



Student Performance Q&A: 2012 AP[®] Music Theory Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2012 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?

This question assessed students' ability to:

- hear a major melody in compound meter;
- hear and notate the dotted rhythm in the first measure of the melody;
- hear and notate the leap of a third in the first, second, and third measures of the melody;
- hear scalar and triadic patterns in a major key; and
- notate pitches correctly in treble clef.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for this question was 3.60 out of a possible 9 points.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Notating in $\frac{6}{4}$ meter instead of $\frac{6}{8}$
- Notating in simple meter ($\frac{4}{4}$ meter)
- Mixing up the quarter, two sixteenths rhythm with the dotted eighth, sixteenth, eighth note rhythm
- Notating noteheads only with no stems
- Notating the final note as a dotted half note instead of a dotted quarter note
- Notating the dot on the wrong side of the note

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?

- Spend more time drilling students on compound meter.
- Do baroque dances or other movement activities in compound meter.
- Work on musical memory, for example, teaching students to listen and remember before notating on the page.
- Encourage students to listen specifically for half-measure segments.
- Stress proper notation: stems, beams, dots, and so on.
- Discuss question strategy with students; tell them that they can expect straightforward rhythms, a range of approximately one octave, a likely ending on tonic, and so on.

Question 2

What was the intent of this question?

This question assessed students' ability to:

- hear a minor melody in simple meter;
- hear and properly notate the raised 4th scale degree;
- hear and properly notate the raised 6th and 7th scale degrees of melodic minor;
- notate accidentals correctly;
- recognize and properly notate dotted rhythms;
- hear and notate leaps of a perfect fifth and ascending and descending sixths;
- hear scalar patterns in a minor key; and
- notate pitches correctly in bass clef.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for this question was 3.14 out of a possible 9 points.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Missing the dotted rhythm in the first measure
- Not notating accidentals correctly for the raised 6th and 7th scale degrees in ascending melodic minor
- Writing accidentals that are foreign to the melody, especially C-flat in the first measure
- Missing the rhythm, the raised 4th scale degree, and the ascending melodic minor pattern in the second measure
- Missing the ascending leap from A at the end of the first measure to F on the downbeat of the second measure
- Writing quarter notes rather than eighth notes in the third measure
- Not recovering after missing a single pitch or rhythm

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 prompt and frequent feedback to students.
- Use exercises that help students begin thinking tonally; for example, practice identifying the tonic pitch as well as other pitches at phrase beginnings and endings.
- Work to help students think more holistically.
- Teach students to memorize the melody as they listen and then to mentally rehearse the melody during the time between hearings.
- Help students find a consistent system and procedure that works for them.
- Teach correct rhythmic notation, including appropriate placement of dots and beams.
- Teach the correct notation of accidentals in minor keys.
- Emphasize the importance of legible notation.
- Emphasize sight singing regularly.
- Remind students to follow the directions for the exercise.
- Advise students to use pencil rather than pen to complete dictation exercises.

Question 3

What was the intent of this question?

This question assessed students' ability to:

- hear a four-part progression in a major key and notate the outer voices;
- demonstrate a knowledge of common chord progressions;
- demonstrate a knowledge of the interaction between the chord progression and the line;
- demonstrate an understanding of standard cadences;
- hear and properly label the outer voices and Roman numerals of the cadential six-four chord; and
- hear the seventh in a V7 chord.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for this question was 14.57 out of a possible 24 points.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Notating the ii^6 chord as a iv chord
- Notating the penultimate chord as V instead of V^7
- Missing the skips 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?

- Teach common cadential chord progressions.
- Teach the ii^6 chord.
- Work on differentiating between the V and V^7 chords.
- Work consistently on ear training skills.

Question 4

What was the intent of this question?

This question assessed students' ability to:

- hear a chord progression in four parts, in a minor key;
- 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 the analysis of the applied dominant chord;
- hear and notate algorithmic progressions such as $I-V_3^4-I^6$ and $iv-V-VI$;
- hear and notate chromaticized pitches relevant to the tonicization of the subdominant;
- hear, properly notate, and label the deceptive progression;
- hear, notate, and analyze a half cadence;
- hear and notate the seventh of the $V7$ chord in second inversion; and
- hear and notate ascending chromatic motion in the bass line.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for this question was 9.05 out of a possible 24 points.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Writing a note a step off, which resulted in displacement of the entire line by a step
- Missing the 7th in chord two, thus naming it a V_4^6 instead of a V_3^4
- Adding sharps to the progression unnecessarily
- Transcribing notes correctly but mislabeling inversions

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 check that their bass and soprano lines match their Roman numeral analysis.
- Emphasize the correct resolution of altered notes, especially leading tones (e.g., an A-natural in F minor should go to B-flat, not to G).
- Teach students to identify cadence types and to work backward from the ends of phrases.

