



Student Performance Q&A:

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

The following comments on the 2015 free-response questions for AP[®] Japanese Language and Culture were written by the Chief Reader, Motoko Tabuse of Eastern Michigan University. 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.

Interpersonal Writing Task: Text Chat

What was the intent of this task?

This task evaluates writing skills in the interpersonal communicative mode by having students respond as part of a simulated exchange of text-chat messages. The prompt comprises a statement in English identifying an interlocutor and conversation topic, and a series of six brief messages to which the student responds. Each message consists of a chat entry in Japanese and a brief direction in English that provides guidance on what is expected in the response. Students have 90 seconds to read the message and respond at each turn in the text-chat exchange. Each of the six responses receives a holistic score based on how well it accomplishes the assigned task, and all six scores count equally in calculating the total score.

The task on the 2015 exam directed students to participate in an exchange of text-chat messages with a future exchange student from Japan, Akiko Kawamura, about visiting their town. Students were asked to (a) respond to Akiko's request to begin their chat and answer some questions, (b) give a description about their town, (c) give some examples about activities they could do in their town, (d) describe the weather in August in their town, (e) give some suggestions as to what kind of things Akiko should bring for the three months that she is in their town, and (f) provide some recommendations for souvenirs for Japanese classmates.

How well did students perform on this task?

The mean score for the Standard Group¹ was 20.21 out of a possible 36 points. The mean score for the Total Group was 23.29.

¹ The Standard Group does not include students who hear or speak Japanese at home or who have lived for a total of one month or more in Japan, a country where Japanese is the language spoken predominantly. Decisions on cutoff scores are based on the Standard Group.

Although the text chat exchange comprised the most difficult portion of the four free-response questions on this year's exam, most students were able to perform the task relatively well. The topic seemed to be a familiar one to most students and all of the six prompts were expressed in straightforward language at the appropriate level. Thus, the students were generally able to respond to all of the prompts.

What were common student errors or omissions?

The following were errors or omissions specific to each of the six prompts:

Text Chat #1 — Respond. こんにちは。今日はあなたの町についてお聞きしたいのですが、いいですか？

Responses revealed several patterns of errors, including honorific language errors (はい、お聞きして下さい; お聞きしてもいいです), particle errors (何を質問がありますか? あきこさんを来たときはいいですよ), long vowel and short vowel differentiation errors (どうぞ来てください for どうぞ聞いてください), orthographic errors (こんにちは; こんにちは; 灰/肺、いいです), and improper responses to いいですか, such as それはいいです or いいですね.

Text Chat #2 — Give a description. あなたの町はどんなところですか？

There was a tendency to write the misspelled names of the city where the students lived instead of describing their town (ヌーよっく for New York ; とーレンス for Torrance) with ーに住んでいます. Students also occasionally mixed two similar sounding nouns 町 and 道 in their responses as well as misspelled adverbs such as ちよと、ちようと for ちよっと. Some used existential verbs あります and います without the required inanimate/animate distinction (たくさん人があります; 学校がいます).

Text Chat #3 — Give some examples. あなたの町では、どんなことができますか。

While most responses included two or more examples as instructed in English, some provided only one example or elaborated on the previous question in Text Chat #2 (お菓子屋さんがとても有名です). When listing things the student could do in town, errors in orthography occurred frequently in various situation such as short vs. long vowels (e.g., 湯名 or 夢 for 有名; 子円 for 公園), *katakana* words (e.g., すぽつ for スポーツ; 語流伝下と for ゴールデンゲート) and the combination of letters that were only deciphered by sounding them out (e.g., するもの害バイ instead of するものがいっぱい; 打つ駆使 for 美しい; か芋の尾する instead of 買い物をする). There were frequent errors of usage with grammatical particles 助詞 (joshi) or てにをは—for example, ことをできます instead of ことができます. There were also frequent errors made with the ~たり form of verbs (for example, モールにいきたり for モールに行ったり).

