



Student Performance Q&A:

2010 AP® Spanish Language Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2010 free-response questions for AP® Spanish Language were written by the Chief Reader, Gustavo Fares of Lawrence University in Appleton, Wis. 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-1: Interpersonal Writing

What was the intent of this question?

This question was intended to measure students' ability to compose an electronic message with proper register while responding appropriately to all four parts of the prompt. Students had 10 minutes to read the prompt and to write a response that was at least 60 words in length. The task asked them to imagine that they were writing to a friend thanking him or her for the invitation to spend a week of vacation with the friend and his or her family. Students were asked to do four things: to greet the friend, to thank the friend for the invitation, to offer some suggestions for possible activities during the week of vacation, and to say goodbye. The response was scored on effective task completion and topic development in one category and on language use in a second category.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for the Standard Group* was 2.90 out of a possible 5 points, slightly lower compared with the score of 2.93 in 2009. For the Total Group the mean score was 3.21, compared with 3.34 in 2009. Writing an electronic message to a friend required using vocabulary that was of relatively high frequency, so the majority of students were able to accomplish the task. Even in such a short message, the prompt lent itself to varied vocabulary for greeting, saying thanks and saying goodbye, as well as a variety of structures and tenses for possible activities during the week of vacation.

*The Standard Group does not include students who speak Spanish 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.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Although the four elements of the task were clearly indicated in the prompt, common errors included the misinterpretation of the invitation. A number of students seemed to be confused with respect to who was inviting whom and whether the week of vacation had already occurred or was going to take place. Some students thought the week of vacation was in the past, not in the future; others thought the message was intended to invite the friend and his or her family for a week of vacation.

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?

- Throughout the year, simulate this question by creating a variety of interpersonal writing tasks for classroom work and as homework. Regular practice on this type of question, including under the same constraints as those of the exam, will assist students in best preparing for such a question.
- Provide routine practice, including editing for consistency, for tasks using different registers in the written responses.
- Rephrase the introductory paragraph to the prompt so that students can practice answering this question, paying special attention to the setting for the response.

Part A-2: Presentational Writing

What was the intent of this question?

This question was an example of the presentational mode of writing and a task that integrated the skills of reading, listening and writing. Students were asked to understand, organize and synthesize information from three different sources into a cohesive written response to a prompt about the effect of music on the lives of young people. The specific examples referred to in the sources were a chorus in Nicaragua, a youth symphony in Venezuela and music classes in Chile. Students were told to use information from all the sources to support their ideas in a formal essay. The instructions, in both English and Spanish, asked them to identify the sources as they used them in their answers. Students were also advised to avoid simply summarizing the sources individually.

This task was based on three sources, including both print and audio material. The first print article was entitled “El talento del coro ‘Fabrettino’” and was taken from the Nicaraguan newspaper *La Prensa*. The second print source was entitled “Jóvenes de la Sinfónica ‘orgullosos de ir a España’ con Abreu” and was taken from an issue of *El Universal*. The third source was a rerecorded audio file entitled “La música mejora el rendimiento académico,” originally broadcast in 2008. Students had 7 minutes to read the printed material, and they listened to the audio selection for approximately 3 minutes. They were instructed to take 5 minutes to plan their responses and then 40 minutes to write an essay of about 200 words. They were scored on effective task completion, topic development and language use, equally considered.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for the Standard Group was 2.77 out of a possible 5 points. This was somewhat higher than the mean score of 2.62 in 2009. The mean score for the Total Group was 2.88, which was slightly higher than the mean score of 2.81 in 2009. The language required to answer this question was of reasonably high frequency. Many students used the ample vocabulary and

grammar from the two print sources and even the third source to write detailed essays of considerable length.

The total mean score for the writing portion of the exam for the Standard Group was 5.67 out of a possible 10 points, which was higher than the mean score of 5.55 in 2009. For the Total Group the mean score on the writing portion was 6.08, slightly lower than the mean score of 6.15 in 2009.

What were common student errors or omissions?

A common error was the extensive use of prior knowledge about music without citing one, two or all three sources in answering this question. In many instances students used their outside knowledge as opposed to the specific information and viewpoints provided in the sources. As a result, the most common errors were misinterpreting the sources, especially the third source, and using the information in the essay in a limited manner.

From the perspective of task completion, another common error was an apparent overreliance on the two printed sources. Some students provided minimal reference to the audio source. When citing or referring to the sources, many students simply copied from the print sources, making it more difficult to determine whether the source of the language in the response was the student or the texts. In such cases it could be more difficult to assess the students' ability to summarize or synthesize the material from the sources.

Also, many students' essays were not well organized. Many students organized their essays according to the order of the sources instead of using the third source as the synthesis of the topic and citing examples from the two print sources as support for the synthesis.

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

Students will benefit from practice with as many authentic sources as possible. In particular, continual practice with a variety of audio sources is an excellent idea because it addresses the area of difficulty for many students. In these practice sessions teachers can help the students focus on understanding the "gist" or essence of the audio source, while taking brief notes. Of course, this suggestion is not limited to practice with the audio sources alone. Routine practice with print sources is important as well.

Other ideas for teachers include the following:

- Apply techniques for multiple intelligences, such as illustrating the source with drawings, enacting a skit, or writing a poem that summarizes the information present in the sources.
- Give students presentational writing assignments throughout the year that include two print sources and one audio source, under the constraints of the actual exam.
- Provide examples of ways in which to make reference to print and audio material alike.
- Provide opportunities for discussions and illustration of the differences between summary and synthesis.
- Work with general essay-writing skills or steps, such as prewriting or organizational steps in planning a good writing sample, and editing and proofreading of students' work as the final step in the process.
- Give students practice taking notes while listening to an audio file they have not heard before.

