

Chief Reader Report on Student Responses: 2018 AP[®] Human Geography Free-Response Questions

• Number of Students Scored	216,783		
• Number of Readers	797		
• Score Distribution	Exam Score	N	%At
	5	28,261	13.0
	4	43,009	19.8
	3	46,669	21.5
	2	36,803	17.0
	1	62,041	28.6
• Global Mean	2.72		

The following comments on the 2018 free-response questions for AP[®] Human Geography were written by the Chief Reader, Seth Dixon, Associate Professor at Rhode Island College. 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 preparation 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

Topic: Agriculture and Rural Land Use

Max. Points: 6

Mean Score: 2.54

What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?

In Unit V., Agriculture, Food Production, and Rural Land Use, students are expected to “explain the changing role of women in food production and consumption,” specifically in “food gathering, farming, and managing agribusiness.” In part A students were asked to identify a country in which more than 75 percent of the women in the labor workforce are working in agriculture. In part B students were expected to demonstrate a grasp of the economic, cultural, and political contexts of agricultural production. For each of those contexts, students were asked to identify an obstacle preventing women who work in agriculture from achieving greater equality and empowerment. Finally, in part C, students were asked to explain one impact of empowering women working in rural agricultural regions of developing countries.

Skills required of the students were (1) the ability to read the map, map legend, map title, and data layer, then identify a country that fits the pattern specified; (2) the ability to apply their knowledge of economic, cultural, and political geography to the rural–agricultural context of a developing country; and (3) the ability to evaluate the impact that empowering women would have on the rural–agricultural regions of developing countries.

How well did the response address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?

This question, while mainly an agricultural question, was primarily concerned with seeing how students could use agricultural information and apply this piece of information to other key elements of the course. Some students failed to link the economic, cultural, or political obstacles to the empowerment of women working in agriculture back to the original agricultural context. Responses that merely saw this as a female-empowerment question failed to understand the actual context of women, often conflating the obstacles to gender empowerment in wealthy, developed countries in post-industrial contexts with those of gender empowerment in a rural, less-developed agricultural context. Some students only saw working in agriculture as something to get out of (without any empowerment or agency within it) or conversely thought that gender norms were preventing women from working in agriculture. This appears to be one example of how Western norms and gender stereotypes limited their ability to understand the implications of the data that they were presented.

Some saw part A in this question as a simplistic “gimme” point or one that required no analytical skills. However, this particular point was highly predictive of overall success on this FRQ, and I would argue that points such as this are important for the exam. Many students misread the map, legend, title, data, color schemes, etc. Students who are unable to properly identify one of the 25 countries where over 75% of women in the workforce are in agriculture regularly struggled to understand the spatial patterns in a way that demonstrated college-level understanding. Reading maps and knowing places is foundational, and students who lack that base are rarely able to build upon a wobbly foundation in other parts of the exam.

The key to part C was understanding how female empowerment would change rural agricultural regions specifically. Many of the responses failed to earn points focused on the wrong scale or the wrong places for their assessment of female empowerment’s impact. Many responses that failed to earn points were not able to differentiate between the economic contexts of subsistence and commercial agriculture and consequently missed some of the impacts that empowering women have on less-developed agricultural regions. Students who did connect female empowerment in the agricultural sector to the demographic transition did well and overall knew the demographic transition model at a very proficient level.

What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

1. Students seem to know more about the effects of empowerment than the obstacles to achieving empowerment.
2. Many students failed to apply the provided map to answer part B and said things that would imply that women did not have an opportunity to work in the agricultural sector in these countries.

3. Students struggled to differentiate between unemployment and limited economic potential.

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding gender norms strictly from a developed-world context and not enough from a developing world context 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding obstacles to achieving empowerment in less-developed countries
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Failure to apply information in map provided that led to misunderstanding of women working in the agricultural sector in these countries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding that agriculture was the predominant employment for women in the countries specified
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Misunderstanding of difference between unemployment and limited economic potential 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding that access to education was a key to expanded economic potential and a way to empowerment of women

Based on your experience at the AP[®] Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer to teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?

- Teachers should remember that the ability to identify a place or country on a map is an integral part of any geography course; the regional maps in the articulation should help convey to students that understanding world maps and being able to identify regions and countries is important. This skill will most certainly help them to achieve higher grades on the AP Exam.
- Prepare students to use more “because” statements when they are asked to explain their response and relate their response back to the prompt.
- Teach examples from around the world in a variety of economic, cultural, and agricultural contexts.
- Try to get the students to see beyond the vocabulary terms and instead see how concepts are interrelated in the real world.
- Teach students to approach a question objectively. Readers are looking for an understanding of the concepts, not personal opinions.
- Have the students read and re-read the wording of the question. They need make sure they understand what is asked in order to be able to answer effectively.
- Cultural sensitivity is continually an issue; encourage students to place themselves in the shoes of the person or people they are writing about. Make sure students understand that people from other geographic locations and cultures don’t always view the world in the same way that they do.

