



Student Performance Q&A: 2007 AP[®] Spanish Language Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2007 free-response questions for AP[®] Spanish Language were written by the Chief Reader, Gwyn E. Campbell of Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia. They give an overview of each free-response question and of how students performed on the question, including typical student errors. General comments regarding the skills and content that students frequently have the most problems with are included. Some suggestions for improving student performance in these areas are also provided. Teachers are encouraged to attend a College Board workshop to learn strategies for improving student performance in specific areas.

Part A: Paragraph Completion

What was the intent of this question?

This section of the exam assesses students' knowledge of grammar and language usage in an authentic context. It consists of two categories of fill-in-the-blank exercises: a passage for which root words have been provided and two passages without root words. The total possible score is 20 points—10 points for the selection with root words and 5 points apiece for the two excerpts without root words. The individual answers must be completely accurate in terms of grammar, spelling, and accents in order to be scored as correct, and each is worth 1 point.

In the first paragraph completion, which requires students to complete the 10 blanks with the correct forms of the missing root words, students may need to write more than one word, as indicated in the directions in English and Spanish. The passage for this year's exam was an excerpt from the online version of *Contacto Magazine*, which detailed the election of Michelle Bachelet as president of Chile. The correct answers included an infinitive, a past participle, a present tense form of *haber*, several adjectives, and two preterit verb forms, although the present perfect tense was also acceptable.

In the second set of paragraph completions, without root words, students are limited to one-word answers that are correct, logical, and grammatical, as indicated in the set of instructions in both languages. In the 2007 exam, this section comprised two excerpts from different sources. The selection containing the first five questions (11–15) came from BBCMundo.com and dealt with the worldwide celebration of the four hundredth anniversary of the publication of Cervantes's *El ingenioso hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha*. The second excerpt (questions 16–20) appeared on NBA.com and discussed coverage of the NBA on the Telemundo network. The correct answers

included an adjective, a pronoun, several conjunctions, prepositions, and a verb form. In a few instances (question 18, for example) several correct answers were possible, as corresponds to authentic usage in context.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for the Standard Group* was 11.24 out of a possible 20 points. The mean score for the Total Group was 11.76 out of 20 points. No valid comparison can be made with the scores of previous years, given the new format of the AP Spanish Language Exam in 2007, in which a section without root words appeared for the first time.

What were common student errors or omissions?

At times, students supplied more than one possible answer, but in such cases both answers had to be completely correct in order to receive credit. Frequent errors occurred in spelling and the use of accents, including misplaced accents. One of the responses to question 2 (*recibió*) required the written accent, but question 3 (*obtuvo*) did not. Students also encountered many problems with adjective agreement in questions 1, 7, 8, 10, and 14 (where, for instance, both *otra* or *su* were correct answers). Failure to recognize the need for the infinitive form of *liderar* after the preposition *a* in question 5 was also a common mistake. Other students had difficulty identifying which form of *haber* to use in question 9 and the need for a form of *haber* in the present perfect construction in question 16. Some did not recognize the need for the pronoun *se* in the passive voice construction in question 13, and others failed to change *y* to *e* preceding *internacional* in question 17. The most common problems by far involved the need for various prepositions in context in questions 11, 12, 15, 18, and 20, although questions 12 and 18, for example, each had several correct answers.

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 always good practice to teach students to read the exam directions carefully. In the first section of paragraph completions (questions 1–10), the instructions state that more than one word may be used, such as a compound tense of a verb (*ha obtenido* in question 3) or a reflexive construction. In the second and third selections, only one word was allowed. Progressive verb tenses and periphrastic constructions were therefore not acceptable in questions 11–20.

Even if the correct form is identical to the prompt in parentheses, as in questions 5 and 6, the word must be written in the blank. Writing “*no cambia*” or “no change,” or drawing an arrow from the prompt to the blank is considered an error, and Readers will score the answer as incorrect. Teach students not only to write the correct form when it is identical to that in the prompt but also to supply an educated guess when they are in doubt, a strategy that will at least give them a chance of writing the correct answer (or a correct answer when more than one is possible).

Teachers should encourage students to read the entire passage or paragraph before they start filling in the blanks; this practice will help them gain a good understanding of each question and its context. Students should also make it a habit to allow time to proofread their work in order to correct errors in spelling and grammar.

*The Standard Group does not include students who speak the language at home or who have lived for more than one month in a country where Spanish is the native language. Decisions on cutoff scores are based on the Standard Group.

