



Student Performance Q&A:

2015 AP[®] Chinese Language and Culture Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2015 free-response questions for AP[®] Chinese Language and Culture were written by the Chief Reader, T. Richard Chi of the University of Utah. 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.

Presentational Writing Task: Story Narration

What was the intent of this question?

This task assessed writing ability in the presentational mode of communication by requiring students to narrate a story, depicted in a series of four pictures, to a friend. Students were allotted 15 minutes to write the narration. The response received a single holistic score based on how well it accomplished the assigned task. The purpose of the task was to determine how well students can write a coherent story with a clear progression of ideas—including a beginning, middle, and an end—based on the picture sequence. The task also allowed students to demonstrate their ability to produce paragraph-level discourse using appropriate transitional elements and cohesive devices.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for the Standard Group¹ was 3.57 out of a possible 6 points, slightly lower than last year's mean score of 3.61. The mean score for the Total Group was 4.57, higher than last year's mean score of 4.40. Readers felt that, in general, students performed reasonably well on this task.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Readers felt that this year's picture sequence was very clear and that most students were able to understand the story. Some specific vocabulary, such as "balloon," was more difficult for non-heritage learners, and some students mistook the balloon for a kite.

¹ The Standard Group refers to students who generally receive most of their foreign language training in U.S. schools. It does not include students who regularly hear or speak Chinese or who have lived for one month or more in a country where Chinese is spoken. Decisions on cutoff scores in score setting are based on the Standard Group performance.

Common errors and omissions included the following:

- Not fully addressing all parts of the picture sequence; for example, leaving important elements such as “sitting on a bench” and “running to chase the balloon” out of the narration
- Using inappropriate vocabulary (substituting 木 for 樹, or one of the following for 氣球: 氣泡, 空氣包, 空氣球, 塑料包), incorrect measure words (一套花, 一頭花), or awkward phrases (爬到樹根, 爬上樹葉)
- Not making use of appropriate grammatical structures and cohesive devices
- Selecting an incorrect character whose pronunciation is the same as (or similar to) the intended character (奴 for 女, 术 for 樹, 化 for 花, 趴 or 怕 for 爬)

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, through modeling, to address all aspects of the picture sequence and to include descriptions of all four pictures in the narration.
- Students should practice writing simple stories with a beginning, a middle, and an end.
- Help students learn how to write complete sentences.
- Enable students to practice using the correct software to type Chinese characters.
- Use published Story Narration tasks from previous exams as a classroom exercise to practice writing a complete narration.
- Examine errors in responses from previous exams and teach students how to avoid them.
- Help students use the published scoring guidelines to evaluate their own narrations.

Interpersonal Writing Task: E-Mail Response

What was the intent of this question?

This task assessed writing ability in the interpersonal mode of communication by requiring students to write a response to an e-mail received from a friend. Students were allotted 15 minutes to read the e-mail and write a response. The response received a single holistic score based on how well it accomplished the assigned task. Students had to be able to comprehend the e-mail and then write a response that addresses all the questions posed in the e-mail.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for the Standard Group was 3.39 out of a possible 6 points, higher than last year’s mean score of 3.28. The mean score for the Total Group was 4.35, slightly higher than last year’s mean score of 4.32. Readers felt that students performed well on this task.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Failing to complete the task, possibly due to not fully understanding the e-mail
- Not answering all the questions in the e-mail
- Inappropriately using the format for writing a formal letter
- Using incorrect grammatical structures

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?

- Train students to read the e-mail carefully and identify all the questions asked
- Familiarize students with the informal format used in writing e-mails
- Students should practice addressing all aspects of the e-mail
- Help students practice test-taking strategies

Interpersonal Speaking Task: Conversation

What was the intent of this question?

This task assessed speaking ability in the interpersonal mode of communication by having students respond to a series of questions in a simulated conversation. The task comprised a statement identifying an interlocutor and conversation topic followed by six questions. Students were allotted 20 seconds to speak at each turn in the conversation. Each of the six responses received a holistic score based on how well it accomplished the assigned task.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for the Standard Group was 14.71 out of a possible 36 points, lower than last year's mean score of 14.98. The mean score for the Total Group was 22.18, lower than last year's mean score of 23.78. Readers felt that students did not perform as well on this year's Conversation task.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Not addressing all aspects of the prompt, especially the “why” question
- Giving responses that lack elaboration
- Not using proper register when responding to the first prompt, which begins with 謝謝你
- In responding to the third prompt, not making clear that the activity should take place on a field trip
- In responding to the third prompt, misinterpreting the word 出遊 and confusing 練習 with 學習
- In responding to the fourth prompt, misinterpreting 中國城 (Chinatown) as 中國城市 (a Chinese city)

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?

- Make sure that students understand that addressing all aspects of each question is of the utmost importance in answering the Conversation questions.
- Students should listen carefully to the introduction in English to avoid going off topic.
- Students should practice listening to the questions carefully and addressing them directly.
- Students should practice listening for main ideas.
- During classroom practice, ask students to restate a question after hearing it.
- Students should practice delivering Conversation responses that elaborate on various aspects of the prompt.
- Students should practice giving a response that answers both the “what” and “why” questions within the allotted 20-second response time.

- Emphasize correct pronunciation of the j-, q- and x- sounds.
- Help students understand the published scoring guidelines and let them practice using the scoring guidelines to assess their performance.
- Encourage students to be serious and not to waste time laughing or using foul language while responding to Conversation questions.

Presentational Speaking Task: Cultural Presentation

What was the intent of this question?

This task assessed speaking ability in the presentational mode of communication by requiring students to give an oral presentation on a specific Chinese cultural topic as if they were speaking to their Chinese class. It comprised a single prompt, which identified the cultural topic and asked students to select an example of that topic, describe it, and explain its significance. Students were allotted 4 minutes to prepare the presentation and 2 minutes to deliver it. The response received a single holistic score based on how well it accomplishes the assigned task. In addition to language skills, the task assessed students' cultural knowledge as presented in their responses.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for the Standard Group was 2.86 out of a possible 6 points, higher than last year's mean of 2.52. The mean score for the Total Group was 3.69, exactly the same as last year's mean score.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Focusing too much on describing the cultural topic while neglecting to discuss its significance
- Using limited and insufficient vocabulary and grammatical structures
- Responding in a manner that reflects insufficient Chinese cultural knowledge
- Misunderstanding the prompt (in English), resulting in responses that were off topic

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 practice delivering a response that both describes the cultural practice or product and discusses its significance within the allotted 2-minute response time.
- Expose students to a variety of cultural topics as outlined in the AP Chinese Course Description.
- Provide ample opportunities in class for students to practice delivering focused, clear, and detailed responses to the Cultural Presentation task.
- Help students learn to use comprehensible language with correct pronunciation and accurate cultural information.
- Help students learn to produce paragraph-length discourse using appropriate cohesive devices.
- Do not prepare students by having them memorize written presentations on cultural topics.