



Student Performance Q&A:

2016 AP[®] Spanish Literature and Culture Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2016 free-response questions for AP[®] Spanish Literature and Culture were written by the Chief Reader, Eduardo Cabrera of Millikin University in Decatur, Ill. 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?

Question 1 (Text Explanation) is a short response question that required students to read an excerpt from a work they have already studied, as it is on the required reading list. On this year's exam, the excerpted work was from the essay "Nuestra América," written and published by Cuban author José Martí in 1891. Students were asked to identify the author and period of the text, and explain the theme of "American identity" within the work from which the excerpt was taken. The question asked students to identify the *época* "period" in the question to elicit a historical timeframe, dates, or a literary movement relevant to both the time period and hemisphere in question. Students were asked about "American identity" to elicit references to Latin America, Spanish America, the Caribbean, and/or Cuba.

How well did students perform on this question?

On this year's exam, the mean content score on Question 1 was 1.53 out of 3 possible points. The mean language score on Question 1 was 2.20 out of 3 possible points.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Failing to identify, or misidentifying the author of the cited excerpt or the entire text from which it was taken
- Failing to identify, or misidentifying the *época* (period) of the cited excerpt or the entire text from which it was taken
- Failing to discuss the theme of "American identity" in the cited excerpt or the entire text from which it was taken
- Incorrectly associating the text's historical, sociopolitical, and/or cultural context with a celebration of U.S. American identity, implying either that Latin America should emulate the U.S. or that what was meant by "American identity" in the prompt was U.S. American identity

- Demonstrating an inadequate understanding of the cited excerpt or the entire work, or both
- Not providing implicit or explicit examples from or references to the cited excerpt or entire text to support the explanation
- Offering a general or ambiguous response that suggested unfamiliarity with José Martí and/or “Nuestra América,” or its context
- Incorrectly identifying or alluding to the text’s author as Rubén Darío or some other author
- Incorrectly identifying or alluding to the text’s *época* (period), historical point in time, or literary movement as *Siglo de Oro* (Golden Age), *Edad Media* (Middle Ages), the *Reconquista* [the Reconquest], *la Conquista de América* (the Conquest of America), *posmodernismo* (post-Modernism), etc.
- Incorrectly writing the Roman numerals when identifying the period or historical point in time
- Relying on a prepared overview of “Nuestra América,” José Martí, and/or *el imperialismo* (imperialism) with a limited or no connection to the prompt
- Responding as though the prompt’s primary intention was for the student to effectively situate their answer within the course’s specific organizing themes and subthemes, with less or no detail to the discussion of “American identity”
- Making superfluous and/or erroneous statements

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 omissions mentioned above, to help students better prepare for and perform on the Text Explanation 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 answering this type of question; 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 other readings or summaries representative of the *época* (period), historical point in time, or literary movement (e.g., other than Darío’s “A Roosevelt” and Martí’s “Nuestra América”), 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, *but* ensure that they understand they were not the only two Latin American *modernista* authors who dealt with U.S. imperialism
- Work regularly with students on vocabulary associated with *época* (period), historical point in time, and literary movements, and how these three identifying factors can and do overlap, emphasizing how history, geography, and culture are always connected and that there is a causal relationship among them
- Use the course’s specific themes and subthemes to organize the course curriculum but do not present them to the students in a way that limits their ability to recognize and discuss other themes both in the required readings and other readings
- Give students practice with the correct use of Roman numerals
- Encourage students to highlight or circle important words or concepts in the prompt
- Have students practice how to read, comprehend and address multi-part prompts
- Teach students to include implicit and/or explicit evidence from the cited excerpt or full text from which the excerpt was taken to support their explanations
- Teach students to attempt to answer the question even if they do not know the answer to either part of the prompt, and not leave the response page blank. For example, in Question 1 this year, the first part of the prompt asked them to identify the author and period of the excerpt. The second part asked them to explain the theme of “American identity.” It is possible to read the excerpt without knowing the author, period, or full text, and still glean that it is talking about an identity that is unique to Latin America and not to the U.S. or Europe. Thus, a student could have received a 1 in content, instead of a hyphen (for a blank page)

Question 2

What was the intent of this question?

The question asked students to carry out a thematic comparison of feminine beauty as represented in a text (“Soneto CLXVI” by Luis de Góngora) and a piece of art (the painting *La Infanta Isabel Clara Eugenia* by Alonso Sánchez Coello). In addition, the students were asked to relate the same thematic comparison to the period (the Baroque).

How well did students perform on this question?

On this year’s exam, the mean content score on Question 2 was 1.70 out of 3 possible points. The mean language score on Question 2 was 2.26 out of 3 possible points.

What were common student errors or omissions?

The most frequent omission in this year’s exam was the relationship to the Baroque. Many students compared the two works and neglected the period completely. Other students did a comparison of the two works, but omitted the theme of feminine beauty. A subgroup of this type of response focused on youth (*juventud*) in both works, but without a clear connection to feminine beauty (if this connection was made, the response was often successful). Other students chose to focus on the given themes of the course (“*tiempo y espacio*” or “*dualidad de ser*,” for example) instead of the theme given on the questions (“*belleza femenina*” or feminine beauty). Some students carried out a technical or structural examination of the poem instead of a thematic one, which often coincided with responses that neglected the painting completely. In general, the responses showed that students’ ability to examine art was weaker than their ability to analyze poetry.

