



Student Performance Q&A:

2012 AP® French Language and Culture Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2012 free-response questions for AP® French Language and Culture were written by the Chief Reader, Irène D'Almeida of the University of Arizona. 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.

Task 1: E-mail Reply

What was the intent of this task?

This task assessed writing in the interpersonal communicative mode by having students reply to an e-mail message. Students were allotted 15 minutes to read the message and write the reply. The response received a single holistic score based on how well it accomplished the assigned task. Students needed to be able first to comprehend the e-mail and then to write a reply using a formal form of address. The reply had to address all the questions and requests raised in the message, as well as ask for more details about something mentioned in the message.

In this exam, within the theme of Aesthetics, students were asked to imagine themselves as members of a francophone reading group who receive an e-mail from an Alliance Française French teacher managing their group. The teacher wrote to poll them with certain questions meant to make their meetings more enjoyable for all. Reading group members were requested to indicate their literary preferences, along with an explanation for their choices. They were also asked to state when during the week was best for the meetings to be held. Students needed to be able to express their preferences for their chosen literary genres with adequate vocabulary and grammatical forms and to provide an appropriate explanation. They also needed to know the difference between formal and informal writing patterns in French.

How well did students perform on this task?

The mean score for the Standard Group* was 2.99 out of a possible 5 points. The mean score for the Total Group was 3.10.

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

What were common student errors or omissions?

The directions told students to “ask more details about something mentioned in the message.” Many of them did not do so.

Few students knew what the Alliance Française was. Other vocabulary difficulties were “*se joindre à nous*” and “*genres*” in “*proposer tous les genres qui vous intéressent.*” Also, the term “*Professeur*” written just after “*Thierry Durand*” at the end of the e-mail seemed to confuse students, though it was clear from the introduction to the task that Thierry Durand was a “*professeur.*” Many responses also included anglicisms such as “*je ne peux pas attendre.*”

Students had problems with the greeting and closing of the e-mail (e.g., agreement of the adjective “*cher*” — *cher/chers* and *chère/chères*). There were also spelling mistakes and verbs that were left unconjugated.

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 should be reminded to complete the task, take time to read and follow the instructions properly, elaborate on their answers, and plan their time so they can elaborate *and* complete the task.

Task 2: Persuasive Essay

What was the intent of this task?

This task assessed writing in the presentational communicative mode by having students write a persuasive essay on a given topic while referencing three sources of information about the topic. Students were first allotted 6 minutes to read the essay topic and the two printed sources. Then they listened to the one audio source. Afterward, they had 40 minutes to write the essay. The response received a single holistic score based on how well it accomplished the assigned task. Students needed to be able first to comprehend the three sources and then to present their different viewpoints. They also had to present their own viewpoint and defend it thoroughly, using information from all the sources to support the essay. As they referred to the sources, they needed to identify them appropriately. Furthermore, the essay had to be organized into clear paragraphs.

In this exam, within the theme of Science and Technology, students were asked to write a persuasive essay on the topic of “*le droit à l’oubli*,” loosely translated as “the right of deletion,” on the Internet — that is, the right to control what stays and what must be erased from their Internet files. The task included the integration of three sources on the topic. The first source was an article that advocated for the right of deletion; the second source was a chart that presented the result of a 1,500-person poll to see how they felt about security on social networks; and the third source was an interview that presented a dissenting voice warning against demonization of the Internet and praising social networks for their transparency and for their role as a forum where freedom of opinion can be exercised.

How well did students perform on this task?

The mean score for the Standard Group was 2.94 out of a possible 5 points. The mean score for the Total Group was 3.05.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Students had difficulty integrating the three sources. Some students made disproportional use of the language from the prompt in their answers. They also made many mistakes in trying to use the passive voice.

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?

