



Student Performance Q&A: 2003 AP[®] World History Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2003 free-response questions for AP[®] World History were written by the Chief Reader, Kenneth Curtis of California State University in Long Beach, California. 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 analyze the main features of the system of indentured servitude and, more specifically, its causes and consequences. To answer the question effectively students needed to accomplish the following tasks:

1. develop a thesis that offered an acceptable explanation for both the cause of indentured servitude's nineteenth-century revival and for its global consequences;
2. support both components of the thesis (cause and consequence) with appropriate evidence from the documents provided;
3. correctly analyze and interpret all but one of the eight to nine sources used;
4. demonstrate an understanding of the point of view of at least two documents;
5. develop at least three analytical groupings in support of the argument; and
6. identify at least one additional type of document that would help assess the historical significance of indentured servitude in the period.

Students were required to use effectively in their arguments a variety of document types, including excerpts from government documents, newspaper editorials, a map, statistical charts (some excerpted from official government publications and others compiled by historians), photographs, a recruiting document, and an official document giving an indentured servant's account. Analysis of each type of document required different interpretive skills.

Among the difficulties posed by the document selection, students had to recognize that for some of the documents (Documents 3 and 9) no clearly attributed source had been identified or that the perspective of the author had to be distinguished from that of other figures mentioned in the source citation (Documents 2 and 7).

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for this question was 4.03 out of a possible nine points.

Although there were a large number of documents for students to address, most students were able to refer to eight of the nine documents in their answer. In addition, the number of significant misinterpretations of these documents was minimal. When students experienced difficulty it was largely due to the simple inability to absorb so many documents in the allotted time. Students, in general, understood the documents and effectively exploited them in their essays.

For both the thesis point and the evidence point, as determined in the Scoring Guidelines for this question, students needed to reference both cause and consequence. Most handled consequences successfully, but many students struggled to articulate a thesis dealing with causation or to find documents to support an argument about causation. Some students attempted to answer a different question — “Was indentured servitude just as bad as slavery?” — which often led them away from considerations of key features, including causes and consequences.

While asked to analyze features (including causes and consequences), students most often addressed only the causes and consequences of the revival of indentured labor, grouping the documents to support arguments explaining causes and consequences. The Scoring Guidelines required *three* appropriate groupings to earn this point. A simple pair of cause and consequence groupings was therefore insufficient.

Although “outside knowledge” is not a requirement of the DBQ, this particular question implicitly required students to connect the documents through knowledge of “global economic changes in the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries.” Students did best when they could more generally explain the transition from slavery to indentured labor in the early nineteenth century, the relationship between the nineteenth-century plantation economy and the migration of laborers from Asia, the expansion of commercial agriculture in relation to industrialization, the ethnic segmentation of labor forces resulting from nineteenth-century imperialism, or nineteenth-century forms of colonialism and imperialism. Students did poorly when the historical context they provided was irrelevant (as when they tried to situate the documents in a context of seventeenth-century indentured labor), inaccurate (as when they argued that the slaves themselves became indentured laborers), or nonexistent.

Perhaps because the DBQ asked about a little-discussed subject and required a rather sophisticated analysis of maps, charts, and photographs, fewer students than last year developed answers that scored in the expanded core. This suggests the DBQ was either more difficult than the previous year or students were not as prepared for the particular demands of this question as they might have been. However, the fact that fewer students reached the expanded core resulted less from an inability to analyze the documents or from the demands of the question than from general failure to address point of view effectively or to identify an additional type of document.

What were common student errors or omissions?

The most clear difficulty students experienced with this DBQ, often keeping them from receiving points in the expanded core, stemmed from their inability to identify two examples of point of view in the documents, as required in the Scoring Guidelines. While this may have resulted in part from the relatively limited number of documents that readily lent themselves to such analysis (assuming that students have not been trained to for point of view in statistics, maps, or photographs), students who had a sound conceptual understanding of point of view, bias, and perspective in textual documents were quite capable of finding two examples. Quite a few very strong analytical essays with a wealth of expanded core material did not make it to the expanded core because they identified only one appropriate example of

point of view. Students often either failed to accurately identify the source of the sentiment expressed in a particular document (e.g., conflating the editorialist in Document 2 with Sir George Grey, British colonial governor) or assumed that a particular document type (e.g., photograph, map, or chart) could reveal no point of view.

A significant number of students had difficulty grouping documents effectively. The emphasis in the question on cause and consequence may have led students to understand their responsibility to be fulfilled by addressing only those elements without taking account of other “key features.” Other students failed to group effectively because they inappropriately coupled two documents without adequately demonstrating their analytical connections.