Text Chat #4 — Respond. 8月に行くんですが、天気はどうですか？

In this section, many of the responses with weather-related expressions tended to be short and unnatural and lacking in elaboration (e.g., 天気はおもしろい; 天気はいつでもおかしいです; この町はもう暑いそうです). Some students used *kanji* for *atsui* (i.e., 厚い and 熱い) incorrectly. Grammatical errors occurred with converting adjectives to adverbs for use with the ~なります form (e.g., 天気はちよと寒いなります instead of 天気はちよと寒くなります).

Text Chat #5 — Give some suggestions. 8月から3ヶ月間いる予定なんですが、何を持って行ったらいいですか。

Some students seemed to have difficulties with the grammar needed to make suggestions. An example of this would be responses that were ungrammatical or unnatural (e.g., 水着を持ちなさい instead of 水着を持

って来てください; 水着をもったは、いいです for 水着を持ってきた方がいいです; 持っていいと思います for 水着を持ってくればいいと思います). Errors in directional verbs such as 持つて行く for 持つて来る were rather common. Some responses did not differentiate between 8 月 meaning August, the 8th month, and 8 ヶ月 meaning a time period of eight months. The combination of orthographic and grammatical errors (e.g., 一思つて行く for 一を持つていく) hindered comprehensibility.

Text Chat #6 — Provide some recommendations. 日本語のクラスのみみんなに、おみやげは何がいいと思いますか？

Common structural errors included the insertion of だ as in いいだと思つます instead of いいと思つます as well as the deletion of だ as in 好きから for 好きだから. Errors in *katakana* words were also frequently seen in Text Chat 6 when listing possible souvenir items (e.g., ラ面 for ラーメン; サーカ for サッカー).

As seen above, common errors included orthographical errors with vowel length (long vs. short vowels) and with geminate consonants (small *tsu* つ with double consonants). Errors in *katakana* were also common. For example, students often had difficulty writing the names of the cities where they reside. Weather-related expressions appeared to have presented them with difficulties, and some struggled with unnatural statements such as 天気は熱いです as well as overly direct translation such as 天気はおもしろい. Many students had difficulty with the grammar needed to make a suggestion. For example, Text Chat 5 asks what the future exchange student should bring (何を持つて行つたらいいですか), and some students had difficulty producing appropriate suggestions. Suggestions such as ...持つて来た方がいいです ; 持つて来てください and 持つて来た方がいい are appropriate, but some students had difficulty with the directional aspect (行く vs. 来る) of the answer required to produce a correct and complete statement.

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 bear in mind that, in addition to typing an appropriate response, the ability to read the prompt quickly and accurately is essential to doing well on the Text Chat prompts. The Text Chat is *both* a reading and a writing task. Teachers are encouraged to find ways to practice reading Text-Chat-like messages in a short amount of time. In addition, students should be reminded to read all of the different parts of the prompt as carefully as possible—the overall context, the English instructions associated with each prompt, and the Japanese prompt.

Students should be given regular opportunities to type Japanese so they will become comfortable switching between *hiragana* and *katakana* and converting to *kanji* when appropriate. Students should be given a lot of practice writing and typing words with geminate consonants (e.g., ちよつと) and long vowels (e.g., ゆうめい (有名)). Typing quickly and accurately is essential to success on the Text Chat task. Students should also be advised that repeated typing of the subject or topic takes time and is unnecessary. For example, some students repeatedly wrote 私 to start each sentence of their responses. Instead they should practice dropping the subject to improve the fluency of their responses and, instead, focus more on providing elaboration and detail, which would improve their scores.

For the 2015 exam, students seemed to have difficulties giving advice with 持つて行く/持つて来る verbs. These directional verb pairs (e.g., 持つて行く/持つて来る; 取りに行く/取りに来る ; 迎へに行く/迎へに来る) can be very useful to describe real life events for students. Teachers may consider learning activities using more of these pairs in their classroom.

Presentational Writing Task: Compare and Contrast Article

What was the intent of this task?

This task assesses the student's writing skills in the presentational communicative mode by having students write an article for the student newspaper of a school in Japan. It comprises a single prompt in English, which identifies two related topics and details how they should be discussed in the article. Students are given 20 minutes to write an article of 300 to 400 characters or longer. The article receives a single holistic score based on how well it accomplishes the assigned task.

