



## Student Performance Q&A: 2003 AP<sup>®</sup> European History Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2003 free-response questions for AP<sup>®</sup> European History were written by the Chief Reader, George 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?*

This document-based question (DBQ) asked students to use 12 documents to answer a question regarding changes in attitudes toward “civil peace” in Germany between 1914 and 1918. The intent of the question was to give students the opportunity to demonstrate their skills at constructing arguments, analyzing documents, and appropriately using evidence. Specific skills required for analyzing documents included the ability to group documents in a variety of ways and the ability to discern different points of view in the documents.

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

The mean score for this question was 5.9 out of a possible nine points. Students responded successfully to this question. Because of the wealth of point of view (POV) found in the documents, students were more likely to fulfill the core requirements for this DBQ than they were for previous DBQs, where there frequently was a spike at point 5 due to the failure to fulfill the POV core requirement. Consequently, this question scored somewhat higher than previous DBQs. Consistent with past questions, however, lower scores (i.e., points 3, 2, 1, and 0) were uncommon. The information students needed was provided, so, barring systemic lack of comprehension of the documents, most students were able to perform adequately.

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

In general, students found this DBQ to be clear and straightforward, but a few common errors did surface. One was to confuse being for or against the civil peace with being for or against the war. Students could begin with a war-centered thesis and lose credit for point 1, but in most cases, their handling of the documents indicated their awareness of the civil peace issue. Still, some students wrote in terms of being pro-peace or pro-war, instead of focusing on *civil peace*. Some students also framed their essays around the idea of civil war, again indicating a fundamental misreading of the question. Students also frequently

misunderstood the nature of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), equating it with “the government.” They also frequently misconstrued the right-hand figure in the *Simplicissimus* cartoon, identifying it as a middle-class person, an industrialist, a peasant, or giving it some other incorrect identification.

***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 provide students with practice in finding POV in class essays. Year after year, this is the most common shortcoming in students’ DBQs. They need to know how to assess POV stemming from a variety of sources, including potential biases due to the speaker’s socioeconomic position, the document’s potential reliability problems, and the type of document (e.g., diary, letter, pamphlet, and so on). Tone of the document (e.g., references to “the obvious frustration of the speaker” or “the *highly emotional* tone of the document”) is also a valid route, but students must understand that tonal routes to POV must be well developed, not just a single adjective to characterize the document.

## **Question 2**

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

This question focused on one of the underappreciated episodes in European history, which is usually sandwiched between the more popular commercial and industrial “revolutions.” With this question it was given its due, and the objective here was to understand the elements and dimensions of the Agricultural Revolution in the eighteenth century and to see what consequences it had then and thereafter. Given the presence in the eighteenth century of an interrelated Atlantic and world economy, one might expect to find references to the Americas and even to Africa and Asia; but the proper arena of this question was Europe, and we insisted on this primary focus. Right away we accepted the fact that certain features of the Agricultural Revolution had emerged before the eighteenth century, some even in the Middle Ages. These references were acceptable if students were aware of their continuing roles in the eighteenth century. Consequences could be in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries or both.

Students were asked to *identify* (which we interpreted as introduce/characterize/describe) features (more than one element, dimension, component, and so on) of the eighteenth-century Agricultural Revolution (not the Industrial Revolution, though there are issues in features and consequences where the two movements connect) and then to *analyze* the Agricultural Revolution’s social and economic consequences. Given the wording of the question, the consequences did *not* have to flow from the given features. Analysis was quite important to this question, and both social and economic consequences had to be addressed in a satisfactory essay.

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

Students could choose between Question 2, Question 3, and Question 4. The combined mean score for the three questions was 3.99 out of a possible nine points.

Generally, students performed well on identification of features, even given the expected confusion of features with consequences. For the most part we did not penalize students for this. Some factors, such as the open-field system, enclosures, and cottage industry, were often troublesome, but most students were able to identify two or more inventions, methods, or individuals. Such consequences as increased food supply and better diets and population increase were familiar to many. The major shortcoming was probably in the level of analysis of both social and economic consequences.

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

Such features of medieval origin as the moldboard plow and putting-out system were considered novel in the eighteenth century. Also, various nineteenth-century inventions (e.g., reaper, steel plow, and so on) were placed in the eighteenth. To some the open-field and enclosure systems were a bit confusing. Generally, we would have liked to have seen more students discern both social and economic factors.

***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?***

It is hardly a new suggestion that students need to pay more attention to all the terms of the question and especially to take seriously the task of analysis. Also, as concerns content, perhaps more emphasis needs to be placed on the Agricultural Revolution as a specific historical phenomenon and not just as prelude or background to the Industrial Revolution. Some students focused too much on the Industrial Revolution and thought that was appropriate.

