

## Student Performance Q&A: 2010 AP® Music Theory Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2010 free-response questions for AP® Music Theory were written by the Chief Reader, Teresa Reed of the University of Tulsa in Oklahoma. 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?*

The intent of this question was to test students' ability to:

- hear and notate a melody in compound meter;
- hear and notate a melody within the range of approximately an octave;
- hear diatonic pitch function in a major key; and
- hear and transcribe motivic patterns.

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

The mean score was 3.43 out of a possible 9 points, slightly lower than the mean of 3.49 for this question in 2009.

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

- Failing to correctly notate rhythmic patterns
- Misplacing beats and dots
- Failing to use correct beaming
- Displacing the downbeat
- Failing to recognize tonic
- Failing to perceive macropulses
- Placing unstable pitches on strong beats

Most errors for this question were in bar 3.

***Based on your experience of student responses at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?***

- Teach compound meter, including primary and secondary accents.
- Teach the correct notation for compound meter, including dots and proper beaming.
- Compare triple meter with 6/8 but distinguish between simple and compound meter.
- Teach skips other than those in the tonic triad.
- Emphasize hearing scale-degree functions.

## **Question 2**

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

The intent of this question was to test students' ability to:

- hear a minor melody in simple meter;
- hear and notate the raised mediant in the context of a minor key;
- hear and notate the ascending melodic minor scale pattern, including the raised 6th and 7th;
- notate accidentals correctly;
- recognize and properly notate dotted rhythms;
- hear and properly notate the leap from tonic up to dominant; and
- hear and properly notate minor-key scalar patterns.

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

The mean score was 2.47 out of a possible 9 points, slightly lower than the mean of 2.75 for this question in 2009.

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

- Notating accidentals incorrectly
- Failing to hear the melodic perfect 5th at the beginning of the melody
- Failing to hear the raised 6th of ascending melodic minor
- Confusing harmonic minor with melodic minor
- Notating the D-sharp in bar 3 incorrectly as an E-flat
- Augmenting rhythmic values (i.e., writing eighth notes as though they were quarter notes)
- Failing to hear and properly notate the dotted rhythms in bars 1, 2 and 3

***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?***

- Expose students to minor mode early on; avoid the major mode bias.
- Teach the correct notation of accidentals.
- Teach the correct notation of rhythm, including beams and dots.
- Require students to handwrite music on the staff more frequently.
- Give students practice hearing and notating larger intervallic leaps.
- Stress the importance of choosing the correct enharmonic option (i.e., D-sharp instead of E-flat in bar 3).

- Emphasize the tonic–dominant relationship (the tonal pillars).
- Teach the characteristic usage of accidentals in harmonic and melodic minor.
- Remind students to follow the instructions on the AP Exam and to complete exercises in pencil rather than in ink.

### Question 3

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

The intent of this question was to test students' ability to:

- recognize and properly transcribe a progression in harmonic minor;
- employ the raised leading tone in the dominant chord;
- hear common chord progressions, such as  $V_2^4$  to  $i^6$ ; and
- distinguish between the imperfect authentic and the perfect authentic cadence.

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

The mean score was 11.34 out of a possible 24 points, lower than the mean of 13.12 for this question in 2009.

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

- Omitting the accidental needed to raise the leading tone in both bass and soprano lines
- Failing to hear the ascending bass line skip out of bar 1 into bar 2
- Notating the final soprano note incorrectly as the tonic

#### ***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?***

- Ensure that students receive regular practice with harmonic dictation in minor keys.
- Emphasize the need for an accidental to raise the leading tone.
- Stress common chord progressions and resolutions in harmonic minor.
- Provide students with a listening plan for their dictation exercises.
- Remind students that free-response questions can feature various kinds of cadences, not just the perfect authentic cadence.

### Question 4

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

The intent of this question was to test students' ability to:

- notate the soprano, bass and Roman numerals in a major-key progression;
- hear and properly notate the applied dominant;
- hear and properly notate the cadential six-four;
- hear and properly notate the outer voices of inverted chords; and
- hear and properly label chords with inner-voice sevenths.

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

The mean score was 10.78 out of a possible 24 points, lower than the mean of 11.83 for this question in 2009.