In 2015, students were asked to compare and contrast shopping online and shopping at a store. They were asked to describe at least three aspects of each and highlight the similarities and differences between the two. They were also asked to state their preference and give reasons for it.

How well did students perform on this task?

The mean score for the Standard Group was 3.89 out of a possible 6 points. The mean score for the Total Group was 4.40.

Most students were able to perform the task very well. The topic should be a familiar one to AP Japanese Language and Culture Exam takers. The students were generally able to write a school newspaper article on this topic. Many responses included all of the required elements (i.e., introduction, body, and conclusion), describing three aspects of comparison and expressing preference and reasoning, but some omitted one or more of these parts.

What were common student errors or omissions?

The following points highlight errors or omissions most commonly observed in the presentational writing task.

- Most students responded to the prompt directly, and addressed all aspects of it. Those students who did not organize their essay well, however, simply listed various aspects of each item being compared without situating them in the context of a comparison. In this case, students also failed to use transitional and cohesive devices, giving an impression of scattered information lacking coherence.
- High-quality and effective writing often benefits from employing an appropriate variety of vocabulary, grammatical patterns, and sentence structures. At times, students tended to repeat the same phrases, which would often weaken the impact of their argument. Likewise, student responses that merely listed points and counterpoints without further analyzing them were not as strong as they could be.
- Many students whose writing otherwise flowed quite well used a Japanese word for “you” (あなた, 君) in a place where it would not be used in Japanese. Standard Japanese would in such contexts typically use either nothing or the word 自分. In most cases, this use of “you” in Japanese represents transfer from English, and it is unnatural and unnecessary in the Japanese text.
- Many students failed to supply any *kanji* at all. In addition, many students misspelled words in the input, and these came out in mistaken *kanji* when *kanji* conversion was applied. When students failed to write out the entire word before *kanji* conversion, often an unwanted or incorrect *kanji* appeared.
- Many students were confused about when to use the nominalized form of a verb, versus simply a verb. For example, in contexts that require a noun, 違い “difference” should be used, and in contexts requiring a verb, 違おう “to be different”; “or differ” should be used. In more complex constructions, students were sometimes unsure about how to nominalize a verb.

- Many students incorrectly placed a copular *だ* or *の* after *i*-adjectives at the end of a sentence, or in an embedded clause such as 高くないだ and 安いもの. Many students also seem to have forgotten or were unfamiliar with the form an adjective takes before なる "become."
- Many students seemed to use case particles freely but incorrectly (e.g., 家を出て本屋をいきます; シピンーコストをお金が払います; 私は今日パソコンで日本語本が買いました; 私を作った; 時間にかかる).

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?

Continue to remind students to read and address all aspects of the prompt carefully in their responses. Teachers may also encourage students to use tools for organizing their essays such as a cognitive mapping, outlining, and making a checklist before beginning to write their responses to the prompt.

Spend time helping students learn appropriate ways to introduce and summarize a topic. Have students practice appropriate essay layouts by reading the previous years' examples on the AP Japanese Language and Culture Exam website and make them aware of the differences between high-scoring writing samples and low-scoring samples. Students could then write their own essays using the same or similar topic.

Although responses with excessive spacing between words (分かち書き) have been decreasing in number, teachers need to make sure that students understand that to convert to *kanji* from *hiragana*, they should hit the space bar after the complete word or phrase is typed, not in the middle of it. Give students regular opportunities to type Japanese early enough so they feel comfortable switching between *hiragana* and *katakana* and converting to *kanji* correctly. Also, teachers who use Macintosh computers need to ensure that students become familiar with the PC format when typing Japanese.

Teachers may continue to encourage students to continue expanding their repertoire of vocabulary, idioms, *kanji*, and grammar patterns (e.g., nominalization, relative clauses, complex and compound sentences, particle use, verb conjugation), which will help them achieve natural, easily-flowing expression of their ideas.