Also, though many teachers already do this, it is important to have students take the thesis seriously. It should not be just a restatement of the question but rather an introduction of sorts and an announcement to the reader of just what position the student is taking. The thesis should tell the reader that the student has an understanding of the scope of the question.

**Question 3**

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

This question offered students an opportunity to display their knowledge and analytical skills by addressing one of the central topics in early modern Europe, the rise of French absolutism during the reign of Louis XIV. Unlike some topics raised in earlier AP European History Exams, *every* textbook presents information about French absolutism and Louis XIV in particular. It is, in fact, difficult to conceive of a well-structured course that neglects or omits Louis XIV. Students were asked to *analyze* the *methods* the king used to achieve his aim of “one king, one law, one faith” and to *discuss* the *extent* to which he succeeded. While the term “absolutism” is commonly used when referring to Louis XIV, not all textbooks link the king to the phrase “one king, one law, one faith.” Furthermore, textbooks generally fail to clearly differentiate between “one king” and “one law” even when the phrase is adopted. Some flexibility was required in order to address the fact that many students failed to address all categories evenly.

The overwhelming majority of readers believed the question was fair, though a few expressed some concern over the number of tasks demanded of students. They recommended the Development Committee consider fewer tasks for a 35-minute essay. The directions were viewed as clear, but some modifications were suggested. One reader suggested explicitly limiting the question to domestic affairs, while a second reader felt that students should have been instructed to consider each category separately. Most readers viewed the standards as fair, allowing them to differentiate between a strong and mixed essay with relative ease. One reader, however, felt the standards were too easy and that we should have required more from students in order to rank them in the stronger category. One reader also believed we should have differentiated to a greater degree in the stronger category between a 6-7 essay and an 8-9 essay. Overall, however, readers believed this was a good question, offering qualified students an excellent opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge.

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

Students could choose between Question 2, Question 3, and Question 4. The combined mean score for the three questions was 3.99 out of a possible nine points.

Student responses covered the entire range. Almost every student who attempted to answer the question knew something about the reign of Louis XIV, even if only that he lived at Versailles, was sometimes called the Sun King, and is alleged to have remarked, “I am the state.” The strongest essays (8-9) often displayed extensive knowledge of the material, as well as an understanding of analytical writing. Even the weakest essays usually attempted to answer the question and remembered that Louis XIV was an absolutist monarch. Surprisingly few students committed chronological errors, such as confusedly claiming that the Sun King went to the guillotine or caused the French Revolution. Many students may have difficulty identifying centuries, but they seem to be able to place Louis XIV among his contemporaries (possibly because of last year’s question on the impact of absolutism on the European aristocracy).

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

Many essays provided relevant and accurate information but did not fulfill the requirements of the question to analyze and discuss. A number of students who scored in the mixed or weaker categories either described the steps taken by Louis XIV or simply recalled anecdotes (often from memoirs by Saint-Simon, one of the usual primary sources in textbooks) about life at Versailles.

The poorest responses (0-1) often involved students who simply did not know much about Louis XIV aside from the fact that he lived at Versailles and believed in absolutism. Such students often made sweeping or erroneous assertions that they were unable to defend.

### ***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?***

Just as readers are required to internalize standards at the AP Reading, students need to internalize the vocabulary of the charges of analytical essay questions. Teachers may need to post the terms in their rooms, or they may need to offer students more opportunities for writing exercises. Short writing exercises, perhaps requiring students to respond only to one part of the question, might prove useful, especially for teachers with very large classes. A class might be asked to write a paragraph analyzing methods Louis XIV used to achieve “one faith.” The class would receive two to three minutes of pre-writing time and 10 minutes of writing time. Some of the paragraphs could then be discussed for the remainder of the period. Sample essays from AP Central™ ([apcentral.collegeboard.com](http://apcentral.collegeboard.com)) might be photocopied, and the teacher could then use the paragraphs discussing “one faith” as a teaching device. Ideally, the samples illustrate how students engage in historical analysis.

Weaker students often tended to respond to this question by providing purely anecdotal information. This type of response might be an indicator of the approach favored by teachers when they present the topic in class. Teachers need to be encouraged to be more analytical in their presentation and to place those anecdotes in better historical context.

Finally, readers felt that at the beginning of the year students should be compelled to engage in the process of pre-writing for about five minutes. Too many students still believe that length is synonymous with understanding and only begin to structure their responses when they are deep into their essays.

