



## Student Performance Q&A:

### 2004 AP<sup>®</sup> World History Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2004 free-response questions for AP<sup>®</sup> World History were written by the Chief Reader, Kenneth R. Curtis of California State University, Long Beach. 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 assess students' skills in working with documents to produce an analytical essay. Students were given historical background information that provided a chronological framework from the first century C.E. to 570 C.E. and included some specific reasons for political unrest or instability in China. The six documents were all fairly lengthy written texts and arranged in chronological order. This year's DBQ had no pictures, charts, or maps. The attributions/source information included the dates of the documents and information about each author's social and/or professional status and whether he was an acknowledged Confucianist or Buddhist. All of the documents were written by Chinese elite males, except the excerpt from "The Four Noble Truths," which was neither Chinese nor within the chronological framework of the historical background. Based on these documents, students should have been able to analyze political, social, economic, and religious responses to the spread of Buddhism in China.

As with all DBQs in AP World History, students were required to analyze point of view (POV) in the documents and to specify at least one additional type of document(s) that would help them answer the question more fully. Although the question specifically asked for an additional document that related to the extent of the appeal of Buddhism, Readers were fairly liberal in the type of additional document(s) they accepted as long as students made clear the connection between the additional document(s) and their answer to the question.

### ***How well did students perform on this question?***

On the whole, students performed well on this question. The mean score was 4.3 out of a possible 10 points, which was significantly higher than the mean scores achieved on the other two free-response questions. Since the DBQ in AP World History does not require the use of outside information, this means that many students are learning the skills associated with document analysis.

The question was straightforward and the majority of the students had a thesis statement in the beginning or at the conclusion of their essay. Most students were able to obtain the point for grouping the documents appropriately. (They were held to the rather low standard of only having to produce two relevant groupings, rather than three as in past years. Because of the nature of the question, most students produced only the simple groupings of “pro-Buddhist” and “anti-Buddhist.”) They had no trouble using all or all but one of the documents, and they had no trouble with grouping documents as a form of analysis. Document 3 was the only document that was generally difficult for students to interpret. (The documents and their attributions made it obvious that there were negative and positive responses.) It was gratifying to see how many students had been taught to ask for an additional document and, in fact, worked the request into the framework of their essay. In addition, compared with previous years, an increasing number of students did well in analyzing the POV of the documents.

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

As in years past, the two most frequently missed skills points in the basic core section of the scoring guidelines were POV (Number 5) and the request for additional documents (Number 7). Both of these points are exclusive to the DBQ, so one might conclude that students are not trained systematically to write DBQs and therefore have not internalized these skills. On the other hand, these directions are written on the exam and the requirement to ask for additional documents was part of the actual question, so there is not much excuse for students forgetting to do these tasks.

Other common student errors the Readers encountered involved using the documents, additional documents, and the historical background section; analyzing the documents for POV; and not supporting their essay with evidence from the documents.

- **Using the Documents.** When working with the documents themselves, students had some trouble figuring out what to do with Document 1 (according to Buddhist tradition, “The Four Noble Truths”) since it was both outside the time period of the rest of the documents and it had no direct relevance to the spread of Buddhism in China. It was the document most frequently left out of students’ essays. Students most frequently misinterpreted Document 3 (anonymous Chinese scholar, “The Disposition of Error”). In this document, written in a question-answer style, the stronger adjectives were in the anti-Buddhist explications while the pro-Buddhist responses were milder in language and tone. Many students, therefore, incorrectly saw this as an anti-Buddhist document. If they correctly interpreted all the other documents, however, this mistake did not hurt their score.
- **Requesting Additional Documents.** Students (and teachers) did a much better job than in past years with the analytical skill of realizing they could strengthen their arguments by using another document. Therefore, the Development Committee raised the bar for what it considered to be the minimally acceptable standard for this scoring point: it mandated that students explain *why* a particular document would be appropriate to their argument. Thus, Readers did *not* accept a request or a list that had no explicit or contextual reference to its appropriateness. Statements like “I would like a map” or “I would like a document from a

woman” without any explanation of how such a document would help further the student’s argument were not accepted.

Requiring students to explain why a document is appropriate, either specifically or within the context of a paragraph, rather than merely listing any random piece of evidence, is within the logic of the historical/analytical skill of this core point. While Readers did hold students to this standard, they were more flexible in the range of requests for the additional documents they accepted. There was a very explicit direction to ask for additional documentation to show the *extent of the appeal* of Buddhism. Most students did not follow this directive, and therefore Readers did not hold them to it; rather, they accepted a wide range of requests as long as students explained why it would be appropriate.