Error analyses of the 2015 exam, indicate the following specific approaches may be particularly helpful:

- **Task Completion:** In addition to ordinal cohesive devices such as 一番目に, 二番目に, etc., teachers may provide students with the opportunity to use contrastive transitional elements such as 一方, 他方, その代わりに, 従って, and so forth. Teachers may also provide students with argument-building strategies, such as statement and elaboration or giving reasons followed by a statement of a contrasting situation or phenomenon, which is then elaborated upon or supported with evidence
- **Language Use (grammar and structure):** Teachers may need to review how to nominalize verbs, how to use the conjunctive verb stem of the ーて form, and the differences between verb+*の* and verb+事, where 買うのが and 買う事が are fine but 買うの事が is incorrect. Review basic grammar patterns such as sentence-final forms for *i*-adjectives. Review basic grammatical patterns from time to time so that students master their use. A case in point is *i*-adjectives versus *na*-adjectives and their use before the verb *naru* "become" (e.g., 高くなる and 簡単になる). It might benefit students to periodically review or discuss the correct use of case particles, especially the *が* marking grammatical subject, and the *を* marking grammatical object. Incorrect use of case particles impairs comprehensibility because it sets up certain misleading expectations for the roles of the various participants in a sentence. If the cues provided by the particles are at odds with the intended reading, special effort is required by the reader to reread the sentence and apply a new interpretation.

- **Language Delivery:** Students should be made aware that the use of *あなた* or *君* could make sentences inappropriate and/or very unnatural for Japanese. For example, in a compare and contrast essay in which one refers to a general phenomenon or practice, the word "you" should not be used in Japanese. For example, while the phrase "what you want" in the context of being able to find out whether what you want is in stock can easily be determined online shopping, the equivalent phrase in Japanese, *君がほしいものがある*, is not natural in Japanese. *君が* should be omitted, and the phrase should be *ほしいものがある* or *さがしているものがある*.
- **Language Delivery (orthographic issues):** Give students opportunities to demonstrate the ability to convert kana to *kanji* using a word processor. Remind students that, should a typographic error occur, in *kanji* conversion this will emerge as the wrong *kanji*. Remind students that *kanji* conversion must apply to whole words. If typing is stopped in the middle of a word to apply *kanji* conversion, unwanted *kanji* are likely to appear.

Interpersonal Speaking Task: Conversation

What was the intent of this task?

This task evaluates the student's speaking skills in the interpersonal communicative mode by having them respond as part of a simulated conversation. It comprises a statement in English identifying an interlocutor and conversation topic, and a series of four related utterances in Japanese. Students have 20 seconds to speak at each turn in the conversation. Each of the four responses receives a holistic score based on how well it accomplishes the assigned task, and all four scores count equally in calculating the total score.

The task on the 2015 exam directed students to engage in a conversation with Hiro Yamamoto, a Japanese student, about an upcoming event. Students were expected to (a) give advice to Hiro regarding the choice between informal and formal attire for the concert on Friday, (b) suggest a place to eat after the concert, (c) respond to Hiro's request to go to the concert together, and (d) react to Hiro's remark about looking forward to the concert experience.

How well did students perform on this task?

Standard Group was 14.95 out of a possible 24 points. The mean score for the Total Group was 17.51.

Most students were able to perform the task relatively well. The topic seemed to be a familiar one to most students and all of the four prompts were expressed in straightforward language at the appropriate level. Thus, the students were generally able to respond to all the prompts.

What were common student errors or omissions?

The following were errors or omissions specific to each of the four prompts:

Conversation 1 — 金曜日のコンサートなんだけど、Tシャツとジーンズでいいかな？それともフォーマルな服の方がいいかな？

A noticeable number of students included a self-introduction in their response, which is contextually inappropriate for this prompt and wastes precious seconds of the allotted time (e.g., はじめまして。私は～です。どうぞよろしくお願ひします。このイベントに。。あー、ジーンズがあります)。This may be the result of students being automatically conditioned to start conversations with a self-introduction. Students also mispronounced loanwords frequently (e.g., シャト instead of シャツ and カンソート instead

of コンサート). For the 〜と思います structure, many students either incorrectly inserted だ when it was not necessary or omitted it when it should have been included.