Despite the explicit instructions included in the question itself, far too many students did not identify an appropriate additional kind of document. The usual expectation is that students will refer to a type of document or perspective that is missing from the document set (e.g., the perspective of a former slave on the arrival of indentured servants). Students were allowed to request a type of document or perspective that was already present in the document set (e.g., an indentured servant’s perspective) but would receive the point in this case only if they explicitly justified why another similar document was needed (e.g., to help determine whether the single indentured laborer’s viewpoint was typical).

Weak thesis statements frequently frustrated students’ ability to articulate the main assertions of their argument and also their ability to later analyze the evidence and group it appropriately. Students who merely restated the background material, or restated the question in the guise of a thesis statement, failed to effectively articulate the argument for the readers.

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?

Teach early and often the art of writing an effective thesis that focuses on all parts of the question and demonstrates a close reading of the question.

Stress to students the importance of developing as many effective groupings of the documents as they can. Even in bifurcated questions the most effective answers employ subgroupings of analysis. Also, students should remember to explicitly reference documents when they are cited and should be encouraged to use parenthetical references to document numbers when appropriate. Give students practice in linking DBQs to wider global-historical contexts as well as more practice in dealing with quantitative materials and using evidence from charts and graphs in their arguments.

Clearly the two tasks with which students need the most help are identifying point of view and providing an appropriate additional document. Teachers might try linking the development of these two skills, which are often closely related. To identify an appropriate additional document, students must first conceptualize the possibility of “an appropriate perspective other than those found in the documents.” Analysis of point of view requires an “effective analysis of the author’s perspective” without which it would be difficult to imagine an additional perspective, which might be available in an additional document.

For every document or document type, then, students should be taught to consider how a different document or perspective might reveal an alternative point of view to that expressed in the particular document. For example, of Document 1 on this year’s DBQ (Herman Merivale, British Undersecretary of the Colonies, 1850) a useful question for students to ask might be, “How would an indentured servant distinguish between immigrant, slave, and indentured laborer differently than did Merivale?” In asking this question, students would be led to contemplate both Merivale’s point of view and the possibility that

an indentured servant might articulate a different perspective on the institution, calling forth a request for an appropriate additional document.

Students should learn to examine maps, charts, graphs, and photographs for point of view. Students rarely addressed either point of view or additional documents when analyzing maps, charts, and visual imagery. These documents posed particular challenges for students. However, by asking questions like “Could a map of the world that included migrations of other population groups, economic flows, and so on inform readers of the wider significance of indentured labor in the world economy?” students might be led to reflect on the factors that informed the cartographer.

Analysis of photographs needs to be developed by encouraging students to see authorial intent in photographs, potential audiences, and the effect of decisions about framing, focus, staging, or subject matter. Teachers can encourage students to ask how a photograph might have been different had the image included scenes beyond the frame of the photograph. In this case, how powerful would the colonial figure have appeared in a huge cane field surrounded by hundreds of indentured laborers? What if the photographer had focused on the face of a single male or female indentured laborer, or if the photographer had shown them at home or participating in a religious ceremony or family gathering?

Question 2

What was the intent of this question?

This question asked students to perform five tasks:

1. choose one region,
2. describe *and* analyze the cultural impact of Islam in the 1000–1750 time frame,
3. describe *and* analyze the political impact of Islam in the 1000–1750 time frame,
4. describe *and* analyze the economic impact of Islam in the 1000–1750 time frame, and
5. discuss continuities as well as changes.

The intent of this question was to elicit responses that showed students’ knowledge of a broad range of factors associated with the interaction between the Islamic World and regions in Europe, Africa, or Asia where Islam had a significant impact during the period 1000–1750. The stress on “change and continuities” was intended to prompt students to consider cultural, political, and/or economic factors in their chosen region that remained relatively constant before and after Islam’s impact.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for this question was 3.08 out of a possible nine points.

In a great number of cases the question did not elicit the desired response. Many students interpreted the word “impact” to mean a one-way exchange of information, and many answers built on and exaggerated contemporary stereotypes of the Islamic world with little or no historical specificity. Median scores on the change-over-time question were lower than those for the other two free-response questions on the exam.

It was evident that teaching about the basic tenets of Islam had occurred. Many students knew facts about Islam but did not always know how to place that information in historical context. They knew something about the five pillars of Islam, veiled women, and contemporary events but made sweeping generalizations that showed they were not generally prepared to write accurately about the impact of Islam in these regions *as it changed over time during the specified period*. Students appeared to know

relatively little about the specifics of how Islam spread to other regions. Very few students conveyed an understanding that Islam predated the specified time period, and balanced analyses of changes and continuities were relatively infrequent.

