp of factual information about the impact of the Scientific Revolution and their ability to apply that knowledge in measuring the revolution's impact on religion and philosophy in the period 1550 to 1750. It thus called for higher-order thinking skills.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 3.6 out of a possible nine points. The question drew 66 percent of the exam-takers, more than 51,000 essays. Most students, regardless of their score, showed knowledge of the Scientific Revolution and therefore appeared to have been prepared to answer it successfully. Readers were pleased that scores were spread across the full range and that the scoring standards were applied fairly and consistently.

What were common student errors or omissions?

There were several common types of errors. Many were minor errors of fact relating to scientists (e.g., Copernicus or Galileo being executed by the Church; Roger Bacon being mistaken for Francis Bacon, or geocentric and heliocentric being reversed). More serious errors related to analysis. It was common for students to present a narrative of the Scientific Revolution without providing any analysis of its impact on either religion or philosophy. Many students conflated religion and philosophy. This is not necessarily an error with regard to the period under consideration; but for a student to do this successfully, it was necessary to explain why the two topics were being treated jointly. The most common chronological error was the inclusion of Darwin in the answer. Occasionally the Reformation was placed after the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment was placed before it. The most common omission was to conflate religion and philosophy in a simplistic way, effectively leaving philosophy out of the answer.

Based on your experience of student responses at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?

- Go to workshops, or at least get College Board publications, and visit AP Central.
- Teach students to pick up the nouns and verbs from the question and use them in their answers.
- Make sure students read the question carefully and answer the question that has been asked.
- Remind students to support their generalizations with specific details wherever possible.

Question 7

What was the intent of this question?

This question required students to contrast the impact of nationalism in Germany and the Austrian Empire from 1848 to 1914. In its directive, “contrast the impact of nationalism,” the question made clear the requirement of examining with the purpose of demonstrating the dissimilarities or of pointing to the different manifestations of nationalism in the two areas from 1848 to 1914. The time frame implied politics beginning with the revolutionary wars and ending with the outbreak of World War I. The majority of students understood the political implications of the question.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 3.1 out of a possible nine points. The stronger essays provided a very thoughtful analysis of the impact of nationalism in Germany and the Austrian Empire. Although many students performed below average, the Readers read several hundred brilliant essays and thousands of good essays. The question required students to read carefully and pay close attention

to its chronology and contents. It also afforded them the opportunity to demonstrate their competence in discussing the different manifestations of nationalism and in examining the repercussions of these tendencies in both countries. The wording of the question allowed students to pursue a variety of paths to write a strong essay: Bismarck's wars and German unification, Kaiser Wilhelm II's imperial policy of expansion, the political impact of Italian nationalism, the Dual Monarchy and the plethora of ethnic groups and languages, the agitation of ethnic minorities for liberal reform and Pan-Slavism in the Austrian Empire.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Despite the relative straightforwardness of the question, the weaker essays failed to accomplish the assigned task, whether because of a lack of knowledge or of specificity. Many of the essays contained an apparent knowledge of Bismarck's wars, the balance of power in Europe, and the Austrian Empire's diverse ethnicity in a nationalistic period. The weaker essays, however, did not strongly relate this knowledge to the "impact of nationalism." The weaker essays also skewed the time frame in their responses to the question, limiting themselves either to 1848 to 1871 or 1867 to 1914, and they tended to focus primarily on the political unification of Germany or the foreign policy of the balance of power.

Based on your experience of student responses at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?

Teachers need to remind students of the importance of reading all questions with care and responding fully to the terms of questions, including the entire time period covered by the question.