It is important that students have the opportunity to practice these exercises in class under conditions and time constraints that are similar to those of the exam. Teachers should also instruct students to supply a single answer for each item. Although some items may have several correct answers (e.g., *en, durante, hacia, por* in question 18), writing more than one answer increases a student's chance of error.

Practice in the following language areas can also be helpful:

- Accents (These must be written correctly and clearly. An accent over a consonant, two accents in a word, unclear placement of an accent [e.g., between two vowels], and words missing their required accents are all incorrect. Students will find it helpful to learn the division of words into syllables as well as the guidelines for when the stress falls on the last or penultimate syllable.)
- Identifying the gender of nouns
- Noun–adjective and subject–verb agreement
- Verb conjugations (routinely identifying the stem of a given tense as part of the process of learning and reviewing verb tenses)
- Use of function words, such as prepositions, conjunctions, and relative pronouns
- Sequencing of verb tenses

Part A: Interpersonal Writing

What was the intent of this question?

This question measures students' ability to create an informal written communication with proper register and to respond appropriately to all parts of the prompt. Students have 10 minutes to read the question and to write a minimum of 60 words. This year they were asked to write a note to a friend who was turning 18 years old and for whom a party had been organized. In the note, students were instructed to decline the invitation because of a previous school engagement. Then they were directed to explain why they could not attend, to express appropriate wishes, and to make plans to celebrate the occasion another time. The response was scored on effective task completion, topic development, and language use.

How well did students perform on this question?

The vocabulary of the question was of a relatively high frequency, and the prompt lent itself to a variety of structures and tenses, even in such a short note. The mean score for the Standard Group was 2.89 out of a possible 5 points, and for the Total Group it was 3.22. No valid comparison can be made with the scores of previous years, given the new format of the 2007 exam in general and this task in particular.

What were common student errors or omissions?

The most common error was failure to follow all of the instructions in the prompt, such as omitting a mention of a school activity, or not expressing appropriate birthday wishes. Also, many students did not utilize the proper register for this writing task, which was of an informal nature.

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 necessary for students to practice with a variety of interpersonal writing formats, while keeping in mind the occasions for which these items are written. The style of memos or the content of e-mail messages is different from that of congratulatory notes, notes that express regret or propose plans, or written letters between family and friends. Students also need to be aware that although interpersonal writing employs a register that is distinct from that of presentational writing, correct language and grammar usage is still important.

Part A: Presentational Writing

What was the intent of this question?

This task requires students to understand, organize, synthesize, and integrate a variety of source material into a cohesive written response to a specific prompt. They are instructed to use information from all the sources to support the ideas in their essays. The instructions, in both Spanish and English, ask students to identify the sources when they refer to them. They are also advised to avoid simply summarizing the sources individually.

This year's question asked students to discuss the effect of tourism on culture and the environment. The question was based on three sources, including both print and audio material: two articles, titled "Plan para preservar Machu Picchu" and "Turismo con los indios Kuna," and an audio file, "Turismo Justo anima a los españoles a respetar las culturas de los países que visiten este verano." Students had seven minutes to read the printed material, and they listened to the audio selection for approximately three minutes. They were instructed to use 5 minutes to plan their responses and then 40 minutes to write an essay of about 200 words. This task was designed to illustrate students' abilities to integrate listening, reading, and writing. The essays were scored on effective task completion, topic development, and language use, which were all equally considered.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for the Standard Group was 2.81 out of a possible 5 points, and the Total Group received a very similar mean score of 2.84. No valid comparison can be made with the scores of previous years, given the new format of the 2007 exam.

What were common student errors or omissions?

In terms of task completion, the most common errors were failure to address the task fully by not referring (or referring inadequately) to all of the sources. Regarding topic development, many students erred by summarizing rather than synthesizing the information from the various sources, and at times insufficient or poor organization was a problem. With respect to language usage, students' expression was frequently hampered by errors in grammar, vocabulary, conventions of the written language, and the use of an inappropriate register.

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 have regular and abundant practice with a wide variety of authentic print and audio sources, representative of all Spanish-speaking countries. They should understand the difference between synthesis and summary, as well as the distinction between direct quotation and paraphrasing. In addition, they should learn effective ways to cite information, so that they can use the citations as a way to support their ideas in the context of a given prompt and to do so in an organized fashion. Although there is no fixed format for the presentational writing task, teachers can assist students in becoming accustomed to writing an introduction and to end with a conclusion that is more than a mere restatement of the previous content. Practice with this type of task throughout the year and with source material similar to that found on the exam, including the prewriting and/or organizational phase, is very valuable for students. In other words, students will benefit greatly from training in taking notes while listening to aural sources and in highlighting the important elements of a written text. They must also remember to read the instructions and the prompt attentively, and they should clearly understand the advantages of using the allotted five minutes to outline their responses.

