



Student Performance Q&A:

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

The following comments on the 2015 free-response questions for AP[®] Spanish Literature and Culture were written by the Chief Reader, Eduardo Cabrera of Millikin 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.

Question 1

What was the intent of this question?

This question required students to read an excerpt from a work on the required reading list, identify the author and period of the text, and explain the development of a particular theme within the work from which it was taken. On this year's exam, the textual fragment was taken from the story "La siesta del martes," which appears in Gabriel García Márquez's *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande*. In addition to identifying the author and period of the text, students were required to explain the development of the theme of the individual in his or her environment/surroundings (*el individuo en su entorno*) in the text to which the cited fragment belongs.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean content score on Question 1 was 1.19 out of 3 possible points.

The mean language score on Question 1 was 2.32 out of 3 possible points.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- No author or period identification
- Inaccurate author or period identification
- Confusion between literary movements and historical periods
- Confusion between author and narrator
- No explanation of development of theme
- Failure to respond to all requirements of the prompt (author, period, development of theme in text to which the fragment belongs, using relevant evidence from the entire text and not merely the fragment)
- Response explains the development of an incorrect theme in the correct text (irrelevant)

- Response applies the correct theme to the wrong text (irrelevant)
- Summary or description of text outweigh explanation of development of theme
- Insufficient textual evidence (should use and explain more than one example)
- Failure to use textual evidence to support an explanation of the theme
- Irrelevant comments (not related to theme); e.g., biographical information, explanation of literary movements, references to other themes or techniques used by the author in other works, references to other similar works by the same author or by other authors
- Inaccurate comments (incorrect interpretation of the text)
- Response too brief to convey the students understanding of the theme/text
- Confusion regarding the question; e.g., attempting to analyze the passage as if it were a poem

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?

The Text Explanation question appears on the AP Spanish Literature and Culture Exam every year, and always features a work that comes from the required reading list. The advantage for students is having an excerpt from the work in front of them while they consider, plan, and write their responses. Practicing ways to respond to the same type of prompt under the same conditions and constraints as those of the AP Exam will help students refine their skills and become better equipped to write an effective and organized response to the question.

Aside from the errors and/or omissions offered above, teachers can further help by encouraging students to set aside time to read the question carefully and then read or skim the cited passage, keeping the question in mind. Teachers can suggest that students underline or circle important parts of the question — in this case, the identification of the author and the period, and the theme of the individual and his environment. This type of exercise trains students to remember to fully address the question. Teaching them to take a few minutes to outline their responses and to reserve some time for proofreading, editing and/or correcting elements of their response is another valuable practice.

Throughout the AP Spanish Literature and Culture course, teachers can help their students by:

- Teaching students how to accurately identify the period;
- Involving the class in small-group work or, in a pre-writing phase, having students share their thoughts concerning a particular text's development of a specified theme;
- Focusing on the themes and subthemes that structure the course curriculum framework;
- Help students understand how to explain the development of the theme in a text;
- Bringing in relevant information on the historical and cultural context of texts on the reading list;
- Encouraging students to practice writing responses (as differentiated from essays); and
- Making peer review among students part of the editing process.

Question 2

What was the intent of this question?

This question required students to read an excerpt from a work on the required reading list and study an image of a work of art (e.g., painting, photograph, sculpture, drawing) related by theme to the text. Students were asked to compare how a particular theme is represented in both the text and the image, and then to connect that theme to the genre, period, or movement of the text. On this year's exam, the text was a selection from "Segunda carta de relación" by Hernán Cortés. The image reproduced on the exam was a painting entitled *The Conquest of Tenochtitlán* from the *Conquest of Mexico* series (Private Collection). Students were required to compare the representation of the theme of imperialism (*el imperialismo*) in both works in relation to the Colonial era.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean content score on Question 2 was 1.89 out of 3 possible points.

The mean language score on Question 2 was 2.52 out of 3 possible points.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Not addressing all elements of the prompt
- Inability to explicitly deal with either the theme (imperialism) or the period (the Colonial era)
- Summarizing the text selection and describing the painting in a completely separate manner (without relating them to each other)
- Failing to make an explicit comparison of the theme in both works
- Providing insufficient examples from the two works to support the required comparison
- Including superfluous statements that do not support the specific comparison being made
- Making erroneous statements about the period, the theme, or one or both of the works
- Limited ability to write a focused response

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?