Students chose the Europe option most often, discussing the role of the Crusades, occasionally focusing on Islamic Spain, and less regularly looking at the Ottomans in Eastern Europe and the Balkans. They did not usually specify regions within Europe. They seemed to have the easiest time addressing political factors (military aspects were included here) through discussions of the pope, the Crusades, feudalism, and decentralized authority. Cultural factors were addressed through a discussion of linguistic, architectural, culinary, and epidemiological exchanges that contributed to such events as the Renaissance and the Scientific Revolution. Economic factors included specific trade of goods and, in some cases, technology (e.g., mathematics, medicine [including Ibn Rashid], and navigation). Continuities were effectively addressed when students discussed the continuing legacy of Islam in Spain, showing, for example, how Moors had built mosques that are still standing, Arabic origins of words in Spanish, or the longevity of Christianity in Europe. Students more frequently reached the expanded core with their knowledge of Europe.

West Africa was also a popular choice, though students seemed less able to answer this question using specific information and were less able to show analysis and change over time. Students discussed largely economic and cultural factors, showing how merchants along the trans-Saharan trade networks increased the exchange of goods and how conversions (Mansa Musa) influenced changes in (specific) traditional ways of life, including art and architecture. They also pointed to increased literacy through the Qur'an, as well as the city of Timbuktu as a scholarly center. Connections to the Islamic and the Atlantic slave trade were made here. (But students need to be aware that trade had existed in West Africa before Islam arrived and certainly before 1000.) Some strong essays showed continuity through a discussion of syncretism, of the processes through which Africans fused traditional religious beliefs with Islamic ones, or by focusing on how matrilineal relationships might be affected but not eradicated. Ibn Battuta's condemnation of local females' dress was another specific way that students showed continuity. Political aspects of Islam's impact were addressed through connections to the wider Islamic world and through the argument that Islam helped rulers to unify their populations.

In South Asia (the least frequently chosen region) students addressed political aspects by focusing on the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire. They noted how the political and economic rise of Islam in Western Asia and North Africa intensified connections with the South Asian world. In the economic sphere they pointed out the increase of trade that came with Islam. Cultural factors included the caste system and issues of tolerance and tension in Hindu-Muslim relations. The most sophisticated responses addressed such phenomena as the creation of the Urdu language; Sikhism as a new religion; Akbar's attempt to create a new religion that failed; the back and forth exchange of artistic designs between Persia, Southwest Asia, and India; and the use of Islamic design (e.g., Arabic script and mosaics) in textiles and/or architecture (including the Taj Mahal). Continuities on this response included the persistence of Hinduism as well as the caste system. Relatively few students had anything close to comprehensive knowledge in this region.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Students frequently interpreted the word "impact" to imply a meteor-like event rather than an ongoing process. Many students had no clear chronology, no understanding of exactly when and how Islam affected the given region and how those effects changed over time. As a result, many students did not address the issue of *time* at all, or they confused the order of events in time. Many students neglected to address issues of continuity. Because so few theses addressed the time period in question, a chronological reference was not required in the thesis this year.

Students had a tendency to make general, vague claims instead of providing specific evidence and analysis.

In this question, gender references were largely inaccurate. There were gross generalizations about gender and regions. Students indiscriminately (and inaccurately) talked about women wearing veils everywhere, seclusion in all locations for women, and a total loss of property rights.

Evidence was particularly inaccurate for West Africa and South Asia. Many inaccurately asserted that Muslims were the first to bring trade to South Asia or that agriculture and empire first came to West Africa through Islam. The Mongols were occasionally confused with the Mughals, and the Swahili were sometimes included in discussions of West Africa. For Europe, some argued incorrectly that the Muslims had no influence on Europe; others conversely (but equally erroneously) argued that Europeans overwhelmingly converted to Islam.

Many students had difficulty choosing and defining a region. Some mistakenly chose two regions and wrote a comparative essay. More commonly, students had trouble accurately defining their region, including East African material in their West African response or, even more commonly, interpreting “South Asia” to include the Middle East and/or Southeast Asia. In most essays students did not mention specific countries, states, or empires, giving only the broadest generalization about their region. More specificity would have helped them earn points for evidence. Some students who chose Europe earned expanded core points for using examples from a variety of European regions (e.g., Iberia, Eastern Europe, and Western Europe) and for even comparing the affects of Islam between them. That level of detail was rare in the African and South Asian essays, even among the stronger students.

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 need to *read the question carefully*, recognizing the time, place(s), and categories prompted by the question. This will help them to avoid accidentally choosing more than one region, addressing the wrong geographic location, and forgetting to address continuity.

