



Student Performance Q&A:

2007 AP[®] Art History Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2007 free-response questions for AP[®] Art History were written by the Chief Reader, Joy Sperling of Denison University in Granville, Ohio. 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 30-minute question required students to write about two works of art, *at least one* of which was from a culture beyond the European Tradition. They were asked to explain, on a critical and analytical level, *how and why* each work of art communicated hostility or violence. Students were asked to identify fully two appropriate works of art and to analyze both *how* the formal aspects of pose, gesture, or action (evident in representations of scenes of hunting or battle; demonstrations of power or of intimidation; or representations of irrational, antisocial, social, national, ritual, or religious acts, to name a few) of each work communicated violence or hostility, as well as *why* the function and context of each communicated these qualities.

The question did not ask for a description of each work of art. It did ask students to use their knowledge of art and culture actively to explain how violence or hostility was communicated and thus used in art for a specific purpose. The intention was to encourage them to think actively and to make intelligent connections that they might not have considered before taking the exam.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for this question was 4.34 out of a possible 9 points, which means the question was average in difficulty. This compares to last year's mean score of 4.18. This is the tenth year of the "art beyond the European Tradition" question, the second year that possible topics for the question have not been announced in advance, and the second year that the question has been placed first in the free-response section of the exam.

Taking all of this into consideration, the performance was average. On the one hand, most students filled the contractual requirement of citing one work of art from beyond the European Tradition. On the other hand, there is a disheartening trend among a very large proportion of students toward using Ancient Egyptian and Near Eastern examples for their choice of art beyond the European Tradition. While these works of art are technically legitimate choices, they are not in the spirit of this question and often do not effectively address the issues it raises. The much better choices from art that is truly from beyond the traditional canon were, sadly, many fewer this year than in the past. Unfortunately, poor choices led to weaker essays and mediocre scores. Thus, many scores for this question clustered in the mid-range. Only a very few students earned the highest score this year, while many earned low scores.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Two major problems continue: first is the continued lack of knowledge about one culture beyond the European Tradition and the poor choice of works of art. Many students appeared to have little more than a superficial knowledge of another culture. They confused, conflated, and appeared to misunderstand the functions of several similar works of art from different cultures. Many students could describe works of art well but were unable to go beyond description to address the purpose or function of various art forms. Analysis of purpose is difficult for most.

The second major problem is the failure to identify works of art with any specificity. Many identifications were vague, referring only to general types of artworks (such as *mastaba* or *mosque*), and many students failed to locate works of art in any specific place (region or country) or time (era, period, or century). Students need to learn to identify works of art by name, and failing that, by specific place and time. A secondary problem was that students failed to identify works of art that explicitly communicated violence or hostility (i.e., they made inappropriate choices), or they simply described violence or hostility in works of art.

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 responses came from students who are both interested and engaged in their learning; these students seemed to have studied one other culture actively, and they were able to answer this question easily. These students' teachers are clearly teaching one culture beyond their own in depth and with great skill. Unfortunately, there are no shortcuts to earning good scores on this question. Students who tried to "pass" the question by falling back on Ancient Egyptian and Near Eastern examples and who clearly had not studied a culture beyond the traditional canon of art history did not fare well. It is a very rare student who truly understands *why* his or her selection from within the traditional canon might be a good choice for this question.

Art beyond the European Tradition is part of the curriculum for this exam. If it is not taught and/or studied, both qualitatively and quantitatively, a student's course work is incomplete. Attempting to "game" the exam by ignoring art beyond the European Tradition is an unwise strategy. Students who follow it pay dearly for it on this question (and in the multiple-choice section), to the great sadness of all who read the exams. Instructors might consider teaching one culture beyond the European Tradition in depth every year to provide their students with the skills they need to answer any question that might be asked for this 30-minute essay question, then covering the rest of non-Western art very briefly to enable students to perform well on the multiple-choice questions. The level of knowledge required for the multiple-choice questions on art beyond the European

Tradition is outlined in the *AP Art History Course Description*.

Question 2

What was the intent of this question?