As with all questions on the AP Spanish Literature and Culture Exam, a successful response to the Text and Art Comparison question begins with a careful reading of the question itself and continues with an answer that fully treats the specified theme — in this case, imperialism — and its relation to a particular period, genre, technique, or movement — here, the Colonial era — with supporting textual and visual references. The best responses contain specific examples to support the students' comparisons.

In addition, teachers can help their students achieve good scores on their responses by:

- Working with techniques and phrasing to communicate an explicit comparison;
- Teaching students to distinguish comparison from mere description or paraphrasing;
- Presenting students with a wide variety of additional visual images — paintings, photographs, drawings, sculptures — and providing them with vocabulary, so that they can effectively write about visual artwork (many students had accurate vocabulary to discuss the text, but not the artwork);
- Teaching students how to develop and properly support their ideas;
- Helping students learn to stay focused on the topic by routinely pointing out content in their responses that is required by the prompt; and

- Training students to avoid material not required by the prompt (many students this year attempted to identify rhetorical or poetic devices in the text, which was not required by the prompt and usually did not support the comparison).

Question 3

What was the intent of this question?

This question required students to read a work on the required reading list and then analyze how the text represents the characteristics of a particular genre, as well as a particular historical, cultural, or social context, commenting on relevant literary devices in the text and citing examples from the text that support their analysis. On this year's exam, the work was Tirso de Molina's play *El burlador de Sevilla y convidado de piedra*. Students were asked to analyze how the play represents the characteristics of the Golden Age *comedia* and the sociocultural context of seventeenth-century Spain.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean content score on Question 3 was 2.08 out of 5 possible points.

The mean language score on Question 3 was 3.11 out of 5 possible points.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Failing to refer specifically to the cited excerpt or the entire text from which it was taken
- Failing to discuss the socio-cultural context of the 17th century; or not identifying specific, salient features
- Failing to discuss characteristics of the *comedia del Siglo de Oro* specifically, while generalizing about common traits of theater; failing to discuss rhetorical, stylistic, or structural elements pertinent to theater or the *comedia*, specifically, or Tirso's break with, e.g., traditional theatrical time (into three parts or *unidades*); mixing of tragedy and comedy; use of greater variety and movement; variety of meter and rhyme; use of language and verse to distinguish between social classes; inclusion of musical elements; use of the comic figure (*el gracioso*); use of the 'aside'
- Incorrectly discussing or associating the text's historical and/or cultural context with contemporary notions of *machismo*, feminism, gender roles and relations or infidelity; applying contemporary mores to an analysis of a 17th-century, Spanish text
- Demonstrating an inadequate understanding of the cited excerpt or the entire work, or both
- Providing insufficient examples from the cited excerpt or entire text to support the analysis
- Offering general or vague responses that suggested an unfamiliarity with Tirso de Molina's play and/or its context
- Incorrectly identifying or alluding to the play's author as Cervantes, Lope de Vega, and others
- Making superfluous and/or erroneous statements
- Relying on a prepared overview of *El burlador de Sevilla* with limited connection to the question
- Poor organization or limited ability to write a well-developed essay; limited or no ability to discuss the question's different elements in an integrated manner

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?

In addition to keeping in mind the errors and/or omission mentioned above, to help students better prepare for and perform on the Single Text Analysis question, teachers might also:

- Give students questions based on a number of texts on the required reading list, in order to provide them with the experience of doing this type of analysis; and at some point or points during the year, have students answer this type of question under conditions and time constraints that are similar to those of the AP Spanish Literature and Culture Exam;
- Give students more background information and various, excerpted examples of other Spanish *comedias* from this period, as *El burlador de Sevilla*, by Tirso de Molina, is the only one on the required reading list. By exposing them to other *comedias*, and providing students with broader background knowledge about the changes that were made to this period's theater, and about some of the various themes present in it, students will be less likely to generalize about the *comedia del Siglo de Oro* based on their experience with only one play;
- Give students other readings or summaries representative of the genre and period, and show them relevant films — documentary or feature length, to further familiarize them with the historical, cultural, and political context of the work on the required reading list;
- Work regularly with students on literary vocabulary (not just poetic, but also rhetorical, and especially dramatic) and the features associated with different genres and subgenres that are listed in the curricular framework (remembering that this list is not exhaustive);
- Emphasize the connection of texts to their specific historical and cultural contexts;
- Encourage students to highlight or circle important words or concepts in the questions;
- Help students practice how to read, comprehend, and address multi-part prompts;
- Teach students how to write effective thesis statements and conclusions;
- Teach students how to develop and properly support their ideas when analyzing;
- Help students develop and practice a list of vocabulary, expressions and transitional phrases, so that they will learn how to link sentences and paragraphs while integrating comments of an analytical nature, as opposed to writing anecdotal commentaries;
- Encourage students to write more than one draft of an essay;
- Give students in-class writing practice with all aspects of essay composition: prewriting, outlining, writing, editing, and proofreading; and
- Ask students to act as editors of their own essays, an exercise that can help them recognize problems in their work and refine their essay-writing skills.

Since the Single Text Analysis question can be based on any work from the reading list, it is essential that students read each work completely. Teachers can further assist students by showing them how to do a close reading of all the works, including consideration of vocabulary and linguistic and stylistic features, regardless of the genre.

Question 4

What was the intent of this question?

This essay question required students to read two poems related by theme, one from the required reading list, the other not from the list. Students were asked to write a well-organized essay that analyzes the effect of literary devices used by the poets to develop the given theme: the experience of suffering (*La experiencia del dolor*), compare its presentation in both poems and include specific examples to support their analysis. On this year's exam the two completed poems were "Peso ancestral" by Alfonsina Storni, which appears on the reading list, and "Redención" by Juana de Ibarbourou, which is not on the list.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean content score on Question 4 was 2.77 out of 5 possible points.

The mean language score on Question 4 was 3.30 out of 5 possible points.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Focusing on one literary device
- Not structuring their response as an essay
- Inability to write a comparative essay
- Failure to follow a logical progression of ideas
- Miss identification of literary devices
- Much emphasis on one poem and less on the other
- Lack of comparisons between both poems
- Confusion between the theme given and the overall theme of the AP course
- Addressing literary devices without analyzing and making connections between them and the poems
- Lack of understanding of the literary genre
- Paraphrasing both poems
- Discussing narrative devices (narrator, textual lines) rather than poetic devices
- Much confusion regarding literary terminology

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 students with list of verbs to use while analyzing “effects” and “comparisons.”
- Explore with them how to write a clear essay.
- Explain the differences between major AP themes and sub-themes mostly found in exam questions.
- Provide students with an extensive list of transitional words.
- If “ESSAY” or “ENSAYO” could be incorporated into the exam, right under or next to the heading “QUESTION 4” it may prompt students to begin writing an essay immediately.
- Clarify with students the differences in literary genre. There appears to be much confusion between “poetic voice,” “poetic subject,” “narrator,” “verses vs. textual lines.”
- De-codify for students the various questions within questions to be addressed in the exam’s essay.
- Additional practices on reading to comprehend exam questions: literary level, metaphorical level, and analytical level.
- Suggest teachers begin exam with essay questions rather than short answers. Students spend too much time with short answers, some even write essays, and there is no time to complete the exam.
- Remind students that the reference information at the bottom of poems does not indicate the nationality of the author, but rather where the book was published.
- Allow students to see the rubrics used to evaluate them.
- Have a poster in the classroom of relevant terminology just as we have in our rooms while evaluating exams.
- Have students practice writing weekly essays and short answers.
- There is much emphasis on major themes, which is not reflected on the AP Exam questions. This is a call to the College Board requesting the usage of major themes in questions and not sub-themes. Too often, students reply to essay questions with the major theme that has been overstressed by teachers.
- The continuous practice of the interpretation of exam questions to understand the nuances embedded in questions.