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

- Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations has incredible resources for most Unit V topics, but for this specific question, the gender tab is most helpful: www.fao.org/gender
- The role of rural women in agriculture: www.wfo-oma.com/women-in-agriculture/articles/the-role-of-rural-women-in-agriculture.html
- The BBS show “Tribal Wives” focuses on women from the developed world where they live and work in rural, traditional, agricultural societies. Each episode looks at different settings from around the world.
- Oxfam International: www.oxfam.org

- Various news articles, podcasts, and videos about women in agriculture compiled by the chief reader:
<https://www.scoop.it/t/geography-education/?tag=gender+agriculture>

Question #2

Topic: Cities and Urban Land use

Max. Points: 6

Mean Score: 1.75

What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?

Unit VII, Cities and Urban Land Use, has students learn about a host of urban issues, including gentrification. Students are expected to “evaluate problems and solutions associated with growth and decline within urban areas”, specifically, they need to know the “economic and social problems of [changing communities including] gentrification”. Students need to “evaluate the infrastructure of cities” and understand that the “economic development [of a community is] dependent upon the quality of infrastructure.” Gentrification is centrally about renovating aging buildings, improving neighborhood infrastructure, and a changing “demographic composition of cities.”

Students were expected to show geographic skills by being able to (1) explain the positive and negative components of gentrification for a neighborhood and the various demographic groups within a neighborhood-(parts A and B) and (2) devise possible solutions that city governments could implement to alleviate some of the difficulties confronting a gentrifying neighborhood (part C).

How well did the response address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?

This was a low-scoring question, with most responses earning 2 or fewer points. Most would have been able to earn a simple identification point, but this question was asking responses to demonstrate a nuanced understanding of the complexities of the situation.

Some of the better responses appeared to understand *gentrification* as a vocabulary term; they could identify it and describe the impacts of gentrification. However, they were not sufficiently well-versed to explain gentrification’s positives and negatives. This might have been a good opportunity to have a simple “define gentrification” point available for some responses to earn more credit within the question. Most of the low-scoring responses could identify the pros and cons of gentrification, but many were unable to pass beyond that level.

The verbs in the questions are critical, and students should understand that the bar for receiving a point for a prompt that includes the word “explain” will be higher than that for “identify.” The responses that earned points in this section usually had the word “because” as the key indicator that they were explaining how or why gentrification was impacting a neighborhood. Responses frequently assumed that bringing in wealthier residents to a rundown neighborhood would automatically reduce or eliminate crime.

Higher-scoring responses seemed to understand the economic impacts of gentrification and were able to explain how renovating older buildings changes a neighborhood, but lower-scoring responses often saw gentrification as the construction of new buildings or something that is only being done by the government. Addressing building renovation and understanding the roles of the private sector as a driving force in the gentrification process were key for students to score well on this question. Many students could identify changes, but did not demonstrate an ability to explain the impact. The link between cause and effect was missing.

In preparing students, I would suggest that with “explain” points, students should include a “because” clause. Also, if one’s “explain” points could be simply written as bullet points, they are not going to be sufficient; students need to construct more robust sentences to demonstrate cause and effect.

What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

1. Responses did not see the economic forces creating gentrification and the economic impacts of the process. They did not address that building renovations were underway and that physical aspects of the neighborhood changing.
2. It is clear that students understood displacement happens, but very few responses could explain how building renovations raise property values and property taxes, which can price out long-time residents.
3. Responses understood the negative aspects of gentrification far better than they understood the positive impacts of gentrification on a neighborhood. However, they were not clear on what city governments could realistically do to alleviate these issues.

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Misunderstanding how economic forces create gentrification and the physical changes to the neighborhood as a result.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understanding the economic forces behind gentrification in urban neighborhoods and the economic impacts on the process.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Focused on displacement of residents with no understanding of the economic processes that led to displacement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understanding of the processes that led to gentrification, including how improvements raised property values and taxes, pricing out long-term residents.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Focus on the negative aspects of gentrification with no discussion of the positives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understanding that there are both negative and positive aspects of gentrification of a neighborhood.

Based on your experience at the AP® Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer to teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?

1. Unit 7 is often the most difficult one to teach “out of order” because getting students to understand urban geographic patterns is usually done after they understand the other units; urban dynamics are incredibly fluid and extremely complex. Historically speaking, in the last 18 years, there have been more FRQs based on the urban unit than any other unit, and they have scored low. Teachers should prepare their students accordingly: It’s not simply the last unit that is something to cram in at the end - it is the capstone. I would recommend introducing urban principles throughout the year and at the end of the year to cement the concepts together.
2. Prepare students to recognize the scale context of a question and then have them answer at the appropriate scale; this is an ongoing issue that we see in many questions, year after year.