This 5-minute question asked students to analyze how the Maison Carrée (an ancient Roman temple in France) is similar to and different from a Greek temple. The intent was for students to recall the visual characteristics of a Greek temple and to compare and contrast them visually with this Roman temple. A Greek temple was not shown. The students were expected to recall the Greek architectural characteristics, to observe the characteristics in this Roman temple that were similar to what they knew to be Greek, and to note those that were different. The purpose of the question was to test students' knowledge of the basic terms of architecture and their active understanding of the differences between Greek and Roman temple architecture.

Although this appears to be a purely visual question, it in fact demands that students have an active knowledge of the differences between Ancient Greek and Roman cultures and how these differences played out in temple architecture. If a student did not know why the two cultures built different kinds of temples, the subtle differences in the temple architecture were meaningless and the recollection of those differences was very difficult.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean for this question was 1.9 out of a possible score of 4, suggesting that this question was of average challenge for students. This compares to a score of 1.79 (2006) and 1.58 (2005) for architecture questions in the recent past. While this is an improvement, it should be noted that Ancient Greek and Roman architecture is the backbone of the canon, and one might have expected a higher mean score.

There were very few students who earned zero on this question; most students knew something about temple architecture, and most had some grasp on architectural terminology, but most students scored in the mid-range. There were relatively few high scores. Compared to other questions, however, there was an adequate range of scores. The students earning lower scores described what was visible in the slide. The students earning higher scores went beyond description to show how specific characteristics of the Roman temple linked it or separated it from the Greek architectural tradition.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Many students recognized the temple and simply began to write a list of characteristics of the building without linking them to the Greek tradition. Some saw the image and simply listed all the characteristics of ancient architecture that they could remember. Many students could not use terminology precisely or actively, knowing only the most general terms (columns), or they knew only very specific details (such as all the details of the Corinthian column) but little about use of the order, architectural massing, orientation, plan, or elevation. Many students could list similarities between Greek and Roman temples, but only a few had more than a vague sense of the differences. Students are evidently memorizing vocabulary lists (e.g., the term *Corinthian* was widely known), but they seem to be learning the words without also acquiring an understanding of the larger meaning behind the terms. Only a few could use architectural terminology actively.

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 are clearly familiar with Ancient Greek and Roman architecture, which is heartening, and the best responses demonstrated a clear understanding of the cultural and religious forces that caused the architectural similarities and differences between Greek architecture and the Maison Carrée. But many students have only a superficial and passive knowledge of either culture, and few seem to have a clear understanding of the distinctions between them. Teachers might focus more on differentiating between the two cultures and on the causal relationship between patronage and art. Many students simply listed visual characteristics of architectural terms. Terminology needs to be used actively and appropriately. Teachers might also consider teaching architecture less as an accumulation of details and more in terms of mass and space. Students benefit from reading plans and comparing spatial organization. Finally, students need practice in the comparative method. They need to write. They need to write comparatively—a lot and frequently. Even if the work is self-graded, the active analysis that writing demands is key to success on this exam. No test of passive knowledge is any substitute for active analysis.

Question 3

What was the intent of this question?

Students were asked to identify Hogarth as the artist of *The Marriage Contract* (1743-45) and *The Breakfast Scene* (1743-45) and, by citing specific details from the paintings, to analyze how the artist used satire to comment on class and taste in the society of his time. The intent of this 10-minute question was for students to analyze *how* satire functioned as a rhetorical strategy in eighteenth-century England, either to amuse the public or to carry a subversive or moralizing message. The best responses connected details of the particular narrative(s) shown in the slides to William Hogarth's use of satire to comment on changes in English class and taste.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for this question was 1.59 out of a possible 4 points. Students found this question challenging, but there was a good range of scores. The question separated students well by ability. Many students were familiar with at least one of these images (they were not asked to refer to both), even if they could not recall Hogarth by name. The low-scoring students tended simply to describe the images. The mid-scoring students described the content of the images with some awareness of the subject. Students with knowledge of Hogarth or the images but with no skills in analysis could not score above the mid-range. The high-scoring students analyzed how Hogarth used specific narrative details in the images to communicate a satirical message to his audience about class and taste; they chose carefully which details in the paintings to refer to, and they did not include a full restatement of the narrative.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Although this question was easy to understand, many students did not read it carefully. Many recognized the images and simply described them or restated the narrative content. This is a

longstanding problem with questions on genre paintings or narrative scenes in art; students tend to default to a retelling of the story in the painting. Many students wrote voluminously, thinking that their own, often very fanciful, interpretations of these scenes were valid; these students clearly mistook art appreciation for art history. Students need to be aware that critical analysis of works of art is more than observation and more than personal response, and it must be grounded in history.