Conversation 2 — あ、そう。それで、コンサートの後、どこに食べに行こうか？

Many responses were about “what to eat” rather than “where to go to eat (together)” (e.g., たこ焼きがいいと思います) and students responded with their own personal plan (e.g., 私はマクドナルドに行きます), which sounded like an inconsiderate response. Students also used proper nouns for the names of the restaurants without an explanation such as 〜というレストラン that would help the interlocutor better understand the comment.

Conversation 3 — ところで、コンサートの場所がよく分からないから一緒に行ってくれない？

Some students did not respond to the request directly (e.g., コンサートの場所はとてもきれいです). Many students seemed to have difficulty handling the last part (一緒に行ってくれない?) and responded to the question of whether they were going to the concert or not with such replies such as ええと、私はコンサートに行きます, which did not address the request about going together. Other replies were merely short answers (e.g., はい、一緒に行きましょう) that lacked additional information.

Conversation 4 — 金曜日のコンサート楽しみだね。わくわくするよ。

Some students used parting phrases such as ありがとうございます or よろしくお願ひします that are contextually inappropriate for this prompt. This may be the result of students automatically expecting to end the conversation task with formulaic expressions. Also, some students inappropriately used 楽しい instead of 楽しみ・楽しみにしています. Others described the concert in the past tense (e.g., コンサートは楽しかったと思います). There was also some confusion about the difference in the meaning of sentences ending ~ね and ~よ. Some of the responses were inappropriate because they reflected this confusion (e.g., きんようびに、わくわくするよ).

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 read and listen very carefully to the instructions on how to respond and then respond as fully and appropriately as possible each time it is their turn. Students need to listen carefully to the situation, the overall content and entire prompt. Teachers should encourage students to think of ways to elaborate and give ample practice opportunities to expand simple statements to ones with more detail and elaboration.

For this year’s AP Conversation, the English directions state that “You will have a conversation with Hiro, a Japanese student, about an upcoming event.” The phrase “upcoming event” should provide a helpful hint on the verb tense to focus when responding to the prompt, and the fact that Hiro, the Japanese student, began his casual speech, not using です and ます styles also indicates that he was already supposed to be acquainted with the student. Teachers should encourage students not to give well-practiced “autopilot” responses in which they always start with a self-introduction and end with a parting phrase. Take advantage of the audio files uploaded on the AP Central Japanese Language and Culture Speaking Prompts from previous exams and have students practice responding flexibly and appropriately to prompts with different topics, situations, and context.

Increase practice time for students to get used to speaking *katakana* words such as ハンバーガー and レストラン so that they will be able to communicate effectively with Japanese native speakers who are not

necessarily familiar with nonnative pronunciation and speech. Correct spelling and pronunciation of these words is an integral part of proficiency in Japanese.

Lastly, students would likely benefit from teachers' providing more practice opportunities to understand and differentiate between casual and polite sentence forms as well as correct use of sentence-final particles such as *ね* and *よ*. These language features are deeply woven into the fabric of Japanese society, and students should know the impact of correct and incorrect usages of these features on their intended message and on the overall impression they may give an interlocutor.

Presentation Speaking Task: Cultural Perspective Presentation

What was the intent of this task?

This task assesses the student's speaking skills in the presentational communicative mode by having them give a presentation on a cultural topic to a Japanese class. It consists of a single prompt in English, which identifies a cultural topic and details how it should be discussed in the presentation. Students are given four minutes to prepare the presentation and two minutes for its delivery. The presentation receives a single holistic score based on how well it accomplishes the assigned task. In addition to language skills, the score reflects the level of the student's cultural knowledge exhibited in the presentation.

The 2015 exam directed students to present their view or perspective on Japanese music. They were to begin with an appropriate introduction, discuss at least five aspects or examples of famous Japanese people, explain their own view or perspective about them, and end with a concluding remark.

How well did students perform on this task?

The mean score for the Standard Group was 3.95 out of a possible 6 points. The mean score for the Total Group was 4.56.

Most students were able to perform the task relatively well. The topic seemed to be a familiar one to most students and they were able to speak on the topic covering a wide range of choices, including traditional Japanese music, popular songs, and anime songs.

What were common student errors or omissions?

