



Student Performance Q&A:

2005 AP[®] European History Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2005 free-response questions for AP[®] European History were written by the Chief Reader, George Munro of Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond. 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 a document-based question is to assess the degree to which students can write an analytical essay based on documents, developing a thesis and supporting it with evidence from the documents. They do so by correctly interpreting the meaning of the documents, organizing them into appropriate groups, and evaluating the reliability of the documents and the ways in which each author's identity—that person's position, occupation, or status in society (e.g., class or nationality)—intertwine with the perceptions or views stated in the document, or display motive and intent.

This particular document-based question asked students to analyze various views regarding European unity from 1946 to 1989, using 12 documents (11 prose documents and 1 cartoon) spread across the time period of the question. All but one of the documents' authors held high political positions, and many are well-known. Most of the documents were straightforward public expressions for or against a greater degree of formal unification, but in three documents the authors expressed ambivalence, which gave the better students an opportunity for more sophisticated analysis. The question allowed students to use their knowledge of postwar Europe to good effect, particularly in providing analysis of the point of view for individual documents or collectively for a group (e.g., the French). The selection of documents gave students a wide variety of possibilities for grouping; most students chose to group either by views or by the nationality of the authors.

How well did students perform on this question?

Student performance was mixed. The mean score was 4.77 out of a possible 9 points, a bit lower than in past years. Many students used most, if not all, of the documents, and many wrote long essays. Overall, students seemed to feel comfortable with the documents themselves and with the time period, and many were able to effectively use outside information about World War II, the Cold War, or the European Union (EU) itself. Students typically knew something about several of the documents' authors, particularly Churchill, which helped them when doing point-of-view analysis. Generally, students were able to find three groups relatively easily among the documents, and they grouped them in a variety of ways. The best essays were often splendid, sophisticated in both their analysis of the documents and their use of outside information.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Three general problems frequently appeared in the student essays. The first was the weakness of many of the thesis statements; some students did little more than say there were differing views on the issue, which Readers judged as an inadequate response. Even some strong essays had minimally acceptable thesis statements, though stronger essays typically had stronger thesis statements. As long as it met the standard, a good conclusion could have counted for the thesis statement core point if the student did not begin the essay with such a statement. However, students frequently did not write conclusions to their essays.

The second problem was the absence of point-of-view analysis. Too many students continued to describe the documents' content without making any connection between that and the identity of the authors, or without examining the reliability or purpose of the documents. Students who failed to provide three point-of-view analyses could not earn that point and move into the expanded core of the scoring guidelines. An excellent descriptive essay with consistent attribution was not sufficient to earn this expanded-core point; analysis was required. In responding to this particular document-based question, students often used outside information to provide point-of-view analysis, particularly of motive.

The third general problem was frequent errors of document interpretation. This was particularly true for the Macmillan, De Gaulle, Gonzalez, Lynch, and Thatcher documents, all of which had elements of ambiguity or ambivalence that led students to express only one side of the author's views and completely deny the other side. Not recognizing the ambivalence in these documents often resulted in erroneous groupings. Many students appeared to read the documents carelessly or used inaccurate language in such a way that Readers considered it a major error of interpretation. When students wrote about one side of the views in such documents and merely ignored the other, it was considered a minor interpretation error. Weaker students sometimes made egregious errors of interpretation on relatively easy documents (e.g., Churchill).

Students experienced other problems with the documents. They often grouped documents 10 and 11 (Lynch and Gonzalez) together as stating opposition to European unity or as prime ministers expressing doubts about joining the EU. Neither document expresses such ambivalence. Some students incorrectly identified the figure in the cartoon as an American. Probably this was the result of not reading or paying attention to the title and the description of the document.

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?

Students should be trained to do all of the following tasks.

- Read the question carefully and think through an outline that creates groupings and leads to a thesis before beginning to write.
- Begin all essays with a strong thesis statement that goes beyond description to include at least one analytical point.
- Pay careful attention to the meaning of documents, especially those with ambivalence and ambiguity, and describe them without using overblown prose or exaggerated analysis.
- Make an effort to do point-of-view analysis on as many documents as possible but on at least three.
- Remember to always have at least three groups of documents.
- Pay attention to the information that has been given about the author of a document and the type of source to avoid errors in document interpretation; whenever possible use this information to analyze point of view.
- Take a moment to read over the essay when it is finished to ensure that its language is clear and accurate.

Question 2

What was the intent of this question?

Question 2 provided students with the option of an economic/social question from the middle of the chronological period covered by the course. (Question 3 was political, and question 4 was political/cultural/intellectual; both were from the early period of the course.) The widely used textbooks all cover this material adequately, though the chronological and national organization varies. This variance was compensated for by the question's generous 150-year span and the choice of England, which is well covered during the Industrial Revolution.

