

Student Performance Q&A: 2011 AP[®] Music Theory Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2011 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 a major melody in simple meter;
- hear and notate the dotted rhythm in the second measure of the melody;
- hear and notate the leap of a third in the second measure of the melody;
- hear scalar and triadic patterns in a major key; and
- notate pitches correctly in bass clef.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 4.26 out of a possible 9 points. This is slightly higher than the mean score of 3.43 in 2010.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Notating the first pitch incorrectly
- Missing the minor third in the second measure
- Notating the dotted rhythm incorrectly
- Adding accidentals
- Confusing the treble and bass clefs

- Notating the triad in the first measure as a stepwise pattern
- Notating the rhythm of the last pitch incorrectly

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?

- Work on melodic dictation regularly.
- Gradually increase the difficulty of dictation exercises.
- Emphasize rhythm within a melodic context.
- Help students develop memorization skills by having them sing the melody after one or two hearings.
- Teach students to hear the structural melody and then fill in the connecting notes.
- Encourage students to pencil in solfège syllables, numbers or letter names during hearings.
- Teach several approaches to dictation.
- Have students discuss with each other their approaches to hearing melodies.
- Employ regular sight singing to help students connect aural recognition with visual patterns.

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 compound meter;
- hear and properly notate the raised 3rd scale degree;
- hear and properly notate the raised 7th scale degree of harmonic minor;
- notate accidentals correctly;
- recognize and properly notate dotted rhythms;
- hear the leap of an octave; and
- hear scalar patterns in a minor key.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 2.83 out of a possible 9 points. This is slightly higher than the mean score of 2.47 in 2010.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Notating accidental incorrectly
- Notating dots incorrectly

- Notating compound meter incorrectly, often writing in 6/4 rather than in 6/8
- Using inappropriate beaming for 6/8
- Omitting the sharp needed to raise the 7th scale degree to leading tone in the seventh segment
- Displacing the B-natural in the fourth segment across the bar line
- Notating the raised 3rd scale degree with a sharp rather than with a natural symbol

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 from the beginning; avoid the major-mode bias.
- Teach compound meter alongside simple meter.
- Give students both an aural and a visual understanding of the differences between compound and simple meter.
- Teach correct rhythmic notation, including appropriate placement of dots and beams.
- Teach the correct notation of accidentals, especially in minor.
- Emphasize the importance of legible notation.
- Emphasize sight singing regularly.
- Remind students to pay attention to the directions for the exercise.
- Have students complete dictation 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:

- demonstrate a knowledge of common chord progressions;
- notate the outer voices from a four-part excerpt;
- demonstrate a knowledge of the interaction between the chord progression and the line;
- demonstrate understanding of standard cadences; and
- hear and properly label the outer voices and Roman numerals of the cadential six-four chord.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 11.76 out of a possible 24 points. This is slightly higher than the mean score of 11.34 in 2010.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Writing a diminished ii^6 chord instead of a ii half-diminished $6/5$ chord
- Not correctly notating the skips in the soprano and bass lines
- Not correctly notating the octave skip in the bass line

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?

- Give regular attention to the ear-training portion of the AP Music Theory course.
- Teach standard chord progressions.

Question 4

What was the intent of this question?

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

- hear a chord progression in four parts;
- notate the soprano and bass lines of the progression;
- provide the correct Roman numeral analysis of the chords;
- hear and properly notate the outer voices and analysis of the applied dominant;
- hear and notate algorithmic progressions such as $I-V^6-I$ and ii^6-V-I ;
- hear and notate chromaticized pitches relevant to the tonicization of the supertonic;
- hear, properly notate, and label the deceptive progression;
- hear the internal 7th of the V^7 chord; and
- hear and notate the leap of I to V and V to I in the bass line.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 12.48 out of a possible 24 points. This is higher than the mean score of 10.78 in 2010.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Not notating the V^7 to vi correctly
- Omitting the 7th from the V^7
- Not providing the correct inversion with Roman numerals
- Not correctly notating the chromatic inflection of the Bb to B natural
- Including a 7th with the dominant chord at the cadence
- Missing the leap from chord 3 to chord 4

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 that secondary dominants can tonicize any major or minor chord, not just the V.
- Teach students to hear and transcribe standard cadences.
- Drill standard harmonic progressions, distinguishing between typical initial harmonies, intermediate harmonies and cadential harmonies.
- Analyze basslines and their connections to logical harmonic patterns.

Question 5

What was the intent of this question?

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

- realize figured bass with Roman numerals in Common Practice style; and
- demonstrate an understanding of diatonic harmony, including chord spelling in a four-part texture, voice leading, and doubling.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 12.0 out of a possible 25 points. This is significantly lower than the mean score of 15.10 in 2010.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Not correctly realizing chordal inversions
- Not correctly resolving the chordal 7th
- Not correctly doubling and resolving the cadential six-four
- Not doubling the third in the VI in the deceptive cadence, resulting in poor voice leading
- Not employing proper voice leading
- Misreading figured bass symbols (Many students incorrectly thought the accidentals in the figured bass represented secondary dominants.)

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 common tonal idioms, especially in the minor keys.
- Teach the preparation of the cadential six-four chord.
- Use a variety of activities to teach figured-bass realization. Such activities may include singing, analyzing and creating bass lines.

- Practice realizing figured bass progressions in the minor mode.
- Stress that Roman numerals represent chords, that Arabic numbers mean interval above the bass, and that voice leading takes precedence over doubling.
- Instruct students to avoid using the III chord.
- Attend AP Summer Institutes and workshops to keep current with curriculum content and procedures.