Many students frequently failed to mention key details in the works that referred satirically to issues of class and taste. Indeed, many students seemed unsure of the definition of *satire*. This is a perennial problem (as with the allegory question on the 2006 exam), but terms such as these are a standard part of the college lexicon and cannot be omitted. Many students failed to understand Hogarth's pictorial strategies and the dynamics of his satires. All but the best students failed to understand his larger social and cultural context and the function of his narratives in the culture of his time and place.

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 might consider teaching genre and narrative art more substantially. It was clear that many students mistook a retelling of the narrative for analysis. It is easy to teach this kind of art in narrative terms, but it needs to be taught within its larger cultural and historical context. Students could read stories in the paintings, but they could not read meaning in them, or meaning about them, in connecting what they saw to what they know.

Question 4

What was the intent of this question?

This 10-minute question asked students to analyze *how* Barbara Kruger uses both image and text *and* appropriation to communicate meaning in *Your Gaze Hits the Side of My Face* (1983). The intent was twofold: to make students analyze how Kruger uses image and text together to communicate her meaning, and also to analyze how she uses appropriation to do the same. Because image-and-text narratives are well represented throughout art history, this question offered an opportunity for students who may not have seen the image to use analytical skills honed in other areas of the course. Similarly, because *appropriation* is a standard term in art history (as well as other disciplines), it also gave students the chance to use analytical skills learned in other areas and other disciplines. In addition, since many early modern artists (Picasso most notably) made frequent use of both image-and-text *and* appropriation strategies in collages, photo collages, and photomontages to communicate very specific meanings, students should have been very familiar with both concepts.

This question also related to several recent issues in the arts: the gaze, feminism, advertising, and consumerism among them. These issues were not asked about specifically and not required in answers, but they were all possible topics of discussion. Finally, this was the only essay question located fully in the twentieth century, and it should remind students and teachers alike that the modern period is a significant part of the AP Art History curriculum that cannot be ignored without serious consequences for students.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for this question was 1.15 out of a possible 4 points. Some students found the question extremely difficult, and many found it impossible; many students earned a score of zero, while many others earned very low scores. The few who did well performed superbly and earned very high scores. Student performance correlated directly to student exposure to late-twentieth-century art and its issues. This was (until question 5 on this year's exam) the worst performance on an essay question in the past 10 years. Indeed, if the scoring guidelines had not been adjusted to accommodate for a very flexible reading of the term *appropriation*, the scores would have been even lower.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Barbara Kruger is discussed in all of the major textbooks, but even if she were not, students should have been able to treat this image as an unknown example of recent art. Not only did very few students know the artist, but very few had any idea of how to place her artistically in any way. This inability to place the artist reveals a lack of even basic analytical skills in late-twentieth-century art. With the exception of a few students who performed extremely well on this question, very few students could use the term *appropriation*, a standard introductory college-level term.

Students also exhibited a general lack of awareness of "the gaze" (despite it being in the work), of body image, of gender issues of any kind, or even of feminism in twentieth-century art. Indeed, even though they were given her name, a fairly large percentage of students referred to Barbara Kruger as "he," indicating a lack of even a basic awareness of the composition of today's art world. Very few students were able to relate the image to today's world of mass media, commercial imagery, or advertising. While there was some analysis of image and text, almost no one related it to any kind of theory. A disturbingly large number of students tried to analyze the image visually or worse, psychologically. One simply cannot address new art without studying today's 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?

Unfortunately, this question may have tested the teachers more than the students, and equally unfortunately, many failed. The lacuna in students' knowledge and skills in art since 1900 is disturbing. Teachers need to budget their time to cover twentieth- and twenty-first-century art in their courses and determine more judiciously which parts of the curriculum to emphasize in class and which to give students responsibility for learning on their own.

