



Student Performance Q&A: 2012 AP® Spanish Language Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2012 free-response questions for AP® Spanish Language were written by the Chief Reader, Gustavo Fares of Lawrence University in Appleton, Wis. 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.

Part A-1: Interpersonal Writing

What was the intent of this question?

This question measured students' ability to compose an electronic message with proper register while responding appropriately to all five parts of the prompt. Students had 10 minutes to read the prompt and write a response that was at least 60 words in length. The task asked them to imagine that they were inviting their best friend to their brother's or sister's college graduation. Students were asked to do five things in the message: greet the friend, give details about the graduation, explain the importance of this graduation for the family, invite the friend to the graduation, and say good-bye. The response was scored on effective task completion and topic development in one category, and language use in a second category.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for the Standard Group* was 2.95 out of a possible 5 points. For the Total Group the mean score was 3.30.

Writing an electronic message to a friend used a vocabulary that was of relatively high frequency, and most students were able to accomplish the task. The prompt lent itself to a variety of structures and tenses even in a message of such a short length.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Although the five elements of the task were clearly indicated in the prompt, common errors included the omission or misinterpretation of one or more of the items. Overall the elements of the prompt that were

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

most commonly misinterpreted were either who was graduating or whether the event at hand was a graduation from college or high school. For some responses it was difficult to decide to whom the e-mail was being addressed and why the student was inviting a friend to a sibling's graduation. Finally, some students did not discern that this graduation was happening in a few weeks.

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?

- Throughout the year, simulate this question by creating a variety of interpersonal writing tasks for classroom work and as homework. Regular practice of this type of question, under the same constraints as those of the exam, will assist students in preparing for the interpersonal writing task.
- Routine practice, including editing for consistency, should also provide for tasks using different registers in the written responses.
- Give students practice rephrasing the information contained in the prompt so that they can practice answering this type of question, paying special attention to the setting for the response.
- Provide students with practice answering this type of question using a variety of verb tenses beyond the present tense and with vocabulary beyond that of the prompt itself. Students should practice discerning to whom the message needs to be addressed and using proper register for this type of message.

Part A-2: Presentational Writing

What was the intent of this question?

This question was an example of the presentational mode of writing and a task that integrated the skills of reading, listening, and writing. Students were asked to understand, organize, and synthesize information from three different sources into a cohesive written response to a prompt about the effect of technology on art. Art primarily meant the visual arts, but the third source expanded the definition of art to include music. Technology primarily meant computers, but it also meant the Internet, Web sites, digital art, and digital music. The instructions, in both English and Spanish, asked students to use information from all three sources to support their ideas, to identify the sources clearly, and to avoid simply summarizing the sources individually.

This task was based on both print and audio material. The first print article was entitled “El museo real también es virtual” and appeared in the electronic newspaper *El País* on January 15, 2010. The second print source was an adaptation of an article entitled “La computadora reemplaza al pincel y al caballete,” published in *Hoy* on February 15, 2005, in Ecuador. The recorded audio file was an adaptation of an article entitled “La computadora y el poder de la creación, Brian Eno,” from the electronic newspaper *Milenio*, which appeared in Mexico on April 17, 2020. Students had 7 minutes to read the printed material, and they listened to the audio selection for approximately 3 minutes. They were instructed to take 5 minutes to plan their responses and then 40 minutes to write an essay of about 200 words. They were scored on effective task completion, topic development, and language use, equally considered.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for the Standard Group was 2.78 out of a possible 5 points. The mean score for the Total Group was 2.77.

The total mean score on the writing portion of the exam (both interpersonal and presentational) for the Standard Group was 5.73 out of a possible 10 points. For the Total Group the mean score on the writing portion was 6.06.

The language required to answer this question was of reasonably high frequency. Many students used the ample vocabulary and grammar from the two print sources and even the third source to write detailed essays of considerable length.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Some students were hampered by unfamiliar vocabulary, errors in grammar, or problems with the conventions of the written language.

From the perspective of task completion, a common error was a very general mention, if at all, of the audio source. Moreover, when referring to the sources, many students simply copied language from the print sources, making it more difficult to determine whether the source of the language itself was the student or the texts. In such cases it can be more difficult to assess students' ability to summarize and synthesize the material from the sources. Many students did not organize their essays well, preferring to follow the order in which the sources were presented. By doing so, they had difficulty integrating the sources cohesively.

A common student error was the misinterpretation and lack of understanding of some vocabulary items that appeared in the sources and that students used to answer this question. The three sources presented an expanded perspective of the impact of technology on art in general. The most common errors were misinterpreting vocabulary such as *la serigrafía* (silk-screen printing), *el pincel* (the paintbrush), *el caballete* (the easel), and *el lienzo* (the canvas), or concepts such as *la música ambient* (the type of digital music introduced by Brian Eno in the 1970s) or examples such as online casting to find a new Ryan McGinness. Many students recognized the terms but had difficulty using them cohesively in their essays.

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 will benefit from practice with as many authentic sources as possible. In particular, practice with a variety of audio sources is an excellent idea because relating the information from the audio source presented a difficulty for some students. In these practice sessions, help students focus on understanding the gist or essence of the audio source while taking brief notes. Of course, this suggestion is not limited to practice with the audio sources alone; routine practice with printed sources is important as well. Throughout the year it is a good idea to give students presentational writing assignments that include two printed sources and one audio source, under the constraints of the actual exam.
- Provide students with examples of ways in which to make reference to printed and audio material alike. Help students find which article seems to best summarize the answer to the question.
- Assist students by discussing and illustrating the differences between summary and synthesis. It is also always helpful to reinforce general essay-writing skills, such as prewriting, editing, and proofreading.

