



Student Performance Q&A:

2006 AP® European History Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2006 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: The Document-Based Question

What was the intent of this question?

This document-based question asked students to explain how Europeans perceived the role of sports from 1860–1940. Students were provided 12 documents (11 prose documents and 1 visual image) from which to construct the essay response. The question was straightforward and gave students relatively little difficulty in terms of formulating an appropriate thesis and using a majority of the documents correctly. Several documents contained nuanced political messages, giving better students the opportunity to incorporate a higher level of analysis into their responses.

The intent of the document-based question is to assess the degree to which students can write an analytical essay based on the documents provided. Students' essays are assessed on the extent to which they meet the following criteria. First, the essay must contain an explicit thesis drawn directly from the documents. Second, students must discuss a majority of the documents individually and specifically. More particularly, students must use at least seven documents—even if used incorrectly. Documents cannot be referenced together in order to get credit for this point (e.g., “Documents 1, 4, and 6 suggest ...”). Third, the essay must demonstrate an understanding of the basic meaning of a majority of the documents. A student may not significantly misinterpret more than one document. A major misinterpretation is an incorrect analysis or one that leads to an inaccurate grouping or a false conclusion. Students must also support the stated thesis with appropriate interpretations of a majority of the documents and analyze point of view or bias in at least three documents. Students must evaluate the reliability of the documents and the ways in which the author's identity—that person's position, occupation, or status in society—intertwine with the perceptions or views stated in the document or display motive and intent. Finally,

students must illustrate appropriate analysis of documents by explicitly organizing them in at least three appropriate groups. A group must contain at least two documents that are used correctly.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 4.48 out of a possible 6 points. Although there were many very fine essays written on this question, overall performance was mixed. Students seemed comfortable with the topic itself and sometimes incorporated outside information about the topic and/or the time period. They understood most of the documents and were able to use them appropriately. Most students who made legitimate attempts at point-of-view analysis were able to do so effectively. The most commonly identified groupings included nationalism/national unity, physical health, moral lessons, and women/feminism. Therefore, many students were able to earn all of the points in the core scoring guidelines and in some cases move into the expanded core.

Perhaps the most challenging task for students, however, was to identify point of view in the documents. In fact, those who scored poorly did so in most cases because they failed to address point of view at all.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Some students relied on general thesis statements that did not reflect the content of the documents. Such essays did little more than state that sports played a number of different roles, and this was not sufficient to meet the core scoring standard calling for an appropriate, explicitly stated thesis that addresses all parts of the question. In some cases, essays that began in this way were able to provide a specific thesis in the conclusion; however, many students do not write conclusions because of the time constraints and therefore cannot recover from a weak start.

Students continued to struggle with the task of identifying point of view and bias in the documents, even though there were many opportunities to do so. Three valid attempts to examine point of view are required in order to receive credit in the core scoring guidelines. In many cases, students made no attempt to incorporate any point-of-view analysis beyond simple attribution or formulaic references. This core point is designed to demonstrate students' ability to critically interpret sources; hence, even an excellent descriptive essay with accurate attribution could not earn point-of-view credit. Some students have learned to incorporate key words (e.g., *bias*), but this is also insufficient if they fail to include how or why a source might be biased.

Students had difficulty capturing the nuances of several of the documents. For example, many did not recognize the dual message about sports presented in Document 3, the context of unification in Document 4, or the anti-fascist message in Document 11. These were not deemed to be major errors, but they often resulted in more simplistic essays that did not achieve the level of analysis needed to score in the highest part of the expanded core. Document 6 was problematic for a surprising number of students; they failed to recognize it as a recruitment poster for the British military during the First World War (despite its source line) and instead identified it as an attempt to encourage more people to play sports.

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 it is important to spend the suggested 15 minutes planning their essays. By doing some prewriting or outlining, they will be better able to begin their responses with a specific thesis statement that is drawn directly from the context of the documents and formulate groups that advance the stated thesis.

