



Student Performance Q&A:

2011 AP® Chinese Language and Culture Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2011 free-response questions for AP® Chinese Language and Culture were written by the Chief Reader, Tao-chung Yao of the University of Hawaii at Manoa, and the Chief Reader Designate, T. Richard Chi of the University of Utah in Salt Lake City. The comments 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.

Presentational Writing: Story Narration

What was the intent of this task?

This task assessed writing in the presentational communicative mode by having students narrate a story to a friend. It comprised a series of four pictures that depicted a story. Students were allotted 15 minutes to write the narration. The purpose was to determine whether students could write a well-organized story with a clear progression of ideas, including a beginning, middle and end. The task also gave students a chance to demonstrate their command of sentence structure and vocabulary and their ability to use appropriate transitional elements and cohesive devices.

The subject this year was a traveler whose luggage is temporarily lost. The first picture showed a young woman standing by the carousel at an airport baggage claim and wondering where her bags are. The second picture showed her in a room, staring at a bed with a bare mattress, a closet containing only coat hangers, and a bathroom with an empty medicine cabinet. The third picture showed the woman opening the door to find three smiling young people bringing her sheets and towels, clothing, and a bag filled with supplies. The fourth picture showed the woman opening the door to a delivery person who has brought her missing luggage.

How well did students perform on this task?

The mean score for the Standard Group* was 3.35 out of a possible 6 points, slightly lower than last year's mean of 3.39. The mean score for the Total Group was 4.08, the same as last year's mean. In general, students performed well on this task, and some performed very well.

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

What were common student errors or omissions?

The most common problem was students not giving equal attention to all four pictures, resulting in an unbalanced or incomplete narration of the story. For example, many students did not provide sufficient information on the second and fourth pictures. Typical responses included the following: for the second picture, 她到了宿舍 / 旅馆 / 家, 什么衣服都没有; and for the fourth picture, 原来她的行李找到了 / 行李回来了. Some students skipped the fourth picture entirely.

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?

Encourage students to pay attention to and practice the following:

- Give adequate attention to all four pictures.
- Address the content directly.
- Do not include irrelevant information in the narration.
- Pay attention to details depicted in the four pictures.
- Write a coherent story encompassing all the information presented in the pictures.
- Practice using different words and expressions that have similar meanings.

Interpersonal Writing: E-Mail Response

What was the intent of this task?

This task assessed writing in the interpersonal communicative mode by having students write a response to an e-mail message received from a friend. Students were allotted 15 minutes to read the e-mail and write a response. Students first had to comprehend the e-mail and then were required to write a response that addressed all the questions raised in the e-mail.

In this year's e-mail, Xiaoyue asks for advice about completing an assignment for her English class: to prepare an oral report on a topic that she selects for herself. Xiaoyue asks for a suggestion on what topic she should select, along with an explanation of why that would be a good choice. She also asks for general advice on what she needs to do in order to prepare and deliver a good oral report.

How well did students perform on this task?

The mean score for the Standard Group was 3.35 out of a possible 6 points, lower than last year's mean of 4.28. The mean score for the total group was 4.58, lower than last year's mean of 5.06. Although this year's mean scores were not as high as last year's, students performed well on this task.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Many responses did not address the last part of the prompt: 请告诉我, 要做好一个口头报告, 应该注意哪些事情. Others failed to elaborate on 请告诉我为什么你觉得这个题目很好.
- Many responses contained typographical errors that resulted from selecting incorrect characters whose pronunciation is the same as or similar to the correct characters; for

example, 因该 for 应该; 应为 for 因为; 清除 for 清楚; 将一将 for 讲一讲; 专悲 for 准备; 先 for 选; 在建 for 再见; 提 for 题; and 那些 for 哪些.

- Some responses did not present a clear progression of ideas.

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?