- **Acknowledging Historical Background.** On the whole, most students did not realize that the historical background section had any relevance to the task at hand, and therefore their essays showed no sense of chronologically specific attitudes. When Readers saw a chronologically argued essay, they could anticipate that it would have the potential to be quite good. More generally, students ignored the dates of the documents almost completely.
- **Analyzing for Point of View.** Mere attribution (repeating the identifying information of the document) has never been enough to attain this point on the exam. Students need to explain *why* this particular person produced this particular document at this particular time or place. Some students still have difficulty with this analytical skill (which may be either a teaching issue or a developmental issue related to the fact that most of the exam takers are sophomores). Many students, however, understood how to analyze documents for POV, and therefore the Development Committee raised the bar from previous years and required students to correctly analyze the POV of *three* documents to attain this core point. (The Generic Core-Scoring Guide for AP World History Document-Based Question, which can be found on page 34 in the Course Description, sets a minimal standard of analyzing POV in “at least two or three documents.”) Students who missed the POV point usually did *no* POV analysis; there were few students who missed the point because they did POV analysis of two documents instead of three.
- **Supporting with Evidence.** Interestingly, the most difficult and problematic point for students this year was Number 4 on the Generic Core-Scoring Guide: “Supports thesis with appropriate evidence from documents.” Frequently, students merely summarized the documents rather than analyzing them. Or to phrase it another way, they cited information from documents but never explained why that information was relevant to “analyzing the responses to the spread of Buddhism in China.” Often, essays degenerated into “this person liked Buddhism, and this one didn’t.” One method Readers used to discriminate summary from analysis was to ask if the student made any commentary on specific information.

***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?***

Based on these essays, teachers need to continue to emphasize the following basic skills with their students.

- **Working with Documents.** Students need steady and consistent training in working with documents throughout the year. They need to be exposed to both simple and sophisticated documents on a regular basis. Even though this particular DBQ did not have

visual documents like charts, maps, or photographs, these should not be ignored in training students for DBQ analysis.

- **Understanding the Scoring Guidelines.** Teachers need to realize that the Generic Core-Scoring Guide sets the minimal acceptable standards. For example, students should be taught to analyze POV in *every* document on a DBQ, not just two or three, in order to satisfy the scoring guidelines. Likewise, students should be taught to explain why an additional document might be useful to them and not merely taught such mechanical “tricks” as always asking for a “woman’s document” or “a peasant document.”
- **Finding POV.** Teachers need to continue to teach students how to assess POV. Teachers should avoid the use of the term “bias” if at all possible. Even though this word is currently used in the Generic Core-Scoring Guide, most students think of bias as a negative quality, and that compounds the difficulty in teaching them to analyze for POV. In its simplest analysis, students need to ascertain why this particular person held this particular opinion at this particular time and/or place. They might also consider the audience for whom the document was originally produced and the tone of the document, if appropriate.
- **Paying Attention to Chronology.** Most students ignored the dates of the documents, and yet this chronology in tandem with the historical background section was the simplest way to argue or structure the essay. In fact, the best students did recognize that Chinese attitudes toward Buddhism changed over time. This lack of attention to chronology is particularly puzzling since AP World History students are also writing change-over-time essays. Perhaps the solution is for teachers to write practice DBQs for which dates are key to successful analysis. Chronological grouping of documents should be encouraged when relevant.
- **Analyzing Information.** Students need to be taught the distinction between “plot summary” (what the document says) and “analysis” (how it supports the thesis/argument). One way to phrase it might be to ask “so what?” when students cite a piece of information. Rather than just repeating information from the documents, students must comment on information and relate it to the broader question.
- **Requesting Additional Documents.** Teachers have done an impressive job of teaching students to wonder what other document(s) might make their arguments stronger. Teachers need to emphasize that the call for an additional document needs to be explained by asking why that document would be appropriate.

## Question 2

### ***What was the intent of this question?***

The intent of this change-over-time (COT) question was to focus students on issues of changing labor systems, one of the topics of the AP World History course as detailed in the Summary Course Outline for World History in the Course Description. Students were to analyze changes in labor systems during a single chronological period, 1750–1914. (In previous years, COT questions have asked students to analyze changes *across* two time periods.) Although all students were required to answer this question, they were given a choice of regional focus. Students had to draw on their knowledge of world events and processes to explain the causes of changes. In addition, they had to draw upon the information throughout the entire time period to describe at least one continuity that was also shaped by world events or processes.