Question 5

What was the intent of this question?

This question assessed students' ability to:

- realize a figured bass progression in Common Practice style;
- demonstrate an understanding of diatonic harmony, including chord spelling in a four-part texture, voice leading, and doubling;
- analyze chords using Roman numerals;
- remember to raise the leading tone in the minor mode; and
- notate an authentic cadence with a 4–3 suspension.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for this question was 16.12 out of a possible 25 points.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Neglecting to raise the leading tone
- Misunderstanding the role of accidentals in the figured bass
- Not preparing the suspension
- Incorrectly realizing the figures for the suspension
- Incorrectly realizing the figures for the V^4_2
- Writing parallels in contrary motion at the cadence
- Writing the root position V^7 chord incorrectly at the cadence
- Using augmented and diminished intervals
- Notating accidentals incorrectly
- Writing hidden fifths and hidden octaves
- Writing embellishments that created voice-leading errors
- Changing the given notes

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?

- Stress correct chord spelling, especially in minor keys.
- Remind students to raise the leading tone in the dominant chord in minor.
- Encourage students to think about voice leading first, before working on vertical realization.
- Drill students on the meanings of the figures, giving special attention to identification of chordal roots.
- Teach students to use stepwise motion and to keep the common tone whenever possible.
- Teach students to avoid dissonant intervals, especially the augmented second in harmonic minor.
- Remind students to complete this exercise in compliance with the norms of common practice style.

Question 6

What was the intent of this question?

This question assessed students' ability to:

- write a four-part chord progression from Roman numerals;
- 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; and
- demonstrate an understanding of tendency tones and their resolutions.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for this question was 9.73 out of a possible 18 points.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Missing the A-sharp on the secondary dominant chord
- Writing incorrect accidentals (especially E-sharp) on the secondary dominant chord
- Omitting or adding chordal sevenths
- Using incorrect spacing
- Writing parallel octaves and fifths at the deceptive cadence
- Writing parallel octaves or hidden octaves between chords 2 and 3
- Appearing to change key in the second half of the progression
- Confusing IV and vi (apparently reversing the components of the Roman numeral)
- Writing incorrect inversions (generally putting all chords in root position)
- Writing leaps of a seventh in the bass
- Not resolving the leading tone in the melody

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?

- Focus on realizing progressions with stepwise root motion, especially V–vi.
- Avoid overemphasis of doubling the root, as this is not always appropriate.
- Drill inversions and their figures, carefully distinguishing triads from seventh chords. Students should be aware that they will not receive any points for a chord if the inversion is incorrect or if a seventh is added or omitted (i.e., does not match the analysis provided).
- Focus on chromatic voice leading and the importance of approaching and resolving chromatic notes smoothly.
- Focus on dissonance treatment, especially the approach to and resolution of the chordal seventh.
- Encourage students to use smooth voice leading.
- Advise students not to add embellishing tones unless specifically required by the figures.
- Address issues of notation, particularly the proper way to write a notehead, accidentals, and how to portray doubling (including doubled whole notes).
- Encourage students to use contrary motion in the outer voices.
- Encourage students to write the outer voices first and to fill in the inner voices as a pair after the outer voices have been carefully checked.
- Discuss the appropriate use of charts, diagrams, and other memory aids. Writing charts and diagrams often seems unhelpful for this particular question: It takes time, the information is not always relevant to the question, and the layout sometimes seems to cause mistakes because the student confuses the layout of the diagram with the actual music notation.

Question 7

What was the intent of this question?