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

- Failing to hear and properly notate the opening leap of a third in the bass
- Failing to properly notate the chromatic bass pitch of the applied dominant in bar 1
- Failing to hear and properly notate the descending soprano leap of a fourth in bar 1
- Failing to hear and properly notate the ascending soprano leap of a fourth, also in bar 1
- Failing to include the seventh in the labeling of the penultimate chord

***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?***

- Emphasize and give students practice with proper handwritten notation, ensuring that they write legibly.
- Encourage students to hear each line in solfège before notating on the staff.
- Use daily sight-singing exercises as a way to reinforce dictation skills.
- Have students practice bass/soprano duets during sight-singing.
- Provide students with a step-by-step strategy for harmonic dictation.
- Encourage students to notate first what they hear best.
- Have students practice with algorithmic progressions that feature logical chord sequences and resolutions.
- Help students to develop a harmonic vocabulary.

**Question 5**

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

The intent of this question was to test students' ability to:

- correctly interpret and realize the figured bass progression;
- correctly spell chords and analyze those chords with Roman numerals;
- write proper voice leading in four-part harmony;
- prepare and properly resolve chordal sevenths;
- remember to raise the leading tone in the minor mode; and
- properly execute a deceptive cadence in the minor mode.

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

The mean score was 15.10 out of a possible 25 points, significantly higher than the mean of 12.76 for this question in 2009.

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

- Forgetting to raise the leading tone in the minor mode
- Misinterpreting the figured bass symbol for raising the leading tone
- Failing to properly construct an inverted dominant seventh chord
- Ending the exercise on the tonic harmony instead of on the submediant harmony

- Failing to properly execute a deceptive cadence in the minor mode
- Forgetting to correctly prepare and resolve the chordal sevenths
- Spelling chords incorrectly
- Using improper spacing in the upper voices
- Completing the exercise in three voices rather than four
- Analyzing the chords in the relative major instead of in minor

***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?***

- Explain what is meant by “realize the figured bass.”
- Emphasize raising the leading tone in the minor mode.
- Emphasize both the preparation and the resolution of chordal sevenths.
- Emphasize that all inverted seventh chords and triads should be complete chords.
- Emphasize smooth voice leading with minimal movement in the inner voices.
- Emphasize correct chord spelling.
- Teach the proper treatment of unequal fifths — when they are appropriate and when they are not.
- Show students how to avoid overlapping and spacing errors.
- Emphasize the horizontal aspects of voice leading; have students play their realizations on the piano to help this process.
- Remind students not to alter the given material, i.e., the bass pitches and figures.
- Emphasize the spelling of seventh chords.

## **Question 6**

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

The intent of this question was to test students’ ability to:

- write a four-part chord progression from Roman numerals;
- properly spell secondary dominant chords, including inverted secondary dominants;
- properly resolve leading tones; and
- properly resolve chordal sevenths.

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

The mean score was 8.98 out of a possible 18 points, slightly lower than the mean of 9.05 for this question in 2009.

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

- Writing the upper voices with improper spacing
- Spelling inversions incorrectly
- Writing a parallel unison between chords 1 and 2
- Writing parallel fifths, particularly between chords 1 and 2, 2 and 3, and 6 and 7
- Doubling the leading tone in chord 2
- Writing hidden octaves or fifths between chords 2 and 3
- Misspelling the secondary dominant (chord 4)

- Realizing the secondary dominant (chord 4) as two separate chords
- Resolving the leading tone incorrectly in chord 4
- Resolving the chordal sevenths incorrectly in chords 4 and 6
- Confusing tonicization with modulation (i.e., writing the last measure in the key of C major)

***Based on your experience of student responses at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?***

- Teach students the importance of correct spacing when writing chords.
- Become familiar with the AP Music Theory scoring guidelines for this question and employ them in classroom teaching.
- Include secondary dominants in the curriculum.
- Have students practice recognition and avoidance of common voice-leading and chord-spelling errors throughout the course.
- Remind students that chordal sevenths must resolve downward by step in the same voice.

## **Question 7**

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

The intent of this question was to test students' ability to:

- write standard cadences;
- recognize and correctly use a secondary dominant;
- compose a bass line following the rules of 18th-century counterpoint;
- use conventional harmonic patterns; and
- use embellishments correctly in a two-part framework

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

The mean score was 4.65 out of a possible 9 points, slightly lower than the mean of 4.82 for this question in 2009.

