



Student Performance Q&A:

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

The following comments on the 2015 free-response questions for AP[®] Spanish Language and Culture were written by the Chief Reader, Jeffrey Reeder, of Sonoma State 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.

Task 1: E-mail Reply

What was the intent of this question?

The student was asked to initiate and sustain interaction during a written interpersonal communication by writing an e-mail reply in response to an e-mail message received in reference to a possible scholarship to go to Peru. In the reply, the student was asked to include a greeting and a closing, respond to two questions that were addressed in the e-mail received, and elicit information and clarify meaning about the topic in the original message. The student was also asked to use a variety of vocabulary, including idiomatic and culturally appropriate expressions. Finally, the student was asked to use a formal form of address in their response as well as appropriate format and conventions.

How well did students perform on this question?

Among the Standard Group¹ of students (those whose experience with the language has come primarily through classroom instruction), the Mean Score was 3.025, and the Standard Deviation was 1.02. Among the total group (all examinees), the Mean Score was 3.19, and the Standard Deviation was 1.00.

What were common student errors or omissions?

The variety of vocabulary used in the printed e-mail was diverse enough that it allowed most students to understand the entire message. Even if they did not understand all the vocabulary stated, they were able to infer meaning. The questions that the students were to respond to in the printed e-mail text were clear and seemingly easy to understand.

¹ The Standard Group does not include students who hear or speak Spanish at home or who have lived for one month or more in a country where Spanish is the native language. Decisions about score distributions are based on the Standard Group.

Some students misunderstood the second question, which asked “what is the impact their travel to Peru would have on their future.” Instead, they answered to whether or not this experience would impact them at the time of receiving the e-mail.

Some students asked questions that were not directly relevant to the situation.

Students sometimes misunderstood the e-mail purpose: to inform the student that he/she is a finalist to be awarded a scholarship. Instead, he/she understood that the scholarship had already been awarded.

While students mostly answered the two questions they were asked in the received e-mail, they did not always elaborate in their responses.

A few students did not use a formal register in their reply or did not consistently use a formal register.

In some cases, students were unable to fully complete the given task, because they were not familiar with the word “beca” (“scholarship”).

Based on your experiences of student responses at the AP[®] Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them improve the performance of their students on the exam?

Teachers should train their students to read the task carefully in order to understand what they ultimately have to do (write a greeting, answer questions, ask for clarification/more information, and write a closing). Teachers should also remind/teach students the use of appropriate, consistent formal register, as well as inform students that while they do not need to elaborate on their greeting/closing, they do need to elaborate on the body/main part of the task in order to have the opportunity to earn the highest score. Teachers should refer to AP Central[®] for copies of released exam samples and scoring rationales to better understand how to prepare students for the Interpersonal task, and may consider sharing the AP Scoring Guidelines with their students as they apply them in their lesson assessment throughout the year.

Task 2: Persuasive Essay

What was the intent of this question?

The student was asked to write a persuasive essay to submit to a Spanish writing contest, in which they were asked to answer the question: “Is it beneficial for a company to allow their employees to work from home?” The essay topic was based on three sources (two printed sources and one audio source) that presented different viewpoints and statistical information on the topic. In their persuasive essay, the student was asked to present the sources’ different viewpoints on the topic, as well as to indicate and thoroughly defend their own viewpoint on the topic using and integrating the three sources for that purpose. The student was asked to refer to, and appropriately identify information from, all the sources, in order to support his or her viewpoint. The student was asked to organize their essay into clear paragraphs.

How well did students perform on this question?

Among the Standard Group of students (those whose experience with the language has come primarily through classroom instruction), the Mean Score was 3.046, and the Standard Deviation was 0.97. Among the total group (all examinees), the Mean Score was 3.01, and the Standard Deviation was 0.99.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Students often did not refer to all three sources, even though the instructions required them to do so.

Some students did not write a persuasive essay in which they gave their viewpoint, but instead simply answered the question and included personal experiences.

Some students answered the question by addressing the pros and cons, rather than taking a side and defending it.

Many students addressed what the benefits were for an employee, rather than what the benefits are for a company, even though the question asked for the benefits for the company.

Students often misunderstood or misinterpreted the statistical information provided by the second source.

Many students did not cite their sources in an appropriate manner, often instead just making reference to some of the ideas without citing them, and many students did not organize their essay into paragraphs.

Based on your experiences of student responses at the AP[®] Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them improve the performance of their students on the exam?

Teachers should train students to carefully read the question first, to write a properly organized persuasive essay, to know how to cite sources properly, and to include information from all three sources.

