



## **Student Performance Q&A: 2010 AP® Japanese Language and Culture Free-Response Questions**

The following comments on the 2010 free-response questions for AP® Japanese Language and Culture were written by the Chief Reader, Laurel Rasplica Rodd of the University of Colorado in Boulder. 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.

### **Interpersonal Writing: Text Chat**

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

This task evaluated writing in the interpersonal communicative mode by having students respond as part of a simulated exchange of text-chat messages with a Japanese language professor about learning Japanese. It comprised a statement identifying an interlocutor and conversation topic and six messages to which students responded. Each message consisted of a chat entry in Japanese and a brief direction in English, which provided guidance on how to answer. Students were asked to give some examples of what they do in their Japanese class, tell what they would like to do with their Japanese in the future, give and justify an opinion regarding the use of only Japanese in Japanese language classes, offer advice to someone planning to begin the study of Japanese, and ask some questions about the study of Japanese at the university level. Students had 90 seconds to read the message and respond at each turn in the conversation. Each response received a holistic score based on how well it accomplished the assigned task; all six scores counted equally in calculating the total score.

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

The mean score for the Standard Group\* was 16.94 out of a possible 36 points. The mean score for the Total Group was 19.55. The task proved moderately challenging for most students.

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

The text chat involved communicating with a Japanese language professor about learning Japanese. The topic seemed to be a familiar one to most students, and most students had control

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

of the vocabulary needed to respond. Most were able to choose and maintain the appropriate polite register. The syntax in the third message, which asked the question 日本語がもっと上手になったら、日本語を使って何をしたいですか, seemed to be difficult for some students to comprehend. Also, some students seemed not to understand the meaning of だけ in the message in Question 4: 日本語だけを使ったほうがいいと思いますか.

***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?***

Remind students that they should carefully read the instructions on how to respond to each prompt and respond as fully and appropriately as possible each time it is their turn. Students should say as much as possible in response to each prompt and not be content with a minimal answer. They should keep in mind the context of the text chat and be sure all their responses are relevant to that context.

Instruct students to pay careful attention to the English instructions that accompany each of the interlocutor’s written comments. In this particular text chat, instructions were to “give specific examples,” “justify your opinion,” “give advice,” and “ask some specific questions” in response to Yumiko Sato’s text messages. Some students provided minimal responses that did not follow these instructions and therefore did not fully address the prompt. Teachers could practice these activities in class so students are more familiar with the various syntactic structures that can be used to fulfill these functions.

Remind students that there is a time limit for each response and that they should be sure to complete their response within that time limit. Some students provided an extensive self-introduction in response to the first prompt and so did not have time to answer the question 日本語を勉強していて、何が一番楽しいですか.

Give students regular opportunities to type Japanese so they feel comfortable switching between hiragana and katakana, converting to kanji when appropriate, and producing geminate consonants and the kana ん and ん correctly. Correct use of Japanese punctuation is important to facilitate readability. Some students insert unnecessary spaces between Japanese words, which is time consuming for them.

## **Presentational Writing: Compare and Contrast Article**

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

This task assessed writing in the presentational communicative mode by having students write an article for the student newspaper of a school in Japan. It comprised a single prompt, which identified two related topics and detailed how they should be discussed in the article. Specifically, students were asked to compare and contrast reading a novel and reading a magazine. They had to describe at least three aspects of each and highlight the similarities and differences. They were also asked to state their preference and give reasons for it. Students were given 20 minutes to write an article of 300–400 characters or longer.

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

The mean score for the Standard Group was 3.05 out of a possible 6 points. The mean score for the Total Group was 3.43. Most students were able to perform the task relatively well.

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

Most students were able to include all the required elements: introduction and conclusion, three aspects of comparison, and expression of preference and reasoning, but some omitted one or more of these parts. Although many students were able to use such conjunctions as *そして*, *でも*, *しかし* and *それから* and many used a numbering system (第一, 第二), they would benefit from expanding their repertoire to include additional phrases, such as *まず*, *最初に* and *つぎに* *けつろんとして*. Failure to use complex structures (e.g., relative clauses, comparative structures, and explanatory phrases) sometimes marred presentational writing and detracted from the impression of ease of expression. Lack of rich vocabulary and idioms often led to inappropriate repetition of basic and common vocabulary or to interference from another language. Many students had trouble comparing the experiences of reading novels and reading magazines because of a lack of vocabulary.

### ***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?***

Remind students to carefully read the prompt and address all aspects of it in their responses. Taking time to outline ideas before beginning to write will help students organize their thoughts and structure their essays clearly and logically.

Spend time helping students learn appropriate ways to introduce and summarize a topic. Students need practice in using a range of appropriate conjunctions and transitional elements. Help them practice appropriate use of more such elements.