As in the case with the other questions, various errors and omissions were found. They included the following:

- Some students appeared to be confused with the Compare and Contrast prompt and used the format appropriate for the writing prompt in their Cultural Perspective Presentation (e.g., *これから日本の音楽とアメリカの音楽をくらべます。共通点は～です。相違点は～です。結論として～です*).
- Some students did not talk about Japanese music but, instead, chose to talk about the music (e.g., *アメリカの音楽はいいです*).
- Some presentations were not well organized, sounded scattered, and were difficult to follow. Others used a format for presentation indicating the order and sequences of the required information without much content, details or elaboration (e.g., *第一に日本の音楽はいいです。第二に日本の音楽は面白いです。第三に...第四に...五に...ご清聴ありがとうございました。)*
- Some presentations began with lengthy self-introductions including names, grades, high schools, or personal experiences (e.g., *私の名前は～です; 私は～高校の4年生です*) that were not related to the prompt, which made their speeches incomplete.
- Some students considered their conclusion or their views as the 5th aspect or example in spite of the fact that the prompt clearly indicates "FIVE aspects or examples" AND "views or perspective."

- Some only partially included their own opinions without giving five concrete examples (e.g., 日本の音楽はおもしろいです; 日本の音楽はつまらないです) and without concluding remarks.
- Many students used “Japanese language music (日本語の音楽)” when they should have referred to “Japanese music (日本の音楽).”
- Common grammatical mistakes included misuse of particles, such as in 日本の音楽について話します and 音楽はいいだと思います。
- Many speeches included incomplete or confusing statements such as 日本の音楽は好きです。なぜなら、日本の音楽はいいです。私はアメリカと日本のファッションが違います。
- Lastly, students made frequent errors trying to use English words in their responses (e.g., 日本の音楽は instrument が違います for 日本の音楽は使う楽器が違います; and ノート referring to musical notes instead of notebooks).

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?

Continue to remind students to address all the requirements of the prompt and outline their ideas before beginning to speak so that they address all aspects of the prompt including their own view or perspective. Encourage students to view cultural topics using perspectives, practices, and products (the three P’s of culture) and provide students with ample opportunities to express their own opinions about them within a set timeframe to structure their presentation. Students need to demonstrate their understanding of the difference between “aspects or examples” and “view and perspective” in the Cultural Perspective Presentation. Although it is important to know that a higher score (4 or higher) can be given to responses using simple grammatical structures and fairly basic vocabulary if they are combined appropriately, they should be encouraged to go beyond simply describing something as interesting, boring, pretty (おもしろい; つまらない; きれい). Students should be taught to begin with an introduction, then come up with at least five aspects or examples of the given topic, then think about details and elaborate on each point according to their own view and perspective, and finally, end with a concluding remark. Teachers may benefit from incorporating the creation of cognitive mapping (“mind maps”) for all required prompts within the four minutes to prepare students for the test-specific and/or task-specific environment. This may alleviate the confusion between the writing task of Compare and Contrast Article and the speaking task of Cultural Perspectives Presentation.

Teachers can also include frequently used common introductory expressions such as “これからーについてのスピーチをします; 今からーについて話します” and help the students practice speech delivery to avoid frequently observed errors such as “ーについて話します; ーについてをスピーチします and to incorporate helpful concluding remarks such as “以上が、ーについてのスピーチでした; これでーについてのスピーチを終わります.” They may also point out the grammatical differences between English and Japanese where the subject *watashi* does not always have to be present and in fact is sometimes better omitted in Japanese sentences. In addition, the correct usage of the expression, ーと思います, which is used frequently to state a viewpoint needs to be reviewed and practiced. Ungrammatical use of this form was prevalent in this year’s exam. The correct use of *katakana* for both proper nouns and loan words can lead to higher scores on the exam.

Students should also repeatedly practice giving a timed presentation so that they develop a good grasp of how much they can say in two minutes. In addition to frequently used sequencing expressions such as 第一に、第二に、, the use of それから and 次に may enhance the speech. Lastly, using a moderate amount of typical Japanese hesitation sounds such as あのう and えっと rather than “um” and “uh” will help make the speech sound more natural and flow more easily.