Students need to become independent learners and active participants in their education. Teachers cannot and should not try to talk about every work of art in class. It is wiser to spend class time on contextual analysis, on explaining difficult concepts and terms, and on teaching skills. AP Art History demands substantial daily independent assignments.

Students also need to learn to confront unknown works of art, to look for clues in them, and to use their knowledge and skills to make judgments. They must be able to analyze how and why works of art function, even in our own society in our own time. It is not enough to see art as something remote and from another time and another place, or merely to describe it.

Student performance on this question indicates a belief that it is possible to attain a high score on

this exam without much knowledge of modern art. It is important for teachers to understand, however, that the AP Art History course includes the modern period, and the twenty-first century is part of the curriculum. The modern period can be difficult to teach, but AP Central® (<http://apcentral.collegeboard.com>) has suggestions for planning a syllabus and references to aids in learning about nineteenth-, twentieth-, and twentieth-first century art, including reviews of a number of short, accessible books. Teachers who feel their grasp of more recent art is shaky are strongly encouraged to participate in professional development that focuses specifically on this area.

Question 5

What was the intent of this question?

This 10-minute question asked students to identify the Bayeux Tapestry (eleventh century), to speculate on the likely political motivations for its creation, and to indicate how these motivations were expressed in the work. The question seemed quite straightforward: the Bayeux Tapestry is a well-known work of art; there is nothing else quite like it; it is illustrated in most world history books as well as art history textbooks and it was in the *AP Art History Course Description* until quite recently. Thus students should have been very familiar with it and its history.

Knowing that most students should be aware of the narrative in the Bayeux Tapestry, this question asked about the possible motivation for its creation. Students were asked to question the function and purpose of the work of art, to ask themselves why it was created and for what purposes, and to find visible evidence of those possible motivations in the tapestry itself. This was a simple question, but it required students to draw connections between the work of art and the time and place in which it was made, and to analyze why it was made and how it functioned originally.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for this question was 1.13 out of a possible 4 points. This was the worst student performance in 10 years; students found the question extremely difficult. Very few scored highly, and many earned a score of zero. A very large number of students could not identify the Bayeux Tapestry, and those who did identify it often failed to answer the question that had been asked about it. It is difficult to tell whether this was a matter of not reading the question or not knowing the history behind the piece. In either case, the failure is problematic. It should be noted that students were not asked to write about the entire Bayeux Tapestry (or embroidery) in detail, to identify the precise panels in the slides, or to write about the specific events in these two panels. The panels shown were provided merely as visual prompts for the essay.

What were common student errors or omissions?

An astounding number of students misidentified the work of art; an equal number did not know anything significant about the Norman Conquest (despite some names being visible on the slide); and a large number of students described the contents of the images in detail but did not read the question and made no mention of how the image was propagandistic or how its particular rendering of history legitimized the victors. Students were not asked to look into this work; rather they were asked to look beyond it to analyze the larger implications of its patronage and function. Unfortunately, most students could not move beyond the specific images on the screen. Many recognized the images but could do little more than describe the internal narrative of the objects,

and they could not think actively about the tapestry as a whole. They knew the work of art but could not articulate why it was significant or for what reasons it might have been made.

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 learn how to look actively at a work of art and to learn that this often means looking beyond the particular image to ask questions about why a work came into being, for whom it was made, and why and for what purpose. These questions also drive form and content. But too many students seem to be limiting themselves to asking only *what* is a work of art and *how* does it appear. They need to address meaning, purpose and function, patterns of intention, and patrons and audiences. Very few students seemed to be aware of the political, historical, or cultural function of the Bayeux Tapestry, strongly suggesting that it is taught primarily on a visual level, stripped of all real meaning. As stated in previous years, this is a significant problem in the teaching of art of this period. Unfortunately, given student performance on this question, the situation does not seem to be improving.

Question 6

What was the intent of this question?