Teachers should address the following points:

- Remind students that they must complete the task.
- Insist on the need to cite the three sources and use them in an integrated way, and let students know that all three sources must be cited to receive a high score.
- Expose students to a variety of audio sources during instruction and assessment.
- Refrain from teaching students idioms out of context (especially those that are very informal), which they tend to use indiscriminately, artificially, or inappropriately in their writing.
- Encourage students to read and follow directions and answer *all* specific questions.
- Teach students the difference between summarizing and integrating.
- Work with students on the use of different registers (*les niveaux de langue*) and what is acceptable in addressing journalists or interviewees — for example, not to call them by their first name in this context.
- Teach students the passive voice.
- Provide practice in making transitions by using appropriate transitional words or phrases and cohesive devices.

Task 3: 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 oral conversation. Students were first allotted 1 minute to read a preview of the conversation, including an outline of each turn in the conversation. Then the conversation proceeded, including 20 seconds for students to speak at each of five turns in the conversation. The series of five responses received a single holistic score based on how well it accomplished the assigned task. The responses had to appropriately address each turn in the conversation according to the outline as well as the simulated interlocutor's utterance.

In this exam, within the theme of Contemporary Life, students were asked to respond to a simulated oral conversation with Christine, a young student who wants to go to France to improve her speaking skills. Christine was not admitted to her chosen program and laments the fact by expressing her disappointment and seeking advice. Students were directed to respond to Christine, asking for details that would explain why her application was rejected and why she wanted to go to France in the first place. They were to state their opinions on the matter, offer alternative solutions, comfort and encourage her, and finally say good-bye. This task required good communicative skills that would allow students to listen to and understand Christine's statements and give appropriate answers.

How well did students perform on this task?

The mean score for the Standard Group was 2.76 out of a possible 5 points. The mean score for the Total Group was 3.03.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Many students did not understand the expressions “*Présenter un dossier*” and “*Donnez votre avis.*” The most common error was the use of the verb “*appliquer*” or “*faire une application*” (anglicisms) for “*faire une demande*” or “*postuler.*”

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?

Teachers should be attentive to the following points:

- Inform students that they must complete the task and read and follow the directions properly.
- Remind students to take the introduction to the task into consideration and to speak as much as possible.
- Provide opportunities for students to participate in timed conversations similar to the one on the exam; in other words, practice this task under conditions similar to those of the exam.
- Teach students to consistently use the appropriate register for the conversation and avoid mixing the “*tu*” and “*vous*” forms when speaking to the same person.
- Advise students to be ready to improvise, and provide opportunities for this in class.

Task 4: Cultural Comparison

What was the intent of this task?

This task assessed speaking in the presentational communicative mode by having students make a comparative oral presentation on a cultural topic. Students were allotted 4 minutes to read the topic and prepare the presentation and then 2 minutes to deliver the presentation. The response received a single holistic score based on how well it accomplished the assigned task. The presentation needed to compare the student’s own community to an area of the French-speaking world, demonstrating understanding of cultural features of the French-speaking world. Furthermore, the presentation had to be organized clearly.

In this exam, within the theme of Personal and Public Identities, students were asked to deliver a comparative oral presentation on cultural diversity. They were supposed to compare people’s attitude toward cultural diversity in their own community and in a region of the francophone world that they knew either from personal experience or from issues studied in class.

How well did students perform on this task?

The mean score for the Standard Group was 2.54 out of a possible 5 points. The mean score for the Total Group was 2.62.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Many students did not read the prompt itself. They apparently assumed that the instructions given in both French and English were the prompt, and they made comparisons that had nothing to do with the topic.

Students did not speak to the attitudes of people toward cultural diversity. They found it difficult to express values, beliefs, and attitudes.

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?

Teachers should pay attention to the following points:

- Bring cultural practices, products, and perspectives into the classroom, and go beyond the boundaries of textbooks by providing a variety of authentic materials.
- Let students know that they must complete the task. Remind them to read instructions and underline key words in the prompt, such as “attitudes” in this instance.
- Provide opportunities for students, who are often used to speaking about themselves, to speak about people and perspectives in the francophone world.
- Teach students to avoid clichés and stereotypes and to go beyond generalizations.
- Teach students to make logical and appropriate comparisons — for example, some students compared a neighborhood with a whole continent.