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

- Writing a deceptive cadence at the end of phrase two, despite the resulting parallel fifths
- Using ii or IV on the first beat of measure six, despite the resulting cross relation
- Using six-four chords improperly
- Using nonchord tones improperly
- Using iii and its inversions excessively
- Failing to properly analyze the prolonged dominant in bar 5
- Using root-position leading-tone triads excessively
- Concluding cadences with six-four chords
- Writing unusually disjunct bass lines
- Writing parallel fifths where chordal roots were related by second (i.e., IV—V)

**Based on your experience of student responses at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?**

- Teach students the stylistic norms of 18th-century counterpoint.
- Give students practice with two-part writing as well as four-part writing.
- Remind students that Question 7 is *not* an exercise in free composition.
- Have students practice the proper use of six-four chords.
- Teach seventh chords and their proper resolution.
- Teach and have students practice standard harmonic progressions.
- Remind students to avoid chords rarely seen in this style, such as iii and I<sup>7</sup>.
- Teach and have students practice standard cadences.
- Give timed practice exercises in preparation for the AP Exam.
- Remind students to avoid florid ornamentation.

## **Question S1**

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

The intent of this question was to test students' ability to:

- differentiate between major and minor;
- perform dotted rhythms;
- perform common rhythmic patterns and variants of those patterns (such as the short–long values in bar 7);
- sing a two-phrase unit with motion from *do* to *sol* and *sol* to *do*;
- correctly perform simple meter;
- retain a sense of tonic from the beginning to the end of the melody; and
- read treble clef.

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

The mean score was 4.71 out of a possible 9 points, lower than the mean of 5.4 for this question in 2009.

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

- Mixing major and minor mode in the performance
- Singing the rhythm in bar 1 with a dotted value on the first beat
- Missing the repeated pitch in bar 3
- Failing to sing the tonic to dominant leap out of bar 3 into bar 4
- Changing meter partway through the performance
- Performing the wrong rhythm in the penultimate bar
- Singing a lowered second scale degree in the penultimate bar
- Failing to hold the last note for its full value

**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?**

- Have students practice common rhythmic patterns in various meters.
- Provide regular opportunities for students to do sight-singing in class (such as using previous AP Music Theory sight-singing questions for practice).
- Have students practice singing in minor keys as well as major keys.
- Encourage students to “ghost-finger” along as if playing their instruments while singing.
- Allow students to use a neutral syllable if they are not comfortable with solfège syllables or numbers by March.
- Encourage students to continue singing (rather than stopping) when they make a mistake.
- Advise students to sing just rhythm on tonic if they struggle greatly with pitch.
- Have students sing aloud during practice time.
- Have students work on rhythm first during practice time.
- Encourage students to write on the exam during the practice period.
- Go over the directions for the sight-singing questions with the exam proctor.

## **Question S2**

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

The intent of this question was to test students’ ability to:

- sing a major melody in bass clef;
- sing in compound meter;
- sing arpeggiated triads;
- perform basic chromaticism;
- sing a variety of skips, such as the diminished fifth near the end;
- sing a variety of rhythmic patterns; and
- perform proper resolution of the leading tone.

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

The mean score was 3.87 out of a possible 9 points, lower than the mean of 4.41 for this question in 2009.

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

- Missing the major triad in bar 1, often substituting “do-re-mi”
- Missing the F-sharp in bar 2
- Failing to execute leaps, especially “fa-ti” at the cadence
- Missing the descending tonic triad in bar 3
- Singing badly out of tune
- Singing rhythms incorrectly, often as though in duple meter
- Failing to hold the final note for its full value
- Ending on notes other than tonic



***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?***

- Have students practice the major scale ascending *and* descending.
- Have students practice singing ascending and descending tonic triads.
- Teach students to breathe properly and sing in tune.
- Encourage students to slow down.
- Teach students to clearly articulate each note (e.g., avoid humming or singing on “ha”).
- Emphasize the *sound* of the music over solfège or numbers.
- Remind students to give each note its full duration.
- Teach strategies for analyzing music and practicing segments in isolation.
- Encourage students to develop a repertoire of common patterns.
- Help students gain a clear sense of tonic and dominant.
- Require instrumentalists to occasionally sing their parts during rehearsal.
- Make sure that exam proctors are adequately prepared to administer sight-singing questions.
- Avoid administering the exam in a language lab where groups of students are present, if at all possible.
- Encourage students to make music!