Teachers should refer to AP Central for released exam samples and scoring rationales to better understand how to prepare students for the Presentational task. Teachers should consider sharing the AP Scoring Guidelines with their students as they apply them in their lesson assessment throughout the year.

Task 3: Conversation

What was the intent of the question?

This task assessed speaking in the interpersonal communicative mode by having the student respond as part of a simulated conversation. The task elicited responses based on a recorded conversation and an outline that asked the students to perform different linguistic tasks. Instructions in both English and Spanish informed students that they had 1 minute to read the directions and 1 minute to read a preview of the conversation. Shortly thereafter, the conversation began and students had 20 seconds to record each response. Students were instructed to participate in the conversation as fully and appropriately as possible.

How well did the students perform on this question?

Among the Standard Group of students (those whose experience with the language has come primarily through classroom instruction), the Mean Score was 2.954, and the Standard Deviation was 1.35. Among the total group (all examinees), the Mean Score was 3.77, and the Standard Deviation was 1.33.

What were common student errors or omissions?

The first prompt asked for the student's reaction to the idea and for suggestions for dishes their club could provide. Many students commented on the event itself but did not provide suggestions for specific dishes.

The second prompt asked for ways to promote the event. Some students misinterpreted the question and instead mentioned whom to invite.

In the fourth prompt, the outline places a constraint on the conversation, asking students to respond negatively to the news that José had reserved the auditorium for the event, and to instead offer an alternative. Some students did not follow the outline and reacted affirmatively. Others misunderstood the

word “*auditorio*,” affecting the appropriateness of their response or simply said the whole event was a bad idea.

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, teachers should practice the task often in class, simulating test day conditions. This is especially important with the interpersonal speaking task, as some students are unfamiliar with the process of conversing with a recorded interlocutor while following a written outline. Teachers can use activities in the Practice Exam and the 2014 and 2015 released free response questions to practice the task, and use the recorded student samples and scoring guidelines to familiarize students with how the task will be assessed.

AP teachers should work with the AP Coordinator to ensure that all those involved in the process (e.g., students, proctors, technology personnel) are familiar with the test instructions, the operation of the equipment, and the recording process to be sure that students’ responses are recorded properly. Practice sessions should include ensuring that digital recordings are saved in the proper MP3 format. We suggest that schools perform a test run including the CD burning process with student responses in order to identify difficulties and prevent improperly burned files, which can affect students’ results. Schools using cassettes should also provide opportunities for students to become familiar with the recording equipment.

Task 4: Cultural Comparison

What was the intent of the question?

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 record the presentation. The students were asked to make a comparison between their own community and an area of the Spanish-speaking world. Students were required to demonstrate their understanding of the cultural features of the Spanish-speaking world.

The question had two parts: the first part was a preamble that asked the students about the effect of fast food on their home community; the second part asked the students to compare their observations about their home communities with those about a region in the Spanish-speaking world they knew through their studies or personal experience. The students had 1 minute to read the instructions, 1 minute to read the question, and 4 minutes to prepare their presentation. After that, they were given 2 minutes to record their presentation.

How well did the students perform on this question?

Among the Standard Group of students (those whose experience with the language has come primarily through classroom instruction), the Mean Score was 3.119, and the Standard Deviation was 1.28. Among the total group (all examinees), the Mean Score was 3.22, and the Standard Deviation was 1.45.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Many responses did not clearly establish the two communities being compared, or only spoke about one community, leading to a cultural presentation rather than a comparison. A few students erroneously focus exclusively on the *tema curricular* instead of the prompt itself. In some student responses, the “effects” of fast food were not addressed explicitly as the prompt requires, but rather students limited their responses to the availability/absence of fast food in each community. When some students spoke about the effects of fast food, they got sidetracked on issues of health and exercise and disregarded to some extent the focus on the cultural comparison regarding the effects of fast food.

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?

It is important for teachers to address the notion of making cultural comparisons at all levels of instruction so that students are familiar with this task. Provide students with multiple opportunities to compare products, practices and perspectives of the Spanish-speaking world with those of their own community in a variety of contexts and modes: spoken, written, paired work, etc.

AP teachers also should emphasize organization and cohesion by focusing on the transition words that help students make explicit comparisons and integrate relevant examples, thus improving the cohesion of their presentations. Instruct students to elaborate on their examples by giving relevant, supporting details. Finally, teachers can help students use the preparation time to create an outline, graphic organizer, or notes to organize their ideas and guide them as they speak for 2 minutes.