Help students learn to do the following:

- Read the directions and the prompt carefully to avoid misunderstanding what is required and thereby not completing the task.
- Address the task directly and avoid merely repeating the wording used in the prompt.
- Use the proper register (salutations, tone of the message, writing conventions) for informal written compositions such as e-mails.
- Allocate time wisely to allow for addressing all aspects of the task, proofing and checking for typographical errors, and further revising and editing to achieve a clearer progression and more coherent presentation of ideas.

Interpersonal Speaking: Conversation

What was the intent of this task?

This task assessed speaking in the interpersonal communicative mode by having students respond as part of a simulated conversation. It consisted of a statement identifying an interlocutor and conversation topic followed by six questions. Students were allotted 20 seconds to speak at each turn in the conversation. All six scores counted equally in calculating the total score. Students needed to speak clearly with good pronunciation and make sure that each of their answers addressed the prompt directly and was culturally appropriate.

In this year's conversation, the student spoke with Zhang Hui, a teacher who is organizing Chinese Culture Week at school, about volunteering to help plan the week's events.

How well did students perform on this task?

The mean score for the Standard Group was 19.17 out of a possible 36 points, lower than last year's mean of 21.84. The mean score for the Total Group was 26.41, lower than last year's mean of 27.92. Students performed reasonably well on this task.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Many students did not address the "why" part of some questions.
- Many responses betrayed a lack of appropriate vocabulary by, for example, overusing the word 东西 (things) as a substitute for more specific terms that the student did not know.
- Many responses omitted important details, such as proposing a specific location for the 歌舞表演 as called for in Question 3.

- Some students seemed to be confused about the difference between 比赛 (competition) and 表演 (performance).
- Many students apparently had difficulty understanding the meaning of 文化周 (Culture Week), mentioning such activities as traveling to China to visit Beijing, the Great Wall and Tibet as possibilities for the school’s Culture Week.

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?

- Help students practice the following:
 - Listen carefully to understand the question, then address it directly.
 - Address the question appropriately; for example, do not answer a “why” question with a “what” or “when” response.
 - Include details and elaboration in the response.
 - Work on pronunciation, especially tones, so that inaccurate pronunciation does not interfere with the listener’s ability to comprehend the response.
 - Listen for key words and have a speaking strategy to address all parts of the question within the time allotted for the response.
- Provide opportunities for students to practice recording timed spoken responses, similar to those on the AP Exam.
- Engage students in conversational tasks that emulate real-life situations.

Presentational Speaking: Cultural Presentation

What was the intent of this task?

This task assessed speaking in the presentational communicative mode by having students make a presentation on a cultural topic as if they were speaking to their Chinese class. It consisted of a single prompt that identified a cultural topic and directed students to select an example of that topic, describe it and explain its significance. Students were allotted 4 minutes to prepare the presentation and 2 minutes to deliver it. In addition to language skills, the task assessed students’ cultural knowledge as exhibited in their responses.

This year’s task asked students to choose one Chinese leisure activity (martial arts, Chinese chess, karaoke, table tennis, etc.), describe the selected activity and explain its significance.

How well did students perform on this task?

The mean score for the Standard Group was 3.91 out of a possible 6 points, slightly higher than last year's mean of 3.87. The mean score for the Total Group was 4.78, also slightly higher than last year's mean of 4.75. In general, the students performed very well on this task.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Some responses appeared to be based on a misinterpretation of the key term “Chinese leisure activity.” Some students who have learned English as a second language may have had difficulty comprehending the prompt, which is presented in English.
- Many responses failed to provide a detailed description of the leisure activity or to discuss its significance, as called for by the prompt.
- Language interference from English was a problem in some responses; for example, using 好时间 to mean “a good time,” or using the wrong word order, as in 唱歌在那里跟你的家人.
- Many responses suffered from a lack of adequate 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?

- Teach students the importance of understanding and addressing the topic of the prompt.
- In preparing students for the exam, do not try to guess the topic, and do not encourage students to memorize a scripted text as a response for the Cultural Presentation task.
- Guide students to practice organizing information coherently and logically.
- Work on accuracy of pronunciation.