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

1. Use local case-studies, and, if possible, field trips to show urban geography in action. This helps make the abstract concepts of the urban unit much more real. If you can’t get students to a city, pictures and a teacher’s experience and observations of the city can still be beneficial.
2. Access the Curriculum Module - *Urban Geography*- available as free .pdf download on apcentral.
3. Teach students more about the positive impacts of gentrification. This Washington Post article attempts to get people to challenge some of their notions about gentrification: <http://wapo.st/1Zks.JL5>
4. The 2012 film, “My Brooklyn” documents the gentrification of Brooklyn, NY. <https://mybrooklynmovie.com/>

5. Various news articles, podcasts, and videos about gentrification compiled by the chief reader:
<https://www.scoop.it/t/geography-education?tag=gentrification>

Question #3

Topic: Cultural Patterns and Processes

Max. Points: 8

Mean Score: 4.38

What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?

This question hits multiple parts of Unit III., Cultural Patterns and Processes. Students were expected to explain the diffusion of culture and cultural traits through time and space, especially language. They need to be able to differentiate between the different types of diffusion that include expansion (contagious, hierarchical, stimulus) and relocation. Students will learn to compare and contrast popular and folk culture and the geographic patterns associated with each. The AP Human Geography course prepares students to “explain how globalization is influencing cultural interactions and change.”

Part A asked students to identify two specific means by which new expressions in popular culture are diffused globally. Part B asked students to explain how expressions diffuse via three specific processes. Part C asked students to explain two barriers to diffusions of expressions. This was an applied question that dealt with various topics in Unit III. Skill-wise, this question had the students (1) apply knowledge from one part of Unit III to another and (2) think critically about linguistic diffusion in a new globalized context, which is quite different from the way that it is discussed in the textbooks.

How well did the response address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?

This was the FRQ that students were best prepared to answer, and most often teachers refer to the cultural unit as their favorite and the one that they spend the most time teaching. Its overall high score counterbalanced any lower-scoring questions to give students opportunities to earn points and do well. The goal of this question was to assess the understanding of the ways popular culture diffuses, using the example of terms in popular culture. The most significant factor limiting student responses wasn't the lack of geographic content, but the inability to read the question carefully and answer the complete question that was asked. The best responses linked barriers to diffusion with popular culture, since many of the long-standing examples of barriers to linguistic diffusion are not as applicable to the diffusion of modern popular terms or phrases.

Less prepared responses were very generic when the question asked for specifics. They were asked to explain diffusion in the context of the spread of linguistic terms; however, many responses did not address that but instead discussed diffusion of fashion, food, or pop culture in general. The questions and the prompt were quite specific, and the rubric was equally specific. The question asked them to apply diffusion concepts to the spread of terms in popular culture.

What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

1. Diffusion was well understood, but the barriers to diffusion were not as clearly understood.
2. Responses earned points for identifying two specific types of media and/or technologies that facilitate the diffusion of terms, but some struggled to describe anything more specific than “media” or “technology”.
3. Some responses understood the three types of diffusion mentioned but were not able to describe them in terms of language and popular culture.
4. Responses reflected an understanding of the types of diffusion, but struggled to explain what contagious diffusion is. Many also confused expansion diffusion and saw relocation diffusion as an example of expansion diffusion.

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responses reflect understanding of diffusion in general, but are unable to discuss with specific examples. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solid responses were able to apply the different types of diffusion to specific, real-world applications, such as language.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responses reflect a lack of understanding of barriers to diffusion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solid responses were able to provide and discuss clear barriers with specific examples, such as closed cultures, different spoken language from diffusing term.

Based on your experience at the AP[®] Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer to teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?

1. In order to earn the best score possible, students should read the prompt, several times if necessary, and be prepared to answer the entire question asked, not only parts of it. The prompt contains content clues that will guide students to answer in an appropriate manner. Spend time to ensure students become aware of these clues.
2. Having an understanding of appropriate vocabulary is key to success in any subject. AP Human Geography is no different. Making sure students know, understand, and more importantly, can *employ* the proper vocabulary will help ensure success on any AP Exam. For example, many students did not know what “means” meant in the context of Question 3. Some of them answered with types of diffusion and answered part B twice.
3. A thorough explanation leaves no doubt that the student understands the concept. Many students underexplained and lost point by not writing enough. Check out AP Central for previously released exam questions and have students practice writing answers to those. This will help prepare them for the actual exam.

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

1. This TED-ED lesson, “The history of African-American Social Dance,” demonstrates the diffusion of cultural patterns and practices. <https://ed.ted.com/lessons/the-history-of-african-american-social-dance-camille-a-brown>
2. Teenage girls have been key language innovators for centuries, even before social media. This is diffusion exemplified:
 1. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/teenage-girls-have-been-revolutionizing-language-16-century-180956216/?amp.no-ist>
 2. Various news articles, podcasts, and videos about diffusion and language compiled by the Chief Reader: <https://www.scoop.it/t/geography-education?q=diffusion+language>