## Question 4

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

The intent of this question was to challenge students to consider the causal relationship between advances in learning and technology on the one hand and how these advances influenced European voyages of exploration and trade (in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries) on the other. Put in other terms, the charge of the question was to develop linkages between and among the four parts of the question. The question emphasized an understanding of advances in learning and technology, but it also called for an explanation of just how these factors enabled resultant exploration and trade. In order to do well on this question students not only had to cite several specific examples in the categories of learning and technology, but they also had to both describe what these advances contributed to early modern European voyages of exploration and then connect the latter to the consequent establishment of trade routes.

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

Students could choose between Question 2, Question 3, and Question 4. The combined mean score for the three questions was 3.99 out of a possible nine points.

There was a range of responses to this question, with probably fewer at the top end of the scale. Those students who performed well on this question (those who scored in the stronger category) cited several specific examples of advances in learning and technology (with more in the latter category) and went on to describe how these particular examples furthered voyages of exploration. They then proceeded to demonstrate how trade routes to both the East and West followed on the heels of prior voyages of exploration. The very best essays included several references to important figures (e.g., Henry the Navigator, Columbus) and their contributions. Those students who did not make it into the stronger category, but rather who scored in the mixed category, wrote essays that were less well developed and that also provided fewer examples of advances with less sophisticated explanations of how they “worked.” In addition, they usually only alluded to resultant voyages of exploration and discovery. Essays that fell below the mixed category and wound up in the weaker category were unbalanced in nature, concentrating *either* on advances in learning and technology *or* on voyages of exploration and trade. More often than not these essays demonstrated an insufficient grasp of the question’s charges and, as a result, provided information that was either irrelevant or totally off-task.

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

Common errors included:

- references to technological advances that did not fit within the chronological framework of the question (e.g., the sextant, a mid-seventeenth-century invention);
- references to either the Scientific Revolution or the Enlightenment as spurring the invention of navigational advances;
- references to the earth as “flat;” and
- “putting the cart before the horse” in stating that exploratory voyages resulted in a demand for improved navigational techniques.

***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 reminded that they must provide an essay that answers the question that has been stated; in this case, to *explain* advances in learning and technology and to demonstrate how these *influenced* voyages of discovery and trade. Beyond that, readers want to see several references to specific examples (e.g., Henry the Navigator’s navigational institute, the compass, the quadrant and astrolabe, lateen sails, and so on) along with descriptions of how these facilitated European exploratory voyages and trade. In addition, students should show that they have an awareness of how all of this resulted in the establishment of trade routes to the East and to the West and perhaps even how the latter resulted in the establishment of European colonies abroad.

## **Question 5**

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

This question’s charge was straightforward in requiring students to analyze three reasons for the end of Soviet domination in Eastern Europe. In its directive, “analyze three reasons,” the question made clear the requirement of determining their component parts and examining their relationship to the end of Soviet domination in Eastern Europe. The question was not meant to apply to countries that exist now but to those which, until the collapse of the Soviet Union, were a part of that country. In analyzing three reasons for the end of domination, students were expected to provide historical examples in the satellite nations to support their respective reasons. The topic is included in most textbooks. Virtually all of the textbooks, in varying degrees of depth and specificity, cover the end of Soviet domination in Eastern Europe. Most tend to emphasize the collapse of Communism and the Soviet Union.

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

Students could choose between Question 5, Question 6, and Question 7. The combined mean score for the three questions was 3.5 out of a possible nine points.

The stronger essays provided a strong analysis of the reasons for the end of Soviet domination in Eastern Europe. Many students wrote good essays; however, sizeable numbers of students failed to address the question adequately. The large number of marginal essays may be attributed to the fact that students addressed the question as the fall of the Soviet Union and that some teachers do not teach much beyond the 1950s.

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

Some of the students answered the question as the process by which the Soviet Union became a dominant power in Europe after World War II rather than as the factors that explained the demise of Soviet domination in Eastern Europe. Others responded in terms of the Cold War and conflicts between the United States and the Soviet Union. The majority of the students answering this essay did not address the reasons for the end of domination in Eastern 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?***

Reflective analytical writing was absent in a significant percentage of the essays written in response to this question. Therefore, readers implore teachers to instruct their students in the requisite skills of analytical writing and to impress upon them how crucial it is to answer directly the question that is asked.

## **Question 6**

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

This question asked students to use three examples to show the relationship between two mainstream topics, Romanticism and nationalism before 1850. The three examples could be drawn from various areas within Europe, from specific thinkers, from works of art or music, and so on. In fact, there were many possibilities for examples. Because the question asked students to *analyze* the relationship between the two concepts, they needed to do more than simply describe examples of Romanticism and/or nationalism. It was necessary for them to link their examples to *both* concepts. The question did not explicitly ask students to define Romanticism and nationalism, but certainly their discussions of the examples needed to show, at least contextually, an understanding of both concepts.