Students need ongoing instruction in constructing effective point-of-view analysis; for example, they must be able to explain *why* a particular source expresses a particular point of view or bias, or *how* a source might have been intended for use. Using terms such as *bias* or *reliable* without sufficient explanation does not demonstrate analytical skill; similarly, simple attribution by itself provides no analysis and therefore earns no credit in the basic core.

Grouping is another issue that is sometimes problematic for students. They must develop at least three explicit groupings (containing at least two documents each) that demonstrate analysis and advance an argument in the essay; arbitrary grouping receives no credit and often undermines the essay. For example, grouping by nationality was often cumbersome and ineffective in answering the 2006 document-based question because it resulted in simple recognition of a commonality that failed to offer meaningful analysis. Further, some students did not identify paragraphs within their essays, making it challenging for Readers to follow their attempts at grouping.

Question 2

What was the intent of this question?

The question was designed to elicit comparative analysis on the status, patronage, and roles of the artists in two periods, the Renaissance and Reformation (conflated) and the late nineteenth century. Students were asked to discuss similarities and differences. The intent was to elicit an examination not of the artistic achievements, styles, or goals, but the connections between the artists and the societies in which they lived.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 3.23 out of a possible 9 points. Some students did extremely well on this question, particularly those who had studied art history or used certain textbooks that dealt with this topic in depth. Although some students had difficulty in both periods, many knew a good deal about Renaissance art and could write intelligently about Renaissance artistic patronage, often referring specifically to Leonardo da Vinci or Michelangelo and drawing connections between the artists and the new intellectual movements and social values—humanism, secularism, individualism—of the Renaissance. Some students produced quite sophisticated analyses of these connections or mentioned several artists. Many focused on the improved status of Renaissance artists, indicating their wealth and prestige. Quite a few wrote about the Medici and Pope Julius II or other merchant, clerical, or princely patrons. A smaller percentage also wrote about the artists of the Northern Renaissance, usually Dürer or Bosch, or the Reformation/Counter-Reformation.

Students had a wide variety of artistic styles and movements to choose from in their discussion of the nineteenth century, although most focused on Realism and Impressionism. Sophisticated students considered the changes in patronage in the development of art galleries and museums and focused on the artist as outsider or critic of society. Such students used an impressive number of artists and artworks as examples; many students used musical or literary figures as the basis of their discussion. However, many others had difficulty appropriately identifying artists or art movements or works of the late nineteenth century, frequently writing about earlier nineteenth-century romanticism or later twentieth-century works.

What were common student errors or omissions?

The most common errors were found in the sections of the essays that discussed the nineteenth century. Many students wrote only about Romanticism or cited examples from post-1914 works like *Guernica* by Picasso. Some of these students redeemed themselves by also discussing appropriate late-nineteenth-century artists, but others scored poorly because of an inadequate sense of chronology. There were many errors of fact in the details.

Although a number of students did try to write a “compare and contrast” essay, many only itemized the differences between the two periods. Some students’ attempts to describe similarities led them to make errors about one period or the other. Much of the student writing on this question was vague or overly generalized, consisting of broad ahistorical statements about the role of the artist in any 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?

Chronology—that is, knowing where to place an idea or a movement or an important historical figure—was clearly a problem for students. As much as possible, teachers should show students how to organize their learning about European history into time periods and help them to get a sense of the order in which cultural changes happened.

In terms of writing, students need to be taught how to address the question directly, how to develop a strong thesis, and how to avoid generalized discussion. Some students based their analysis on rather wispy understandings of the stereotypical artist’s relationship with society, which led them to false conclusions about one period or the other, and sometimes both. Others wrote intelligent essays but without any citations of evidence.

Question 3

What was the intent of this question?

The question required students to analyze the relationship between the aims and methods of the Catholic Reformation in the sixteenth century and then to evaluate the outcomes based on the aims and methods the essay identified.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 3.71 out of a possible 9 points. Students appeared to possess a good grasp of the major causes and events of the Catholic Reformation, but the essays also revealed that many were uncomfortable with the given task—analysis—and with the mechanics of linking various components into a unified essay.