Part B-1: Interpersonal Speaking

What was the intent of this question?

The intent of this question was to assess students' interpersonal communication skills. The task elicited responses based on a recorded, simulated conversation and an outline that asked students to perform different linguistic tasks throughout the conversation. Instructions in both English and Spanish told students they had 30 seconds to read the outline of the conversation. They then listened to a recorded message and had 1 minute to reread the outline that indicated five elicited responses they were to give as fully and appropriately as possible.

The simulated conversation required students to participate in a job interview with Mr. Hernandez. Students were told in an audio message and in writing to imagine they were in Mr. Hernandez's office interviewing for a position at a summer camp for children. There were five questions to which students were expected to respond. The conversation outline was a summary of what the recorded speaker said and what students were expected to do. The dialogue kept to the specific topic/task: answering questions in a job interview. The task began with a question about the motive for wanting the job. The second and third questions asked about previous experience and similar job experience, respectively. The next prompt asked students to speak about relevant personal qualities for the job. Finally, students were asked what activities they would organize for the children.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for the Standard Group was 3.03 out of a possible 5 points. The mean score for the Total Group was 3.90.

The ideas presented in this simulated conversation were very realistic and typical of questions asked in almost any interview. Most students were able to respond to the parts and prompts of the conversation and to accomplish the task. Students were able to engage in this conversation as the vocabulary necessary to do so was generally familiar to them. Since the conversation moved in a direct and sequential fashion, most students were able to include a greater range of vocabulary.

The interview situation allowed students to demonstrate correct social or cultural references prompted by the formal interview nature of the task, along with Mr. Hernandez's beginning the interview in formal register. Although the prompts were all presented in present indicative, they did somewhat allow for students to include present, past, and future, along with the possibility of subjunctive mood. The absence of direct instructions for responding to the prompts helped some students to be creative in their responses.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Common challenges were finding ways to rephrase and incorporate additional and relevant vocabulary and ideas for the second and third prompts because they were somewhat similar. In these instances students tended to repeat or rephrase what they had previously indicated to the interviewer, recycling vocabulary. Also, when the prompt asked students to give personal qualities that would be an asset for this type of job, they often responded by repeating the quality mentioned by the interviewer. Other times they departed from the expected answer by talking about familiar activities or past actions that could provide good preparation for the job.

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?

- Simulate this task throughout the year by creating similar telephone conversations and practicing them often in class. This will familiarize students with the format of the exam and will help them to develop the topic fully and thoroughly.
- Make sure students and proctors are familiar with the operation of the equipment and with the exam protocol prior to the actual exam so that responses are recorded properly. As the number of digital recordings increases annually, the problems of poor burning of CDs increase. Work with the school technology department to simulate the exam several times so that the technology staff responsible for burning the exam files are familiar with the operation. Just as students check to see if they have properly recorded on a cassette, they and the technology staff should check the CD.

Part B-2: Presentational Speaking

What was the intent of this question?

This second part of the speaking portion was an example of the interpretive and presentational mode. Students were asked to give a 2-minute presentation in a formal/academic setting integrating reading, listening, and speaking skills. As indicated in instructions in both English and Spanish, students had 5 minutes to read the printed article and then were told to take notes while listening to the audio source. They had 2 minutes to prepare their responses and 2 minutes to record them. In the instructions students were explicitly told that they were “expected to use all the response time to speak.”

The prompt asked students to compare the ideas presented in the two sources about the benefits of water. The printed source, “El elixir de la pérdida de peso,” appeared on August 24, 2010, in the online edition of *El mundo*. The audio source, entitled “Alimento y salud: Beber agua,” came from a June 25, 2011, broadcast on Radio 5. Students’ responses were scored on effective task completion, topic development, and language use, equally considered.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for the Standard Group was 2.96 out of a possible 5 points. The mean score for the Total Group was 3.29.

For the Standard Group, the total mean score on the speaking portion of the exam was 5.98 out of 10 possible points. The total mean score for speaking (interpersonal and presentational) for the Total Group was 7.19.

What were common student errors or omissions?

The content of the two sources provided several similarities and few differences, which may not have been expected by students who anticipated a balance of similarities and differences. However, students were able to successfully compare the sources as they were very accessible.

As in the past, many students tended to summarize the information presented rather than comparing and contrasting. Many students were able to understand the audio source well, which allowed them to complete the task of comparing the two sources. Students needed to be able to refer to and integrate both sources for the development of relevant and thorough speech samples.

Some students read directly from the printed source; others had labored or halting expression or poor pronunciation. In some cases, lack of control of language undermined the ability to develop the topic and complete the task. Conversely, lack of command of the language kept some students from rising into the high range if they only partially addressed the task.

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?

- Simulation of the testing environment during the year will familiarize students with the format of the exam. Past practice has indicated that simulation helps students achieve higher scores.
- Incorporate the teaching skills and techniques for comparing and contrasting ideas presented in the sources without direct quotations.
- Reemphasize reading for meaning, and work with students on their ability to speak in their own words.
- Practice presentational speaking so that students are aware of the proper register required of a more formal presentation.
- Define social and cultural references so that students will be aware of both in the sources provided in the question.
- Provide opportunities for students to hear and read authentic sources representing all Spanish-speaking countries. These may include films, documentaries, speeches, interviews, online newspapers, and magazines, among other sources.
- Students, teachers, and proctors should be familiar with the operation of the equipment and with the exam protocol prior to the actual exam.