Part B: Interpersonal Speaking

What was the intent of this question?

This part of the exam is designed to engage students in a cohesive and well-organized telephone conversation with the appropriate register. In the instructions, in both English and Spanish, students were asked to participate in a conversation with their friend Eduardo, who had two tickets to a concert. The prompts directed them to accept the invitation, to finalize the plans, and to recount the most recent concert they had attended. Students needed to recognize significant details from both the written text outline and the auditory prompts that they heard during the conversation. They were expected to demonstrate their oral aptitude by participating fully in the conversation and illustrating their abilities to integrate listening, reading, and speaking. They were scored on effective task completion, topic development, and language use, which were considered equally.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for the Standard Group was 2.89 out of a possible 5 points, and for the Total Group it was 3.75. Comparisons with the results of the 2006 exam are not possible, given the new format of this year's exam.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Through a variety of prompts, students were asked to participate in a conversation. At the third prompt, the task became a bit more complicated, as students were required to develop the line of the conversation. A common error or omission was the failure to offer an alternative activity as the conversation required. Some students were unable to understand the fourth prompt, which asked them to describe the most recent concert that they had attended. Others seemed ill-prepared for

this task in general and were therefore unable to engage in the conversation. Students also did not necessarily use the entire 20 seconds allotted for each response.

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?

During the course of the year, students should be given repeated opportunities to become familiar with the recording equipment and the format of the simulated conversation part of the exam. Past experience has indicated that such practice helps students to achieve higher scores. Throughout the year teachers should provide opportunities for students to hear a variety of native speakers who represent all Spanish-speaking countries in sources such as films, documentaries, and interviews.

Teachers should place particular emphasis on the skills of synthesizing information, comparing and contrasting ideas, circumlocution, and paraphrasing. Frequently engaging in conversation with other classmates and giving prepared and impromptu oral presentations will enable students to better manage the various questions on the exam. Students should also be reminded to pay attention to register and to social and cultural references that may be included in the authentic sources.

Part B: Presentational Speaking

What was the intent of this question?

The second half of the speaking portion of the exam is an interpretive and presentational task. This year students were asked to give a two-minute presentation in a formal/academic setting in which they compared and contrasted a printed article from *Al día*, “Fiesta boricua por la unidad,” and a interview from Radio Naciones Unidas titled “La danza mantiene vivas las tradiciones paraguayas de quienes crecen lejos de su patria.” Students had five minutes to read the article, and they were advised to take notes during the audio selection. They then had two minutes to plan their responses before beginning their two-minute report. The accomplishment of the task illustrates students’ command of Spanish linguistic skills and their ability to integrate reading, listening, and speaking.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for the Standard Group was 2.89 out of a possible 5 points, and for the Total Group it was 3.13. Comparisons with the results of the 2006 exam are not possible, given the new format of this year’s exam in general and this task in particular.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Many students summarized the information presented rather than comparing and contrasting as instructed by the prompt. Moreover, although they were expected to refer to and integrate both sources during this oral presentation, they instead relied heavily on the printed article and struggled with the audio selection. Organization and cohesiveness played a major role in this part of the exam. Some students did not prepare well, and their responses were disorganized. Additional problems and errors that hindered task completion and development of the topic included the following:

- Reading directly from the printed sources
- Labored, halting expression
- Poor pronunciation
- Lack of control of basic structures such as agreement, gender, verb conjugations, and possessive adjectives

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?

A familiarity, developed during the entire academic year, with the exam-taking environment (especially with the actual recording equipment that will be used) and with the format of the presentational speaking task will help students achieve higher scores. Throughout the AP course, students should have the opportunity to both hear and read authentic sources in a variety of formats from a wide range of Spanish-speaking countries.

Teachers should also assist students in learning how to synthesize material and to work with comparisons, contrasts, and such oral skills as circumlocution and paraphrasing. It is important to show students how to identify register and to recognize and understand sociocultural references in written and spoken sources. Frequently engaging in conversation with other classmates and giving prepared and impromptu oral presentations will enable students to better respond to this task.