### ***How well did students perform on this question?***

The mean score was 2.5 out of a possible nine points, a disappointing result that indicates that insufficient attention has been paid to changing labor systems.

For this year's question there was a considerable variation in the quality of essays, depending on which region was selected. In general, students who selected Russia seemed to have a basic understanding of serfdom and the process of emancipation and could say something about Russia's process of industrialization. Students who chose Latin America and the Caribbean tended to be slightly less able than those who chose Russia, but they were generally able to write essays that focused on relevant issues like the plantation economies and the abolition of slavery. Overall, students who chose sub-Saharan Africa were the weakest performers. Their answers tended to focus too exclusively on slavery, and in that context they paid little attention to the effect of slavery and its abolition *within* Africa itself. Less common were essays that included relevant information on labor systems associated with European colonialism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

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

Common student errors basically depended on the area of the world a student chose.

- **Russia.** The most prevalent error from students who wrote about Russia was the inclusion of information from outside of the question's time frame. For example, students wrote about Peter the Great, communism, Stalin, or Russia being industrialized in 1750. Accurate chronology is still a problem for students.
- **Latin America and the Caribbean.** The most prevalent error from students who wrote about this area was the emphasis on slave trade instead of the labor system of slavery, and students made little mention of other kinds of labor, except indentured workers. Some students also provided inaccurate information about industrialization and factory workers being in all of Latin America and not in specific countries. Others wrote that emancipation led to rapid industrialization.
- **Sub-Saharan Africa.** Some of the students who wrote about sub-Saharan Africa were not familiar with this area and included countries not in Africa. Many other students discussed the Atlantic slave trade but not in the context of its impact on Africa. Most of the students who chose Africa wrote about slavery but very rarely discussed any other labor systems, such as wage labor, in Africa. Students also sometimes tended to skip the imperialist period entirely, focusing on the slave trade without reference to continuity of internal forced labor. One of the main reasons for these omissions is the lack of coverage of nineteenth-century Africa in textbooks other than in the context of slavery or colonialism; textbooks contain little about specific labor systems besides slavery and other forms of coerced labor.

### ***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?***

Based on these essays, teachers need to continue to emphasize the following basic skills with their students.

- **Increasing Understanding of Key Terms.** Probably the most significant problem was students' lack of understanding of the term "labor system," even though it is a key element of one of the diverse interpretations questions (Number 7) in the 1750–1914 section of the

Course Description's Summary Course Outline of World History and is used in a sample essay in the Course Description. Students need a better sense of the definitions of key terms included in the Course Description's Themes section and the Habits of Mind or Skills section, like patterns of interaction, demography, technology, social structure, gender structure, and so on. Many students identified labor systems with trade, the economy, or economic development.

- **Working with Continuity and COT.** Teachers and students need to be reminded that this is a continuity and COT question. Teachers need to structure the course so that continuities in various themes are an integral part of the curriculum and explicitly identified throughout the year on an ongoing basis. Students need to practice identifying implicit and explicit examples of historical continuity in textbooks. When the references to continuity are implicit rather than explicit (as is often the case), teachers need to provide information and opportunities for increased student knowledge in this area. The relationship between changes and continuities should be a regular focus of the AP World History course.
- **Following the Course Description.** Teachers must stay focused on the Course Description, especially the Themes section and the Habits of Mind or Skills section. This course does not focus on just political history; students need information on social history, economic history, and the other domains that are identified in the Course Description.
- **Working with Time Periods.** Students need to work more with timelines or other forms of chronology, even if the focus is just on major events. They also need to be familiar with the way in which AP World History organizes time periods, which can be seen in the Course Description's Summary Course Outline for World History.
- **Answering the Question.** Students must be trained to answer the question that has been asked, not the question they would like to answer, within the specified time period. They need practice in (1) reading the question, (2) identifying the task, and (3) writing a thesis statement that *answers* the question. Emphasize the importance of a clear thesis statement, which preferably appears at the beginning of the essay. Finally, teach students to make generalizations but also to use specific examples or case studies to cite specific evidence. The best essays are those that contain a regular interplay between facts and interpretation or evidence and analysis.

### Question 3

#### ***What was the intent of this question?***

This comparative question sought to relate the political, social, cultural, and economic events of World War I to the regions of the Middle East, South Asia, and East Asia through the 1930s. By making the global linkages, the interwar period can be seen to be a significant era in numerous regions of the world, not simply in Europe. The question required students to explain the interwar decade as a period of crucial importance in twentieth-century world history, not merely as an interlude between two world wars.