What were common student errors or omissions?

The most common error was extensive discussion of the Protestant Reformation, sometimes to the exclusion of the Catholic Reformation. The most frequent omission, sadly, was analysis. Instead, students often instead fell into mere description of familiar events. Fewer essays than expected developed discussions that took into account political or artistic responses. Although the Baroque period was often mentioned, students were not certain about how it fit into the picture. A lack of awareness of chronology, and even the correct use of centuries, led to frequent errors that resulted in lower scores.

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 will benefit from constant emphasis on both critical thinking and essay writing. They should realize that the scoring guidelines for these essays reward responses that fulfill all parts—that is, content and tasks—of the question. In this case, essays that only *described* received much lower scores than essays that *analyzed*. Continued work on perennial problem areas (essay writing, correct use of century numbers, and chronological awareness) will also help students succeed with these questions.

Question 4

What was the intent of this question?

This was an exercise in causation. The question initially called for specific knowledge of the Columbian exchange, most importantly the transfer to Europe of certain New World crops (especially potatoes and corn). Then, the question required linking the Columbian exchange and the population and economy of Europe in the period 1550–1700. The question suggested that there were significant effects to be cited, and the student was required to **analyze** the dimensions of this impact. The student was called upon to recognize both the direct effects, such as better diets for the Europeans and subsequent population increase, and the more extended effects, such as the agricultural revolution, emigration, and the establishment of plantation economies.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 2.91 out of a possible 9 points. The results were uneven. Most students did discuss the impact of potatoes, corn, and tomatoes (and the disease syphilis) on European society. Others referred to plants and animal by-products grown or acquired in the New World and traded to Europe (e.g., tobacco, cotton, cane sugar, animal hides, and furs). The latter focus is sometimes not considered part of the Columbian exchange, but it was taken into account in the Readers' evaluations. Many students were able to make linkages to population growth in Europe and to commercial patterns.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Students often spent too much time focusing on the effects of European diseases and animals on the New World rather than the role of New World plants (and disease) in Europe. Many saw the question as an opportunity to discuss the migration (shipment) of silver and gold to Europe and the impact of this on the European economy.

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?

One message is clear: remind students to read the entire question carefully and respond directly and exclusively to it. When plants, animals, and diseases are emphasized, the student should not expect much credit for discussing silver and gold. If the question calls for the “New World’s effects on Europe,” that should be the focus of the essay, not the reverse. Also, students should be prepared to offer examples to buttress their arguments.

Question 5

What was the intent of this question?

This question tested students’ ability to recognize the similarities and differences in economic and social roles between the state in Old Regime Europe and the postwar European welfare state. Students could approach this question through an examination of the social and economic functions performed (or expected to be performed) by national governments in both periods.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 2.51 out of a possible 9 points. Those who understood the question and had some factual information on at least one of the two periods scored 4 and above. There were some really sophisticated essays, but there were also too many in which the student simply forgot that the emphasis was the role of the state, not just economic and social changes.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Many students did not do a good job of handling both sides of the question. Others failed to focus on the role of the state rather than changes in the form of government. Highlighting political subjects without tying them to social and economic issues was a weakness in sizable numbers of essays. Many students got hung up on the comparison/contrast aspect and neglected to provide the necessary social and economic data required to give their essays a high score. Another common error was the assertion that the post-Second World War economy of Europe (and the state’s role in it) was dominated by laissez-faire liberalism.

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 would benefit from being reminded to answer the question asked and to answer the *whole* question. In an essay question like this one, with very broad time frames (the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the post-Second World War period), if students have sufficient knowledge of the two periods, there is no reason for them to go further afield. Students also need to

be careful not to simply cite names, terms, or facts as part of their responses without clearly relating them to the issues under consideration.

Question 6

What was the intent of this question?