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

Students could choose between Question 5, Question 6, and Question 7. The combined mean score for the three questions was 3.5 out of a possible nine points.

Although student responses spanned the scoring range and tended to cluster in the weaker category, it was not difficult to find strong essays. Because the question did not specify what types of examples needed to be included, the standards allowed for a wide variety of student responses. Indeed, there was not really a typical response to this question. Some students developed an artistic argument (using painting, music, and/or literature), some took a political approach (Italian unification, Greek revolt for independence, and so on), and many combined various approaches. Any of these tactics were valid as long as the examples were well supported. Nonetheless, there were a significant number of essays in the weaker category, primarily because of very generalized examples.

During the question critique, some readers pointed out that 1850 seemed somewhat arbitrary, especially when considering Romantic music. Readers also commented that many students equated examples with traits and included little or no historical information. However, some degree of latitude was granted if students went slightly out of the specified time period, and students who relied on traits were given credit if they used supporting evidence.

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

Weaker essays often used generalized examples with little supporting evidence. Another common problem in weaker responses was a tendency to rely on common *characteristics* between the two movements, where students failed to use concrete evidence to back up their assertions; indeed, a large number of essays contained virtually no reference to anything historical. Some students did not grasp the chronological scope of the question. It was not unusual to see essays in which students had drawn on

examples from earlier periods in history that were clearly prior to the Romantic period. Less often, students used post-1850 examples. Some students struggled with demonstrating a relationship between the two concepts. Their essays contained valid examples of Romanticism or nationalism but did very little to link them in an appropriate way.

***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 question was not a popular choice among students. Many readers felt that students interpreted the question narrowly (as an “arts” question) and were somewhat intimidated by the directive to use three examples. Perhaps this suggests that the classroom approach to Romanticism should be broadened in scope to encompass not only the arts but also other areas highly influenced by Romantic ideals (e.g., philosophy, history, and religion). Students also tended to define nationalism in a narrow way, focusing sometimes exclusively on love of country. Students who had a broader understanding of nineteenth-century nationalism tended to write better responses. Additionally, students need to be encouraged to use ample supporting evidence for their generalizations.

Another important area for improvement on this question is in the area of linkage. Based on student responses and several commonly used textbooks that were examined, it seems likely that Romanticism is taught as an artistic movement and nationalism is taught as a political movement, with little attention paid to the common ground between the two. While students are certainly capable of making this linkage on their own, the difficulty some encountered suggests that more attention might be given to help students see connections between discrete pieces of learning and to use evidence to construct effective arguments.

## **Question 7**

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

The intent of this question was to get students to link the ideas of the Enlightenment with “policies” (a general term) of the French Revolution and to assess the overall extent of the relationship between Enlightenment ideas and Revolutionary policies. This exercise drew together two topics that are generally considered separately. While some textbooks and teachers might address this question directly, in many cases students had to bring together their specific knowledge of the Enlightenment and the Revolution and to argue or discuss the linkage between the two.

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

Students could choose between Question 5, Question 6, and Question 7. The combined mean score for the three questions was 3.5 out of a possible nine points.

Since this question was the most popular choice of all the free-response questions (chosen by 45 percent), it is likely that many students had some knowledge of either or both the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. The challenge, however, was to draw effective connections between ideas and policies in a discussion, so this was not an easy question. We found a good range of answers, including some superb ones; but there were also a number of weaker essays, perhaps reflecting the fact that students chose something that looked familiar but could not effectively address the question.



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

Some students answered the question: “How did the Enlightenment cause the French Revolution?” Others wrote a preprogrammed essay on either the Enlightenment *or* the French Revolution and were not attentive to the need to address ideas and policies. Among those students who were on-task and responding to the question, were those who left out the element of religion. The category of “Enlightenment ideas about society” was treated quite generally, and table leaders permitted students to include political, cultural, or economic ideas. There was no obvious way to organize this question, and students grappled with a number of different forms. The most effective was to describe the Enlightenment idea and then link it to a Revolutionary policy, taking care to deal with both religion and society.

***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 instructed to read the question carefully and to respond to the question *that has been asked*. Readers will not be impressed by a student’s knowledge of the details of the Revolution, for example, if they are not pertinent to the question. Discussion and argument are essential in an essay like this one. It is not sufficient to simply write “Voltaire” and “Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen.” An assertion of the relationship between an Enlightenment idea and a Revolutionary policy is not a linkage. The two must be clearly linked in a discussion. Students should be aware that they could argue with the thesis implicit in the question, as well.