The intent of the question was to have students analyze the links between well-established economic developments (domestic production, stages of the Industrial Revolution, national wealth, etc.) and social developments (changes in the experiences of work, education, employment, class, etc.) *and* the specific effects of those changes on the lives of women in England. Students were expected to analyze, not merely catalog, the effects of the changes.

How well did students perform on this question?

Students did not do particularly well on this question. The mean score was 2.32 out of a possible 9 points. Student essays frequently demonstrated an awareness of changes associated with the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, most often describing the harsh conditions of factory work. A small percentage of students showed keen awareness of the interaction of economic and social forces, presenting thoughtful analyses of how these changes were connected to changes in the

lives of women throughout the 150-year period of the question. A majority of answers, however, revealed a weak grasp of the changes, the chronology, and the effects on women.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Common errors involved chronology (e.g., out-of-time-period examples like women’s rights, wartime occupations, and equality), overgeneralization of changes and effects, stereotyping of gender roles, and ahistorical narratives that did not apply to the place and time specified by 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?

Performance could be enhanced if students developed a much stronger awareness of chronology and historical context, and improved their analytical skills (e.g., cause and effect, change versus continuity), essay (especially thesis) writing, and mastery of course content. Students would especially benefit from an increased emphasis on the social history component of the course, since this is an area that continues to give students difficulty on the exam. Class discussions, primary source readings, and essay writing on social history topics would help students develop their understanding in this area. The *AP European History Course Description* identifies social history concepts to be covered by the course.

Question 3

What was the intent of this question?

This question asked students to do three things: (1) identify the causes (factors) that led to the development of the new monarchies, (2) give key features of the new monarchies, and (3) use factual evidence from two different states to support the case that has been drawn. The question clearly specified the time period, 1450–1550, and contained many examples of new monarchs from various European countries.

How well did students perform on this question?

Many students performed poorly. The mean score was 2.38 out of a possible 9 points. A large number of essays were completely off task; others offered very few facts to back up their assertions. Students who received middling scores usually forgot to answer an important component of the question, most often that of factors (causes). When students knew the monarchs of the time period, they scored very well.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Many students mistook new monarchs for absolutists and thus used monarchs who came from beyond the specified time period. Many students wrote a poor thesis and failed to develop both factors and features supported by factual evidence. It was more common for students to miss the factors, or to allude to factors in a way that suggested it was just accidental that they were included.

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?

Students must have a grasp of periodization. A great essay on centralization using monarchs from either the medieval period or the period of the absolute monarchies simply did not answer the question. Although it is not necessary for students to have every date in history at their command, it is helpful to organize both classroom and textbook materials into broad periods with themes, countries, examples, and so on. It is also a very good idea for teachers to have on hand a number of textbooks by different authors, as supplements for additional information. Students would also benefit from additional help with developing thesis statements.

Question 4

What was the intent of this question?

This question sought to test students' understanding of the Protestant Reformation and how that event manifested itself in different and similar ways depending on the circumstances and individuals involved. In the process, it required students to assess the motivations of Martin Luther in the German States and King Henry VIII in England and show how these motivations translated into actions.

How well did students perform on this question?

Students generally did well. The mean score was 4.85 out of a possible 9 points. Students usually understood the terms of the question and examined both the Lutheran and Henrician reformations, though with considerable variation in levels of development. Many students were able to analyze some significant areas of difference and similarity and support their claims with relevant evidence, though again with considerable variation in levels of specificity. Many students wrote imbalanced essays, devoting much more time to the Lutheran reformation than to the Henrician one, a tendency that is reflected in the treatment textbooks give to these topics.

The mean score for Thematic Essay Group I (questions 2, 3, and 4) was 4.24 out of a possible 9 points.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Many students did not include a meaningful thesis statement anywhere in their essays; frequently, they merely restated the question in a slightly modified form. Some wrote two parallel narratives without actually responding to the terms of the question. Many students failed to put Henry's divorce into a wider political context and simply wrote, "Henry wanted a divorce." Some students made moralizing judgments regarding Henry's behavior (e.g., he was selfish, sinful, and lustful) without seeing his conduct in a broader political/historical context. Most students failed to provide substantial amounts of specific evidence to support their general ideas.

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?

Concentrate on training students to write a thoughtful and substantial thesis statement that provides a brief and general answer to the question and is not just a restatement of the question. Teach students to read the question carefully and identify what task(s) it requires of them, and to work on increasing their awareness of how essential specific evidence is for a compelling essay. Stress the importance of eschewing moralizing judgments that are not grounded in historical context.

Question 5

What was the intent of this question?

Question 5 asked students to define “mass politics” or “the rise of mass politics” (the wording of the question made the task somewhat unclear) and to analyze the effects of this phenomenon on European politics between 1880 and 1914. The question was intended to elicit from students a definition of mass politics and some analysis of some of the variety of mass movements that were significant in Europe at this time, including nationalism, anti-Semitism, Zionism, socialism, communism, trade unionism, and feminism. Another way to answer this question was to discuss some of the events in which the masses played a significant role or forced politicians to take note of them, including the Dreyfus Affair, the suppression of the SPD in Germany, the “New Imperialism,” and the 1905 Russian Revolution.