This 10-minute question asked students to identify Neoclassicism as the art-historical style of the sculpture of *Pauline Borghese as Venus* (1808) by Antonio Canova and to analyze how the form and content of the sculpture conveyed meaning. The intent was for students to identify Neoclassical sculpture on visual grounds (if they did not recognize the image), using clues embedded in the sculpture's form and content, and then to have them analyze how the artist conveyed both a local and a broader meaning through the formal and thematic concerns of Neoclassical sculpture. The question asked students to place the sculpture within its broader historical, cultural, and art-historical context.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for this question was 1.22 out of a possible 4 points. The sculpture question on the 2006 exam had a mean score of 1.62. The 2007 question scored very low by comparison, but the 2006 question was on a major Greek sculpture. Sculpture questions are always very difficult for students, and students found the 2007 question very challenging. It asked them to do several things simultaneously: analyze a sculpture they may not have seen previously and examine its form, content, and meaning. Many students could not identify the sculpture as Neoclassical, but even those who could found it very difficult to do more than describe the sculpture in visual or biographical terms.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Many students did not answer the question. Of those who did, many had difficulty differentiating between form and content and/or knowing what constituted *meaning*, and many identified Pauline as the sitter and Canova as the sculptor. Some knew the specific thematic allusion, but they could not connect any of this to a specific time and place or to the function of Neoclassical art. Many

wrote about Pauline’s “questionable character,” giving the full details of the internal narrative (or back story) of the sculpture, but they failed to note the significance of Pauline’s relationship to Napoleon or of Napoleon’s use of Neoclassical sculpture as a political and social tool. More than half of the students misidentified the sculpture as ancient or even as an Etruscan sarcophagus (a very serious error), indicating a lack of even a very basic knowledge of Neoclassicism (or Etruscan art, for that matter) and its concerns and characteristics.

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?

Neoclassicism is often confusing and difficult for teachers. It is frequently either misunderstood as a largely visual movement or as overly complex and slippery, especially if older or less-scholarly texts are referenced. As a result, it is often skimmed over in class. It is advisable to pay more attention to how Neoclassicism functioned to support systems and regimes in history. There are several excellent new scholarly sources on the subject. Students also need to be careful about using terminology correctly and precisely, and they should practice using it in class. The term *contrapposto*, for instance, cannot be used to describe every sculpture.

Question 7

What was the intent of this question?

Students were required to identify the medium of the Tree of Jesse (from the lancet window of the west facade of Chartres Cathedral) as stained glass, and the art-historical period in which it was made as Gothic. They were also asked to explain the religious and visual reasons for the use of stained glass in the Gothic period. This 5-minute question expected students to analyze the use of stained glass, decorated with religious imagery, as a visual object to look at, as *lux nova* (i.e., the spiritual manifestation of light as it passes through stained glass), and as a structural hallmark of Gothic architecture (e.g., large windows).

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for this question was 2.59 out of a possible 4 points. Students found the question very easy, and many scored in the upper range. Most students could identify the art-historical period as Gothic and the medium as stained glass and could discuss one significant aspect of stained glass in Gothic architecture. Since this was a 5-minute question, being able to accomplish these two tasks was enough to earn a mid-range score. The question did not have a wide range of scores. The strongest students, who wrote superb essays integrating religious and visual reasons for the use of stained glass, did not earn any more than the somewhat average students who could list several aspects of stained glass in Gothic cathedrals with some analysis—hence the high scores.

What were common student errors or omissions?

The best responses noted *lux nova* and made several good arguments. Many students could list several aspects of stained glass in Gothic cathedrals. But many students made serious errors, continuing to repeat very outdated information in their essays. There is no good reason for this. All

of the major textbooks include very good sections on Gothic art and architecture, but many students do not seem to be reading them carefully, or they are getting their information from elsewhere.

Two major problems stand out. First, many students continue to argue that narrative art of any kind during this period was intended to “educate the illiterate,” following Gregory the Great’s statement that images were the “Bibles of the illiterate.” This statement cannot and should not be read literally. It must be read within its historical context as part of a discourse embedded in its specific place and time. Images in churches served everyone. They functioned as part of a complex system that worked to support, underscore, remind, and reiterate the important sermons and teachings of church doctrine. (This issue was addressed in the scoring guidelines for a question on the 2005 exam; the guidelines are available on the Art History Exam page on AP Central.)

The second major problem is that many students still caricature this entire period as “the age of faith,” and they simplistically describe artists as being unable to portray figures and objects naturalistically. They seem to lack knowledge of the complex forces that compelled Medieval society or the many functions of Medieval art, so they fall into clichés. They provide lists of characteristics but make no meaningful connections and thus fail to understand the meaning and purpose of stained glass in Gothic cathedrals.