A common theme in the study of nineteenth-century Europe is the political liberalization that took place in the “West” (the reforms in Britain; the revolutions in France and other continental nations). Russia is generally viewed as minimally (if at all) participating in this process of political liberalization. This question asked students to analyze **social** and **economic** factors that might account for this difference.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 3.49 out a possible 9 points. Students who did well on this question typically took one of three approaches. The largest group viewed this as a “Russia question” and described the shortcomings (prevalence of serfdom, lack of a middle class, lack of industrialization) that impeded Russian political liberalization. This group only employed the West as a foil to reflect Russia’s flaws. Others read the prompt as requiring a direct comparison. These were often the very strongest responses, as they discussed social and economic developments in the West that made political liberalization possible, *and* the social and economic “backwardness” of Russia during the time period that made political liberalization less likely. The least common approach was to view the task as one requiring an analysis of social and economic factors that empowered political liberalization in the West; these responses focused primarily on western Europe with only oblique references to Russia’s lack of the “right stuff.”

What were common student errors or omissions?

The most typical error was the failure to focus on social *and* economic reasons for the different levels of political liberalization in the two regions. Many students addressed one or the other, or, more often, *neither* category. Readers saw too many essays that simply described the political developments of the nineteenth century without any analysis of social or economic causes. The most significant omission was the connection of social and/or economic factors under discussion to political liberalization. There were also a surprising number of students who wrote outside the time period in question, discussing twentieth-century figures and events such as Lenin, Stalin, Bolsheviks, Communists, and the World Wars.

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?

Even experienced teachers who have been teaching AP courses for many years (including those whose students have enjoyed a considerable degree of success on the AP Exam), claim that their teaching practices improve considerably after attending an AP Reading. There is simply no better way of witnessing the standards on which student papers will be judged. For those for whom attendance at a Reading may be impossible, workshops and training sessions are the next best thing (often mock Readings take place at some of these sessions).

Students must be taught about the varying tasks required by the AP essay prompts (see the *AP European History Course Description*), and they must be reminded to read the question carefully to determine precisely what is required. Rewriting the questions to alter the actual tasks will only move the score well down into the *weaker* category. Writing about predominantly political and cultural factors in response to a prompt that says, “Analyze the social and economic reasons . . .” will lead to a score in the lower ranges, even if the essay is very well written and historically accurate.

Question 7

What was the intent of this question?

The primary intent of this question was to determine if students could demonstrate an integrated understanding of the factors leading to Germany’s defeat in the Second World War and if they could show a relationship between the prewar period of Nazi rule and the war years. The question was also designed to have students demonstrate what they knew about the 1930s, to analyze the Second World War in terms of cause and effect, to analyze the war from the Allied perspective, and to see the interrelationship of diplomacy, economics, and military events.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 3.48 out of a possible 9 points. Although virtually all students knew something about the question, overall performance was not as strong as might have been expected. Even many of the stronger students had difficulty dealing with the period from 1933 to 1939 in accounting for Germany’s defeat. Weaker students had serious chronological problems when discussing the prewar years. Student skills in organization and writing were good on this question. The problems occurred in content and analysis. Many students also restated the question rather than providing an actual thesis; this led to a listing of facts rather than an analytical approach.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Although the organization of many essays was generally sound, the lack of a thesis led to superficial analysis. Some students confused World War II with World War I, discussing, for example, the Schlieffen Plan, the sinking of the *Lusitania*, or the Zimmerman telegram. Dealing with the period 1933-39 proved especially problematic for many students who had little sense of change over time in the interwar years and who also had an incomplete understanding of terms such as *inflation* and *depression*. Finally, sizable numbers of students chose the Holocaust as the focus for their essays to the exclusion of other important events in this period.

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 students are to perform well on history examinations, they must be taught to write clear thesis statements. They also need to address all parts of the question directly and to recognize that analysis means more than listing facts. Students also need to understand the specific terms in which the question is posed. As an example, when answering this question, many students mistakenly discussed internal German social policy instead of diplomacy, which was what the question called for.