This question assessed 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 for this question was 4.95 out of a possible 9 points.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Using the I⁷ and IV⁷ chords and their inversions, resulting in inappropriate harmonizations in this style
- Using leaping embellishments and various accented nonchord tones
- Using unnecessary nonchord tones, which resulted in additional errors
- Writing harmonic perfect fourths between the soprano and bass
- Writing melodic augmented fourths in the bass line
- Overusing the vii^o chord in root position
- Writing a bass note at the fermata that did not match the rhythmic value of the soprano note
- Doubling the leading tone
- Incorrectly resolving the secondary dominant
- Ignoring the secondary dominant
- Writing harmonic retrogressions

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 unaccented passing tones are the only appropriate melodic embellishment for this exercise.
- Discourage the use of six-four chords (except for the cadential six-four chord if appropriate at a cadence).
- Teach students to keep the bass line simple; avoid unnecessary ornamentation that may cause more errors.
- Encourage the use of root position chords at cadences.
- Teach the use of the vii^o chord in first inversion only, as a linear passing chord, and not as an acceptable dominant substitute at a final cadence.
- Teach students to think of the bass as two- or three-note linear patterns rather than only as a vertical entity.
- Teach students to strive for contrary motion whenever possible.

Sight-Singing Question 1

What was the intent of this question?

This question assessed students' ability to:

- sight-read and sing a melody in major mode;
- perform dotted rhythms;
- perform common rhythm patterns and variants of those patterns;
- perform simple meter correctly;
- retain a sense of tonic; and
- read bass clef.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for this question was 5.47 out of a possible 9 points.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Reading in the wrong clef
- Missing the rhythm of segment 2 (dotted quarter–eighth)
- Singing in minor instead of in major mode
- Establishing the wrong pulse and confusing quarter and eighth notes
- Shortening the half notes
- Missing the last three pitches, often singing *do-ti-do*
- Singing *fa* instead of *sol* in segment 4
- Substituting *fa* for *mi* in segment 5

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?

- Sight-sing regularly in class.
- Practice common rhythmic patterns in various meters.
- Emphasize holding notes for their full value.
- 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 practice time.
- Encourage students to write on the test during the practice time.
- Review the recording directions with the proctor before the exam administration.
- Encourage students to conduct while they practice so they establish a good tempo.
- Encourage students to sing strongly so they can be heard.
- Encourage students to sing alone or with a partner during practice sessions, so that they become comfortable singing or recording.
- Discourage humming, as humming compromises accurate pitch production.

Sight-Singing Question 2

What was the intent of this question?

This question assessed students' ability to:

- sight-read and sing a melody in minor mode, using various forms of the scale;
- sing an upward leap from *do* to *me*;
- sing a downward leap from *do* to *sol*;
- sing a melody with simple chromaticism, that is, the leading tone of the dominant;
- sing in compound meter;
- sing note values of varying lengths, that is, the beat, the division, and the subdivision;
- sing the rhythmic pattern of dotted eighth–sixteenth–eighth note;

- retain a sense of tonic; and
- read treble clef.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for this question was 3.43 out of a possible 9 points.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Singing in major instead of in minor mode
- Singing in simple meter rather than in compound meter
- Singing stepwise from C to D in measure 1, instead of leaping from C to E-flat
- Singing the harmonic or natural minor scale versions of scale degrees 5-6-7-1 in measure 2
- Singing an F-natural in measure 3 instead of an F-sharp
- Starting measure 4 on some note other than F
- Not holding the last note for its full value
- Inverting the sixteenth note–eighth note rhythm in measure 4
- Missing the initial interval in measure 1 (*te* instead of *ti*, or *sol* instead of *ti*)
- Singing a dotted rhythm in measure 3 (like the one notated in measure 2)
- Starting the second phrase on a drop down to tonic instead of to dominant

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 singing in all forms of minor (especially the upper tetrachord).
- Emphasize the difference between major and minor scales and triads.
- Practice minor triad arpeggios, both throughout the octave and of just pairs of notes, for example, *do–me*, *sol–me*, *sol–do*.
- Practice executing rhythms, including dotted rhythms, in compound meter.
- Practice *descending* scalar and intervallic patterns in all forms of the minor key.
- Practice melodies that contain common altered tones, particularly the raised 4 of the scale.
- Practice looking at and singing melodies in various clefs and ranges.
- Coach students on where to place a melody in a range of the voice that is both comfortable and executable.
- Teach students to choose an appropriate tempo for singing. The tempo of this exercise was marked *moderato*. Although points were not deducted for an incorrect tempo set at the start of the exercise, students tended to fare worse if they chose to perform at a painstakingly slow tempo.