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 crucial that students have a firm grounding in Gothic art history, yet students regularly betray a superficial and passive knowledge as well as an inability to work actively with the material. They might start by reading the chapters in the major textbooks carefully. This is a confusing period of art history, but it needs to be understood. Students also need to practice the active use of terminology and the active use of analytical skills when looking at Gothic art.

Question 8

What was the intent of this question?

This was the one text-based question on the exam. It was not accompanied by a slide. The intent was for students to read a text and, based on the information given about the text, the knowledge that they brought to the question about the author of the text (in this case, Giorgio Vasari), the content of the text (*Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects*), and their knowledge of the art history of the time and place in which the text was written (Italy, 1550, 1568), identify the art-historical period of the work mentioned in Vasari’s quotation (Michelangelo’s Sistine Ceiling). They were also asked to analyze how the work exemplified Vasari’s claims about Michelangelo’s accomplishments.

This 10-minute question was intended to encourage students to consider two key issues. First, they needed to be able to read the quotation provided and to ask themselves what the author had said about Michelangelo and how that might have betrayed a personal agenda on the part of the author. Second, students had to ask themselves what Vasari’s quotation told them about the time and place in which his text was written, what it told them about his concept/narrative of artistic progress, and what that might mean for their understanding of art history. The purpose was to encourage students to question the concept that history is fact.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for this question was 1.60 out of a possible 4 points. Students found the question quite difficult. This was the sixth year of the text-based question, and though students have always struggled with this question, the mean score for this year's question compares quite favorably to last year's mean of 1.33 and is not far from the 2005 mean of 1.64. This year's mean score, however, was largely owing to a very flexible reading of the scoring guidelines concerning student responses to the question of the concept of artistic progress. Very rarely did any student address head-on Vasari's concept of artistic progress. Most regarded him as a wholly reliable source of information, and most could not find any critical distance from his narrative. In fact, most students did very poorly on this question. They did not answer the question and, in large part, they failed to address the quotation.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Since this question had no images and involved much more reading than the other questions, students found it more challenging. On the other hand, students were given several very obvious prompts in the question, including the author's name (Vasari), the dates (1550, 1568), the title of the text (*Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects*), Michelangelo's acknowledged supremacy, the references to enlightenment after darkness, the concept of artistic progress, and so on. Despite this, and contrary to all present-day art history, it seems that many students still think of (and are taught about) Renaissance art in Vasari's terms.

There were a few superb essays in which students read the work of Michelangelo and Vasari within their context of time and place and related their analysis to the ceiling specifically. Students who earned average to poor scores failed to analyze and simply described the image and/or the text. Many students who earned lower scores paraphrased Vasari's text or failed to comprehend its main points. Many simply described the Sistine ceiling, while others read the text literally to mean that Michelangelo's painting was brighter in color than previous artists' work. More disturbing errors included the fact that many students could not identify Michelangelo as a Renaissance artist, and many could not identify Vasari as a key figure. Many could not draw the link between Michelangelo and Vasari. Many did not seem to read either the quotation or the question. Almost none of the students were aware of the concept of artistic progress.

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?

Artistic progress is a key concept in art history; it was raised in a discussion of Question 2 in the 2006 "Student Performance Q&A":

[Students] were expected to bring knowledge to the question and use it actively. By asking students to look back to Classical art, this question also invited them to think about art history as a continuum, rather than an artificial construct of "artistic progress."

This question raises three important issues for both students and teachers . . .

[The third is that] art history is a continuum that stretches in many directions in many ways. Vasari may have written about the idea of "artistic progress" in the

1600s, but no really thinks in those terms today. We can look backward in art history as well as forward.

Students need to be taught an understanding of the history of the discipline of art history, some historiography, or at least some self-awareness that the creation of knowledge is an artificial construct. An understanding of the bias built into Vasari's writings is an important first step in this education. In addition, students always have problems with text-based questions. They need to read both the question and the quotation carefully, and they must address the quotation in their answer. Several prompts were embedded in the quotation and question.