Students need a great deal more help writing appropriate theses for change-over-time questions. The thesis must be explicit. At the minimum it should include an argument that addresses the question or prompt, including specific reference to the timeframe and, when appropriate, the region selected. Students need to be able to call up specifics (e.g., sources, people, and events) to support their theses.

Students should know when answering a change-over-time question that chronology is especially important. Teachers should emphasize chronology and sequencing, with frequent use of graphic timelines. Rationales for schemes of periodization should be discussed with students. One effective strategy is to have students think in terms of a three-stage model. What did things look like at the beginning of the period specified? What did they look like at the end? What specific points of transition in between help explain the intervening change over time?

Students need work on geography, especially in understanding basic geographic regions (which are generally delineated in world history textbooks).

Students should understand the difference between an unsubstantiated claim and specific evidence in support of an argument.

Students need to address continuity if it is requested in the prompt. In 2003 students addressed continuity in a number of different ways. The best responses were those that identified historical factors that

predated Islam and then continued after the impact of Islam during the specific period (e.g., the dominance of Christianity in Europe or of depictions of human and animal forms in West African art). Less successful were responses that looked at changes that took place as a result of the Islamic impact but that subsequently became elements of continuity within the region (e.g., the retrieval of classical texts in Europe via Islam) or that focused on aspects of the Islamic impact from the period 1000–1750 that remain today (e.g., gender roles in South Asia or West Africa). Students should be trained to look for continuous trends within a given time period; “continuous” means occurring without periodic breaks — past to the present, present to the future. Students should think of change and continuity as two sides of the same chronological coin, as both change and continuity can be found in almost any historical circumstance.

Students should work on global context when addressing issues of change over time. By making connections between places or comparisons between regions in specific historical periods students can demonstrate historical global context that is relevant to this type of question.

Question 3

What was the intent of this question?

This question required students to perform the following tasks:

1. choose two of the specified regions for comparison,
2. identify at least two “roles” for comparison, and
3. compare *and* contrast those roles between those regions within the specified time period.

The intent of this question was to assess students’ ability to demonstrate skills of comparative historical analysis and to show knowledge of gender relations in two global regions during the specified period. The question also implicitly prompted students to consider the effects of broader world historical developments in the period (e.g., the Industrial Revolution or Western imperial expansion) on gender relations in their chosen regions.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for this question was 4.05 out of a possible nine points. Students performed fairly well on this question. Most students seemed to know something about women’s roles in these regions, though usually of a very general nature. The regions students most frequently chose to write about were Western Europe and East Asia (mainly China). Students did not perform as well when they chose to write about Latin America and/or sub-Saharan Africa. Students were helped by the fact that the question lacked the requirement for analysis, so they could not be required to analyze important factors like cause and effect in order to gain points in the core rubric.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Students lacked depth of knowledge and specific details, giving broad and sometimes inaccurate generalizations. Significant detail was given for Western Europe and a fair amount of detail for China, including references to events (French Revolution) and significant philosophies (Confucianism) that would influence women’s role, and even descriptions of the different roles of elite and non-elite women. Very little detail was given for sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America. A possible reason for this lack of detail, especially about causation and class differences, is this same lack of specificity in textbooks.

Many students did not address all parts of the question. For example, they gave only a similarity without a contrasting point.

Students were required to address the specific time frame in answering the question. Since this time reference was required by the Scoring Guide, students who failed to explicitly reference the time period lost points.

Many students had a lack of understanding of the different roles of elite and non-elite women and their role in a society, particularly of rural women outside of Western Europe.

Students' analysis of the reasons why women's roles varied in different regions was often weak or lacking altogether.

Of the various roles they discussed, students seemed least able to adequately describe women's economic roles, neglecting such important areas as food provision, animal care, and clothing production.

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 with the other types of free-response questions, developing a thesis continues to be a problem for many students. Students need continuous practice on how to write a thesis that is explicit and that comprehensively addresses *all* parts of the question. Have students define, explain, and apply the analytical terms used in questions (e.g., “analyze, compare, contrast,” and so on) in order to understand the requirements of the question. Students need to write frequently, using thesis organization and both individual paragraphs and full essays. Students also need to practice writing timed essays in the AP Exam format.

This year's comparative question demonstrated how the free-response questions are linked to the themes found in the *AP World History Course Description: May 2004, 2005*. AP World History themes like “gender roles” should be incorporated into course planning and into the preparation of course materials.

Teachers should focus on the specific skills that are central to each of the three types of free-response questions, differentiating the tasks associated with the change-over-time and comparative questions. On the other hand, skills and/or tasks common to all three types of questions (e.g., connection to global context; explicit chronological references; use of content-specific evidence rather than broad generalizations to support the thesis) should be practiced in multiple contexts.