#### ***How well did students perform on this question?***

Students on the whole did very poorly on this question. The mean score of 2.0 out of a possible nine points was the worst performance on any free-response question since the launch of the AP World History Exam in 2002. One reason for this weak performance was the fact that over 15,000

students, 34.3 percent of the total, scored either a 0 or “no response” on this question. A great many students either had nothing at all to say on this subject, or ran out of time before they reached the third question, or both.

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

The common errors Readers encountered can be grouped into three general areas: temporal/spatial, content, and skills.

- **Temporal/Spatial.** Many students began or ended their essays outside the stated time frame (1914–39) or used regions not specified by the question. A surprising number of students simply began their essays with a summary of the war in Europe. Others included irrelevant late nineteenth-century background (seemingly trying to include any information on the region in question that they could muster for the exam, such as the Sepoy Rebellion and the Meiji Restoration). Many took their responses through World War II; this was especially true in the context of China and Japan, with numerous responses taking their answer up through the early 1940s. Since Readers used scoring guidelines that included a basic core section of skills, students were not explicitly penalized for including information outside the bounds of the question. However, doing so reduced their chance of producing a relevant analysis backed by appropriate evidence.

In spatial terms, students were sometimes confused about what nations lie within a given region. The distinction between South Asia and Southeast Asia is one common cause of confusion, as is the relationship of Turkey to the Middle East.

- **Content.** The most common errors in content centered on the fact that many students could not see any logical narrative to link World War I to the regions listed. As a result, an overwhelming number of essays on this question tended to warp their answer through a Eurocentric lens: discussions of impact and effect centered on *the actions of Europeans* in these areas. Very few stated the significance of central factors like the Treaty of Versailles, the League of Nations’ Mandates, or indigenous reactions like the May Fourth Movement in China or Ataturk’s role in Turkey’s independence.

Many students saw (or at least identified) the significance of nationalism, colonialism (or decolonization), and capitalism, but few were able to successfully link the war to these processes.

Finally, there continued to be an overwhelming tendency to offer *unsubstantiated* generalizations that often never related to the war itself. Those essays that did make it into the expanded core of the scoring guidelines often included sophisticated analysis and comparisons/contrasts about areas/countries within the specific region.

- **Skills.** Readers continued to find writing a significant hurdle for many of the students. Only a small minority of the exams included an analytical thesis. Many were still simply trying to reword the question. Even more troubling was the lack of meaningful, analytical, and substantial *direct* comparison between the selected regions. An essay based on separate lists of factors for the two selected regions does not add up to an appropriate comparison. Finally, there remained a large number of responses that displayed difficulty in addressing all parts of the question (e.g., time, regions, and comparison/contrast).

***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?***

Based on these essays teachers need to continue to emphasize three basic components: test-taking strategies, writing techniques, and coverage.

- **Test-Taking Strategies.** Teachers need to reinforce the need to organize an essay and the information contained therein. Taking the time to read the question *carefully*, to understand its full implications, and to address the information it asks for would improve students' essays. In addition, students need to have both the endurance and time management skills that are necessary for them to do well on the final essay on the exam. These skills need to be developed during the course of the year.
- **Writing Techniques.** Responses continue to lack good thesis statements that clearly and analytically address the question. Students who continue to simply reword the question or add a vague qualifier do not and will not meet the basic criteria for a thesis. The best essays made direct comparisons/contrasts and did not divide the essay along geographic lines. When given the task of comparison, students should be encouraged to think first of *what* they are going to compare between two or more cases. They can then write an analytical thesis that focuses on theme or themes of the comparison, providing appropriate evidence for the specific cases under discussion.
- **Coverage.** A common error among many of the essays was simply forgetting to address the full thematic, area (regional), and range of time asked by the question. Also emphasize that students need to focus on the regions specified by the question and *not* on the ways in which the West affected that region (or vice versa), where there is little evaluation of the region itself (e.g., the costs of colonialism in India for Great Britain).

Finally, there continues to be a lingering Eurocentrism in many of the responses. In part, this is a result of the tendency of textbooks to address the twentieth century by region and not by theme. In addition, it seems that many teachers may have been in a rush to complete the course and, to the extent that they covered the twentieth century at all, focused on traditional, Western-oriented accounts of such phenomena as World War I and the interwar period. Teachers need to pace their courses in such a way that the twentieth century receives adequate coverage, and they need to bring the same global and thematic emphasis to their treatment of the period from 1914 to the present that they have developed for earlier periods.