



Student Performance Q&A: 2016 AP[®] Latin Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2016 free-response questions for AP[®] Latin were written by the Chief Reader, Mary English, Montclair State University, Montclair, N.J. 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?

The question assessed the student's ability to translate a passage from Vergil's *Aeneid* into English as literally as possible.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 7.55 out of a possible 15 points.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Segment 5: misunderstanding of the adjective *imas*

Segment 7: *imago* translated as an ablative, despite the gloss

Segment 9: *Te movet* misconstrued as a nominative pronoun and a passive verb ("you are moved")

Segment 10: omission of *at*

Segment 10: misunderstanding of subjunctive *agnoscas*

Segment 14: difficult vocabulary (*residunt* translated as "reside," *tumida* as "timid," *corda* as "cord" or "rope")

Segment 14: *corda* often misconstrued as an ablative with *ex ira* in Segment 15 ("from the angry heart")

Segment 15: *ira* rendered as an adjective with *corda* ("angry hearts")

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 develop strategies for helping their students commit to memory the less familiar vocabulary words on the AP syllabus. Throughout the school year, students should receive ample practice in literal translation, and teachers should assess their work with the same precision required on the AP Exam.

Before attempting to translate the passage, students should read through the selection and try to pinpoint its location in the epic in order to minimize overall miscomprehension of the passage. For this particular question, the students who recognized that Sybil was addressing the ferryman Charon often produced stronger and more coherent translations of the passage. Students should also take full advantage of the glosses, which provide not only the dictionary meaning, but also the declension identifier for nouns and the conjugation identifier for verbs. (If students had used the gloss for *imago* and recognized that it was third declension, they would not have rendered *imago* as an ablative.) At the end of the exam, students should be encouraged to proofread their work, making sure that they have accounted for every word in the passage and that they have double checked the tense, voice, and mood of the verbs as well as the case and number of the nouns.

Question 2

What was the intent of this question?

The question assessed the student's ability to translate a passage from Caesar's *Bellum Gallicum* into English as literally as possible.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 7.95 out of a possible 15 points.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Segment 1: *nostrī* rendered as the pronoun *nos* ("we")

Segment 2: difficult vocabulary (*simul* translated as "likewise"; *constiterunt* as "they decided")

Segment 3: difficulty translating ablative absolute *suis omnibus consecutis* (esp. participle *consecutis*, which was often rendered passively "having been followed")

Segment 4: *in hostes* mistranslated as "in the enemy"

Segment 5: *fecerunt* translated as "they carried" (presumably misidentifying *facio* as *fero*)

Segment 8: *longius* not rendered as a comparative

Segment 10: *quod* translated as a relative pronoun

Segment 11: wrong tense for *potuerant*

Segment 15: *pristinam* translated as "pristine," despite the gloss

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 develop strategies for helping their students commit to memory the less familiar vocabulary words on the AP syllabus. Throughout the school year, students should receive ample practice in literal translation, and teachers should assess their work with the same precision required on the AP Exam.

Teachers should also devote time to reviewing the major elements of Caesar's prose style and the most advanced constructions that appear frequently in Caesar. Students should practice translating in context ablatives absolute, indirect statements (esp. in reported speeches), and subjunctive clauses.

At the exam, students should mark the words in the passage that are glossed so that they can use those glosses to their full advantage.

Question 3

What was the intent of this question?

The question assessed the student's ability to comprehend, analyze, and contextualize two thematically related passages from Vergil's *Aeneid*.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 2.89 out of a possible 5 points.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Students often misidentified the addressee of Passage (A) as Juno or Aelous himself.
- Students failed to see that Iarbas was challenging Jupiter in Passage (B) and failed to account for *nequiquam*, *caeci*, *inania*, *inanem*, and *quippe* in their arguments.
- Students are not required to COMPARE passages. A forced or polarizing comparison often led students astray. They should focus instead on applying the prompt to each of the passages cited.
- Students must cite enough Latin to show substantial knowledge of BOTH passages. Many students failed to base their arguments on the Latin in the passages and used their general knowledge about the *Aeneid* as the foundation for their essays.

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 encourage students to read and translate the Latin in both passages before they outline their essay. In doing so, they can tie their arguments to specific citations in the Latin passages. Citing only individual words is rarely the basis for meaningful analysis, and students should be reminded that they need to grapple with significant sections of the Latin, and the nuances therein, to attain the higher scores on this question. Although reference to stylistic devices and word order can enhance a particular argument, students should avoid basing their entire analysis on them. Instead, they should focus on what is happening in the passages and the specific Latin citations that help us decipher what Neptune and Iarbas are trying to achieve.

Question 4

What was the intent of this question?

The question assessed the student's ability to explain various semantic, grammatical, stylistic, and cultural features of a passage from Vergil's *Aeneid*.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 3.68 out of a possible 7 points.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Subquestions 1a and 1b: Although students were able to identify this construction as an ablative absolute, they had difficulty with the vocabulary and often produced inaccurate translations. Some students also had trouble rendering *comitante* as a present active participle.

Subquestion 2: Although many students received full credit for the subquestion, others based their answer on general information about Laocoon instead of looking at line 2 of the passage and *ardens* in particular.

Subquestion 4: Some students remain unfamiliar with the concept of scansion. In more than a few cases, students confused “scanning a line” with “parsing the words in a line.”

Subquestion 6: Some students named a stylistic device that did not appear in the specified lines. Students should be reminded to look at the parameters of the question and select a stylistic device from those Latin words.

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 academic year, students should be given ample practice in this type of question and the types of skills it assesses. Teachers should ask their students reading comprehension questions after they translate a particular passage from the syllabus. They should also have their students identify the major grammatical constructions represented in that same passage.

In addition, teachers should make sure that they familiarize their students with the principles of scanning dactylic hexameter and that frequent assessment of this skill be woven into their syllabi.

Question 5

What was the intent of this question?

The question assessed the student’s ability to explain various semantic, grammatical, stylistic, and cultural features of a passage from Caesar’s *Bellum Gallicum* and to relate the passage to other passages from the student’s Latin or English readings for the course.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 4.25 out of a possible 8 points.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Subquestion 2: Students translated *ferunt* as “they carry” not as “they say.”

Subquestions 5a and b: Students failed to identify the verb as indicative and thus rendered *cum* as “since.”

Subquestion 6: Many students gave “Druids” instead of “Germans” as the answer.

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 academic year, students should be given ample practice in this type of question and the types of skills it assesses. Teachers should ask their students reading comprehension questions after they translate a particular passage from the syllabus. They should also have their students identify the major grammatical constructions represented in that same passage.