Question 6

What was the intent of this question?

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

- spell chords in a major key;
- demonstrate an understanding of chord inversions;
- demonstrate command of voice-leading procedures, including both stepwise root progressions and root progressions by fifth;
- demonstrate knowledge of secondary dominants;
- prepare and properly resolve a suspension; and
- demonstrate an understanding of tendency tones and their resolutions.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 8.21 out of a possible 18 points. This is slightly lower than the mean score of 8.98 in 2010.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Omitting the flat on the 7th of chord 4 (the secondary dominant)
- Otherwise misspelling the secondary dominant (often tonicizing A rather than A-flat, or tonicizing vi rather than IV)
- Not preparing the suspension on chord 7
- Not properly resolving the suspension on chord 7; the note of resolution was often sounded in another voice simultaneously with the suspension
- Omitting the suspension on chord 7
- Misinterpreting the 4-3 as figures representing a second-inversion seventh chord
- Ignoring the figures to include chordal sevenths where none was required
- Writing inverted seventh chords that were left incomplete
- Not using correct spacing, especially between the alto and tenor voices
- Adding superfluous figures, particularly to chord 2, and then realizing this modified progression

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 plan ahead across the entire progression before beginning work, identifying in advance chords that will require accidentals and what those accidentals will be.
- Emphasize that each individual voice should be a singable line.
- Have students write the outer voices first, then write the inner voices as a pair.
- Teach students to prioritize the resolution of dissonant notes and other tendency tones.
- Encourage students to use simple voice-leading procedures; highlight the importance of parsimonious voice-leading procedures (i.e., generally leading each vocal part to its nearest chord tone in realizing progressions).
- Emphasize the conventional paradigms of voice leading in common progressions such as V-vi and V⁷-I.
- Teach root doubling in chords as a standard procedure to improve the chances of correct voice leading into and out of these chords.
- Emphasize the importance of correct spacing between the upper voices of chords.
- Stress the importance of accurate chord spelling.
- Encourage students to improve the legibility of their notation, especially with regard to the accuracy of pitches.
- Ensure that students have practiced working within the given durations of the AP Exam and are able to complete all the free-response questions within the allotted time.
- Understand that the material for the AP Music Theory Exam cannot be conveyed successfully within a one-semester course; two semesters should be viewed as a minimum.

Question 7

What was the intent of this question?

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

- compose a bass line following the rules of 18th-century counterpoint;
- write standard cadences;
- recognize and correctly use a secondary dominant;
- 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 4.59 out of a possible 9 points. This is comparable to the mean score of 4.65 in 2010.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Not properly harmonizing the secondary dominant
- Following the secondary dominant with a I chord
- Using six-four chords improperly
- Using nonchord tones improperly
- Using iii and its inversion excessively
- Using root-position leading-tone triads excessively
- Concluding cadences with six-four chords
- Writing parallel fifths at the cadence to phrase 3 (IV⁶-V)
- Not properly resolving the leading tone

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 with 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, I⁷ and IV⁷.
- Teach and have students practice standard cadences, including root-position V–I at the end of the piece.
- 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 rhythm patterns and variants of those patterns;
- sing a two-phrase unit with motion from *do* to *sol*;
- perform compound meter correctly;

- retain a sense of tonic; and
- read in bass clef.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 4.36 out of a possible 9 points. This is slightly lower than the mean score of 4.71 in 2010.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Missing the return to tonic in segment 2
- Missing the first leap from *do* to *sol* into segment 3
- Singing in simple meter rather than in compound meter
- Singing minor or mixed major and minor mode
- Shortening the last note
- Missing the last three pitches, often singing *do-sol-do*
- Changing meter so as to create duple simple meter

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?

- Practice common rhythmic patterns in various meters.
- Sight sing regularly in class.
- Emphasize minor key singing.
- Have students do the practice AP Exams.
- Encourage students to ghost-finger along as if playing their instruments while singing.
- Allow students to use a neutral syllable if, by March, they are struggling with solfège or numbers.
- Encourage students to keep going even if they make a mistake.
- Encourage students to sing just rhythm on tonic if they struggle greatly with pitch.
- Encourage students to sing aloud during the 75-second practice time.
- Encourage students to practice rhythm first during the 75-second practice time.
- Encourage students to write on the test during the 75-second practice period.
- Review the recording directions with the proctor.

Question S2

What was the intent of this question?

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

- sing in minor mode, using various forms of the scale;
- sing a tonic arpeggio;
- sing a downward leap from *do* to *fa*;
- sing with simple chromaticism, the leading tone of the dominant;
- sing in simple quadruple meter;
- use note values of varying lengths from multiple beats to subdivision levels; and
- sing a melody with a range of slightly more than an octave.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 2.58 out of a possible 9 points. This is lower than the mean score of 3.87 in 2010.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Singing in major mode
- Singing in simple triple meter
- Singing the descending fifth, from *do* down to *fa*, incorrectly
- Singing stepwise motion at the beginning of the melody, instead of the arpeggiated triad
- Not sustaining 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?

- Encourage students to sing aloud during the 75-second practice period.
- Have students practice singing scales, sequential patterns, arpeggios, and upward and downward leaps in minor.
- Encourage students to analyze the melody during the practice period, noting the different forms of minor, arpeggios vs. stepwise motion, tricky spots (like the downward leap) and the melodic range.
- Encourage students to practice rhythm patterns separately from pitch before combining the two.
- Have students practice singing melodies with a large range.