Part B-1: Interpersonal Speaking

What was the intent of this question?

The intent of this question was to assess students' interpersonal communication skills. The question elicited responses based on a recorded, simulated conversation and an outline that asked students to perform different linguistic tasks throughout the conversation. Instructions in both English and Spanish told students that they had 30 seconds to read the outline of the conversation. They then listened to a recorded message and had 1 minute to reread the outline that indicated five elicited responses they were to give as fully and appropriately as possible. The simulated conversation was designed to elicit students' opinions and suggestions about celebrating a "Semana de Idiomas" (Language Week) in their school. Prompts included affirmation of the suggestion and a reason for responding affirmatively, making recommendations of activities, providing details that explain what activity students would like to organize, telling the teacher how to be helpful, and, finally, responding negatively to a possible meeting time while offering an alternative time. The responses were scored on task completion, topic development and language use.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for the Standard Group was 3.10 out of a possible 5 points, the same as in 2009. The mean score for the Total Group was 3.93, compared with 3.88 in 2009. The theme of Language Week was familiar to many students, so the language required to complete the simulated conversation was of relatively high frequency. Although the task did not elicit a wide range of vocabulary, students were able to address the task with proper vocabulary, and many expressed themselves with rich and precise vocabulary. Additionally, as the theme was familiar, the majority of students were able to create and develop ideas needed to complete the task. The situation allowed students to include social and cultural references in both the engagement of conversation with the classroom teacher and the topic of a cultural celebration. The responses included a variety of verb tenses but predominantly the present, the future, the conditional and the subjunctive mood. The past tense was absent. The prompts also encouraged the use of both direct and indirect object pronouns.

What were common student errors or omissions?

The fourth prompt presented some difficulty for many students. It required two ideas to be developed: The first was how the teacher could help the student, and the second was what the student needed to make the activity a success. Many students addressed this prompt in an indirect style, which was acceptable, but in many instances students responded to only one aspect of the prompt.

Common errors included misinterpretation of the word "*el idioma*" as "idiom"; interpreting the prompt "*como te puedo ayudar*" as "how do you want to help," which is the reverse of what was being asked; and not using the subjunctive after words of suggestion. Problems with consistency in register and the recycling of the vocabulary of the prompts were evident in many responses.

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?

- Throughout the year simulate this task by creating similar telephone conversations and practicing them often in class. This will familiarize students with the format of the exam and will help them develop the topic fully and thoroughly.

- Make sure students and proctors are familiar with the operation of the recording equipment and with the exam protocol prior to the actual exam so that students' responses are recorded properly. (This includes marking the permission box on the CD very carefully so as not to damage the CD or recording.) As clearly stated on the master CD, once students begin to record, the machine should not be turned off until indicated. It is also important that students are able to record without distractions.

Part B-2: Presentational Speaking

What was the intent of this question?

The second part of the speaking portion of the exam was an example of the interpretive and presentational mode. Students were asked to give a 2-minute presentation in a formal/academic setting integrating reading, listening and speaking skills. As indicated in instructions in both English and Spanish, students had 5 minutes to read the printed article and were told to take notes while listening to the audio source. They then had 2 minutes to prepare their responses and 2 minutes to record their answers. The prompt asked students to compare the life and the experiences of the writers Juan Marsé and Gabriela Mistral. The printed source was an article by Virginia Hernández that appeared on the website www.elmundo.es in 2008, and the audio file was an adaptation of a presentation about Gabriela Mistral that was given on the radio program *Nuevos Horizontes* at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Students' responses were scored on effective task completion, topic development and language use, equally considered.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for the Standard Group was 2.76 out of a possible 5 points, which was just slightly higher than the 2009 mean score of 2.73. The mean score for the Total Group was 3.07, compared with 2.79 in 2009. Students first needed to formulate a thesis in order to best respond to the prompt. They then needed to refer to and integrate both sources in order to develop relevant and thorough responses. The content of the two sources provided similarities and differences in a fairly clear format that allowed students to perform the task. Many students were able to understand the audio source well, which allowed them to compare the two sources.

For the Standard Group, the total mean score on the speaking portion of the exam was 5.86 out of 10 possible points, compared with 5.82 in 2009. The total mean score for speaking for the Total Group was 7.00, compared to 6.66 in 2009.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Many students tended to summarize the information presented rather than comparing and contrasting. Some students read directly from the printed source; others had labored or halting expression and poor pronunciation. In some cases, lack of control of language or insufficient command of the language undermined students' ability to develop the topic and complete the task.

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?

- Provide instruction in the techniques required for comparing and contrasting without relying on direct quotations.
- Reemphasize reading for meaning.

- Work with students on their ability to speak in their own words.
- Have students practice presentational speaking so that they are aware of the proper register required for a more formal presentation.
- Define social and cultural references so that students will be aware of both in the written article and the audio selection.
- Provide opportunities for students to hear and to read authentic sources representing all Spanish-speaking countries, including films, documentaries, speeches, interviews, online newspapers and magazines.
- During the course of the year, provide simulations of the testing environment to familiarize students with the format of the exam. Past practice has indicated that simulation helps students to achieve higher scores.
- Make sure students and proctors are familiar with the operation of the recording equipment and with the exam protocol prior to the actual exam.