Encourage continued expansion of students' repertoires of vocabulary, idioms and grammatical structures, which will help students achieve natural, easily-flowing expression of their ideas.

Have students should practice appropriate essay layout: paragraphing and indenting the first line of each paragraph are important in helping Exam Readers follow the flow of an essay. Students should not leave spaces between words. Make sure students understand that to convert to kanji from hiragana, they should hit the space bar after the complete word or phrase is typed, not in the middle of it. Students should also be reminded to carefully read and confirm the kanji conversion they have selected.

Give students regular opportunities to type Japanese so they feel comfortable switching between hiragana and katakana and converting to kanji correctly when appropriate, using the space bar rather than function keys for shortcuts as the AP Exam setup does not support function keys. Correct use of Japanese punctuation is also important to facilitate readability.

## **Interpersonal Speaking: Conversation**

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

This task evaluated speaking in the interpersonal communicative mode by having students respond as part of a simulated conversation. It comprised a statement identifying an interlocutor and conversation topic and four questions. Students were asked to engage in a conversation with a friend about an upcoming party. They were expected to respond to the friend's question about whether they should hold the party in the afternoon or evening, recommend activities for the party that everyone would enjoy, explain why they made that particular recommendation, and respond to an expression of appreciation and a request for possible additional help in the future. Students had

20 seconds to speak at each turn in the conversation. Each of the four responses received a holistic score based on how well it accomplished the assigned task; all four scores counted equally in calculating the total score.

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

The mean score for the Standard Group was 10.55 out of a possible 24 points. The mean score for the Total Group was 13.88. Most students found this task moderately challenging.

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

Some students were unable to respond to the questions about the party Masao Hirano was planning and instead replied that they would not go to the party. Some students gave minimal responses and did not attempt to elaborate.

***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?***

Remind students that they should read very carefully the instructions on how to respond and then respond as fully and appropriately as possible each time it is their turn. They should say as much as possible in response to each prompt and not be content with a brief, though appropriate, answer. Students sometimes respond to only part of a prompt or to just one phrase within it, rather than to the entire prompt.

Students should always keep in mind the context of the conversation so as to provide relevant responses. They should keep the interlocutor in mind and choose the appropriate register and style of speech. Students should practice using and responding to set phrases (greetings, apologies, expressions of appreciation, requests for assistance, etc.) until they become automatic, and they should also practice elaborating appropriately when using different levels of discourse. Practice using — but not overusing — typical Japanese hesitation sounds (such as あのう or えーと) rather than “um” or “uh” will help students produce more natural conversation.

**Presentational Speaking: Cultural Perspective Presentation**

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

This task assessed students’ speaking skills in the presentational communicative mode by requiring them to make a presentation on a cultural topic to a Japanese class. It consisted of a single prompt that identified a cultural topic and detailed how it should be discussed in the presentation. Specifically, students were asked to present their view or perspective on Japanese transportation. They were to begin with an appropriate introduction, discuss at least five aspects or examples of Japanese transportation, explain their views or perspectives about them, and end with a concluding remark. They were given 4 minutes to prepare the presentation and 2 minutes for its delivery. In addition to language skills, the task assessed the cultural knowledge exhibited in the response.

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

The mean score for the Standard Group was 3.39 out of a possible 6 points. The mean score for the Total Group was 3.92. Most students were able to perform the task relatively well.

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

Making a presentation that addressed all aspects of the prompt proved challenging to some. Some students provided inaccurate cultural information, and many more were unable to provide details about the examples or aspects of transportation they introduced. Common errors included a lack of organization and a lack of transitional elements. The absence of appropriate cohesive devices from sentence to sentence sometimes led to the presentation of scattershot bits of information.

Additional difficulties included the lack of a rich vocabulary and idioms and the inability to correctly produce complex sentences. A few students were unable to sustain the appropriate register and level of speech for an oral presentation. Students had trouble producing a speech of the appropriate length: Some students ran out of time, while others finished extremely early and then were silent or repeated themselves.

***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?***

Remind students to address all the requirements of the prompt and to outline their ideas before beginning to speak to ensure that they address all aspects of the prompt in an organized oral presentation. Students need more than superficial exposure to many different aspects of Japanese culture, as well as many opportunities to practice describing those Japanese cultural practices, products and perspectives and expressing their own opinions about them. Additionally, students should have the opportunity to practice structuring their oral presentations with appropriate introductory and concluding remarks. They also need practice in using a variety of transitional elements and cohesive devices appropriately, using a range of sentence structures, and building from simple to complex sentences.

Practice in using typical Japanese hesitation sounds such as あのう or えーと and summarizing or restating what they have already said in different words will help students produce more natural-sounding, easily flowing speech. Students should practice producing speeches of the appropriate length so they will know how much they can say in two minutes.