How well did students perform on this question?

Students did not do well on this question. The mean score was 1.39 out of a possible 9 points. Many who performed poorly nevertheless wrote detailed essays on other events in the time period, including the pre–World War I alliance system, the unification of Germany, or imperialism. This indicates they were well informed, just not about mass politics.

What were common student errors or omissions?

The most common error was students’ inability to define mass politics, so they were unable to analyze its effects on European politics. They either did not attempt to define it, or they defined it variously as “governing large groups of people,” “governing large areas,” or the pre–World War I alliance system. Other students had a weak grasp of chronology, so they wrote essays on the unification of Italy and Germany or on Hitler and Mussolini. It is possible that instead of reading the entire question, students focused on the dates used in the question (1880–1914) and thus launched into a discussion of the causes of World War I or imperialism.

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?

This was intended to be a mainstream question. The topic is listed in the Course Description and covered in many textbooks (usually in one chapter). Teachers should be sure that they are using the most recent edition of the *AP European History Course Description* as the guideline for their

course. Defining the phenomenon of mass politics and linking it to events commonly covered in an AP European History course (e.g., the Dreyfus Affair, the rise of the SPD in Germany, the 1905 Russian Revolution, and the women's suffrage movement) would help students perform better on a question like this one. Teachers should remind students to read the question carefully so that they will be less likely to be led astray by its various parts.

Question 6

What was the intent of this question?

This question consisted of three interrelated tasks. The first was a review of Marx's views on economics and politics. The second and third tasks were two assessments: how Lenin implemented Marx's ideals and how Stalin implemented them. In addition, the question asked students to demonstrate an awareness of change over time (i.e., whether in the transition from Lenin to Stalin, Marx's ideals were ever fully realized). This question called for considerable skills of assessment as opposed to mere narrative. Although the question asked students to "assess" rather than to "analyze," the more able students recognized that the question implicitly charged them to explain why, or why not, Marx's ideals on economics and politics were implemented (or manipulated) by both Lenin and Stalin.

How well did students perform on this question?

Student performance was mixed. The mean score was 3.09 out of a possible 9 points. Although this was seemingly a straightforward question—and students presumably had been taught aspects of Russian history—a surprisingly large number of essays reflected little content knowledge.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Far too many students failed to demonstrate any knowledge at all regarding the three main charges of the question. Large numbers of students interpreted the question as calling only for an explanation of how Lenin aligned with Marx, and they neglected to discuss Stalin's notions of economics and politics. Weaker students failed to consider both Lenin and Stalin, though the stated time period, 1917–1939, should have helped them frame their essays. A sizeable number of students went far beyond the time period to write about post-Soviet developments. Some students discussed the definition of revolution instead of answering the question. Others neglected to address all of the specified tasks. The majority of students were able to present *some* pertinent knowledge of Marxist ideals, however superficial and implicit, even when they failed to assess the degree to which Lenin and Stalin realized these ideals. Many students could not write a thesis statement; what they produced was confused, absent, or merely a restatement of 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?

The best advice for teachers can be distilled into two points, one regarding their own pedagogy and the other regarding their students' approach to the AP Exam. First, teachers should acquaint themselves more fully with the entire AP experience. They can do this by accessing relevant AP Web sites (start with AP Central[®] at <http://apcentral.collegeboard.com>), attending AP workshops in their areas, and, best of all, attending at least one AP Reading to help score the exams. Second, teachers should prepare their students to do well on the exam by presenting them with questions

from previously administered AP Exams and reminding them to pay careful attention to the instructions and perimeters of the free-response questions. Teachers should also review with students the page in the Course Description that explains and gives examples of frequently used key essay terms like “assess,” “explain,” and “identify.”

Question 7

What was the intent of this question?

This question called for an analysis of three distinct sets of factors in accounting for the western European domination of world trade between 1650 and 1800. Students therefore needed to discuss these economic, technological, and institutional factors, but they also needed to link them directly to trade.

How well did students perform on this question?

Student performance was mixed. The mean score was 3.26 out of a possible 9 points. Students did well in organizing their answers and identifying and analyzing at least two of the three broad areas. They did not perform as well in identifying the chronological boundaries of the question.

The mean score for Thematic Essay Group II (questions 5, 6, and 7) was 2.95 out of a possible 9 points.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Many students seemed unclear on the meaning of the term “institutional,” and thus discussion of institutional factors was omitted from many answers. Students had difficulty with the time period, particularly the cutoff date of 1800; many concentrated far too heavily on the period prior to 1650.

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?

If a question contains a chronological framework, it is there for a reason. Students need to firmly locate the specific evidence on which they base their generalizations within the required time frame.