



Student Performance Q&A:

2016 AP[®] Chinese Language and Culture Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2016 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 task?

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 accomplishes 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, a 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 task?

The mean score for the Standard Group¹ was 3.30 out of a possible 6 points, lower than last year's mean score of 3.57. The mean score for the Total Group was 3.87, lower than last year's mean score of 4.57.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Although appropriately concentrating on narrating a complete story, some students paid insufficient attention to details in the pictures, or paid attention to some details but not others. For example, many students missed the specific details in pictures 3 and 4.
- Some students did not fully describe the actions in the story, and some added extraneous information not contained in the pictures.

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.

- Some students failed to describe all the characters and activities shown in the pictures.

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?

- Stress the importance of task completion. Encourage students to express meaning using words and phrases they know.
- Teachers should train their students to tell the story in a logical progression while focusing on key details that help to make a complete story.

Interpersonal Writing Task: E-Mail Response

What was the intent of this task?

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 accomplishes 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 task?

The mean score for the Standard Group was 3.20 out of a possible 6 points, lower than last year's mean score of 3.39. The mean score for the Total Group was 4.26, lower than last year's mean score of 4.35.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Misreading 在那儿打过工 as 在哪儿打过工.
- Not assuming the role of the recipient of the e-mail and therefore not writing the response from that person's point of view. For example, the response should reflect that the recipient of the original e-mail has worked at 日新百货.
- Failing to address the question "why."
- Writing a response that lacked cohesion and coherence.

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 help students learn to:

- address the topic directly with attention to all aspects of the stimulus (for example, practice responding explicitly to every sentence in the original e-mail);
- familiarize themselves with the scoring guidelines and use examples of the task to practice writing appropriate responses;
- concentrate on responding to all the questions posed in the e-mail and omit nonessential elements such as salutation, greetings, polite formulas, and signature; and
- write paragraph-length discourse using cohesive devices and appropriate register.

Interpersonal Speaking Task: Conversation

What was the intent of this task?

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 accomplishes the assigned task.

How well did students perform on this task?

The mean score for the Standard Group was 20.98 out of a possible 36 points, higher than last year's mean score of 14.71. The mean score for the Total Group was 27.11, higher than last year's mean score of 22.18. Performance on the Conversation task by both groups in 2016 improved significantly in comparison to that of 2013–2015.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Failing to respond to praise in a culturally appropriate manner (that is, with modesty).
- Not assuming the role of a foreign tourist as required by the Conversation scenario; for example, answering the question “how did you learn Chinese?” by saying “I am Chinese” or “I lived in China for many years.”
- Giving too brief or too hurried a 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?

Teachers should help students learn to:

- respond to the questions directly and use linking words to organize their sentences; and
- pay careful attention to the task directions.

Presentational Speaking Task: Cultural Presentation

What was the intent of this task?

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 task?

The mean score for the Standard Group was 2.70 out of a possible 6 points, lower than last year's mean score of 2.86. The mean score for the Total Group was 3.77, higher than last year's mean score of 3.69.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Spending too much time giving a detailed description of a myth or legend but failing to explain its significance.

- Giving an inadequate description of a myth or legend due to insufficient cultural knowledge and/or vocabulary.
- Focusing on a 成语故事 that does not really represent a myth or legend.

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?

- Emphasize the importance of completing the task.
- Let students practice the task and peer-assess their responses.
- Provide opportunities to increase cultural knowledge by integrating it into daily lessons.
- Teach transitional words and how to organize thoughts.
- Work on precise and accurate pronunciation.
- Help students learn to read/listen to the prompt carefully, understand it thoroughly, and respond to it directly.
- Assign tasks, such as presentations or short essays that require students to express themselves.
- Demonstrate how to describe something with elaboration and how to explain its significance.