Question 9

What was the intent of this question?

This was the second 30-minute essay question. Students were asked to identify two works of art or architecture from different art historical periods (one before 1800) that had been made possible by specific technological developments. For each work they were asked to analyze how the technological development enabled the artist or architect to express ideas in new ways. The intent was for students to choose two works of art or architecture from different periods in art history that clearly demonstrate the central role of technology in their creation, and to analyze *how* the specific technology enabled the artist or architect to express ideas in specific new ways. The key to the question was for students to make clear the causal relationship between the technology and new ways of thinking. The question did not ask them simply to describe new technologies; rather, it asked them to analyze how new technologies have been exploited by artists and architects. Students were not asked to compare images.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for this question was 3.81 out of a possible 9 points. Students found this question difficult but not as difficult as Question 9 last year. Last year's mean score was 3.33, while the mean score in 2005 was 4.25. Students usually have difficulty with the two 30-minute essay questions. Until 2006, the first 30-minute question was more challenging for students than Question 9. The change in placement (it became the first question in 2006), as well as other factors, seems to have altered its challenge somewhat. Question 9 continues to prove difficult. By comparison, the mean score for Question 1 this year was 4.34.

A number of students earned very high scores by answering the question that had been asked and by using both their art-historical knowledge and their art-historical skills in concert to analyze how technology enabled artists and architects to express ideas in new ways. In other words, those students who performed well on this question spent some time reading the question, thinking about it, planning their essays, and choosing their examples wisely, thereby establishing a clear causal relationship between technology and ideas.

What were common student errors or omissions?

The large number of students who earned the lower middle-range scores tended to describe technologies but did not establish a clear or direct causal relationship between the technologies and new ideas. Students who earned lower scores misinterpreted the term *technology* as either invention or technique or material, leading to inappropriate choices. Some described works of art

in which technology was the subject of the artwork (also an inappropriate choice). Many students found themselves lost in descriptions of technologies they did not fully understand or could not completely describe. Many had an insufficient grasp of terminology. Many arguments were too generalized and choices of both technologies and works of art too vaguely identified. Essays on such general topics as “Gothic cathedrals” or “printmaking,” for instance, earned very low scores. A number of students were unprepared to write an essay of this length and seemed unprepared to write about art in any way beyond description.

The 30-minute essay question usually reveals differences between students who are capable of reading a question accurately, making appropriate choices independently, planning an essay, thinking critically about the question, and analyzing the two works of art chosen with reference to the question, and those who are not. Indeed, a significant number of students earned lower scores because they did not read the question, did not answer it, could not make appropriate choices independently, did not fully identify their choices, did not engage in any analysis, or made all of the above errors. Students who had practice in essay writing, constructing an argument, independent thinking, and active argument about works of art were at a distinct advantage.

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?

While a number of students earned very high scores, many students performed poorly on this question. These students seemed to struggle because they had only a superficial knowledge of key works of art or key technologies. When asked to write a substantial essay on a work of art, they lacked the basic knowledge and analytical skills and thus could not begin to frame arguments or engage in analysis.

The key words in this question were *analyze*, *enable*, and *express*. Students who performed extremely well not only knew the art-historical information and terms but could use them actively. Students who could apply ideas, information, and terminology easily, and who could choose examples judiciously and independently, clearly found analysis easy. Students who were unsure of ideas, information, and terminology, who could not choose good examples, and who had to rely on memorized examples, usually defaulted to restating memorized content without analysis. Some of these students even drew parts of their essays “canned” from past AP Art History Exams. This is probably the worst strategy to use. It is like squeezing a square peg into a round hole—it never fits.

Students and teachers might be advised to work more comprehensively with three things: more contextualized learning, more active analysis and writing practice (even ungraded assignments), and more active use of terminology. Students are advised to read the question, to think, and to plan a response before writing, especially for the longer essay questions. Students should always answer the question that has been asked, not the question they wish they had been asked. Students should know that they earn no credit for providing irrelevant information in their answers.

The essay part of the AP Art History Exam constitutes the bulk of the exam. The essay questions test a student’s ability to analyze, to think critically, to build arguments, and to write actively about art. These are the skills that are prized in college and thus on the AP Art History Exam.