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 instruct their students to always respond to all parts of the prompt. This question had three main parts: the theme of feminine beauty, the comparison of two works, and the relationship to the period. Many of the less-successful responses omitted one or more of these elements or changed one of the elements for something that the student was more prepared to discuss. Another suggested area for improvement based on this year’s exam, as well as last year’s, is students’ ability to write about art. It is clear that many students are not receiving training or practice to discuss artwork. Lessons that incorporate three or four basic elements of style for each period would be helpful in training students to deal with other genres of artistic expression.

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 subgenre as well as a particular historical context. The students were asked to comment on relevant literary devices in the text and cite examples from the text that support their analysis. On this year’s exam, the work was the poem “Romance de la pérdida de Alhama.” Students were asked to analyze how the poem represents the characteristics of the subgenre of romance and the historical context of fifteenth-century Spain.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean content score on Question 3 was 2.35 out of 5 possible points.
The mean language score on Question 3 was 3.15 out of 5 possible points.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Not being familiar with the task to be performed (to write an analytical essay)
- Not reading the prompt carefully to take into account all of the required elements that must be addressed in the student’s essay (analysis of the subgenre, analysis of the context, explanation of literary devices, and textual examples)
- Including a minimum of two aspects of each required element (examples may overlap but must be explicitly explained as to how or why the examples connect to the required element being discussed)
- Failing to refer specifically to the text, especially when the entire poem is published on the exam
- Demonstrating an inadequate understanding of the text
- Incorrectly identifying or alluding to the poem’s anonymous author as being a name/person or by misidentifying the author as Isabel Allende, Garcilaso de la Vega, Francisco Quevedo, and others
- Failing to discuss or demonstrating a lack of understanding of the characteristics of the subgenre of the “romance” that are found in the poem or for omitting characteristics of the subgenre of the “romance” that are not literary devices (oral tradition, narrative qualities, brief or limited scenes, etc.)
- Misinterpreting the subgenre of the “romance” for “romanticismo,” the literary movement, or for romantic love
- Failing to analyze or discuss the historical context of fifteenth-century Spain; or not identifying specific, salient, relevant features that connect to the subgenre of the “romance”
- Incorrectly discussing or associating the text’s historical and/or cultural context with contemporary issues of religious conflict and terrorism
- Failing to identify or discuss literary devices found in the poem
- Enumerating literary devices with no discussion as to how or why the literary devices are being used in the poem
- Providing insufficient examples from the poem to support the analysis
- Referencing the course themes and organizing concepts is not a requirement for this task and unless used to analyze the genre or cultural context or to discuss literary devices; references to the themes and organizing concepts may be superfluous or erroneous
- Offering general or vague responses that suggested unfamiliarity with the text and/or its context
- Making superfluous and/or erroneous statements
- 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
- Writing a short response instead of an essay

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?

- Teaching students the differences among analyzing, explaining, describing, and identifying
- Guiding students as to how to approach answering the question addressing all of the different components
- Practicing with students how to read, comprehend, and address multi-part prompts
- Having students answer this type of question under the conditions and time constraints that are similar to those of the AP Spanish Literature & Culture Exam
- Teaching students the differences in writing short answers (Questions 1 and 2) and writing essays (Questions 3 and 4)
- Having students write definitions of the genres and subgenres of the works on the required reading list using textual examples to explain how the text is representative of the genre or subgenre
- Exposing students to other texts from the same genre or subgenre that are not from the required reading list to compare or contrast how the text is representative of the genre or subgenre
- Showing students relevant films (documentary, feature length, or clips) to further familiarize students with the representative genre, period, and/or the cultural context of the work from the required reading list

- Involving the class in small-group work to create an ongoing historical timeline and a parallel timeline for literary movements
- Discussing differences between a historical period and a literary movement
- Working regularly with students on literary devices (not just poetic) and the features associated with different genres and subgenres that are listed in the curricular framework (remembering that the list is not exhaustive)
- Teaching strategies for writing analytical essays (thesis, development, conclusion, linking, and transitional words)
- Teaching students how to develop and properly support their ideas when analyzing
- Practicing timed writing
- Helping students develop and practice transitional expressions and phrases so that they will learn how to link sentences and paragraphs while integrating comments of an analytical nature, as opposed to writing summaries or anecdotal commentaries
- Instructing students to form separate groups for each component of the question and after discussing each group's contribution, combine them to form an essay
- Offering students deconstructed essays to identify components and then reconstruct as well-developed analytical essays
- Using scoring rubrics (personal or AP) and letting students self-evaluate
- Teaching the stages of the writing process: prewriting, drafting, reviewing, revising, and publishing (i.e., blog, literary magazine, book review, etc.)

Question 4

What was the intent of this question?

Question 4 (Text Comparison) is an essay question that required students to read two excerpts related by theme — one from a work on the required reading list, the other from a work not on the list. (The whole work may be included in the case of a short poem). Students were asked to analyze the effect of literary devices that the authors use in the texts to develop a particular theme. Students were required to compare the presentation of the theme in the two texts and to cite examples from both texts to support their analysis. On this year's exam, the two texts included a fragment of Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra's novel *Don Quijote de la Mancha, Segunda Parte*, which appears on the required reading list, and a fragment from Miguel de Unamuno's novel *Niebla*, which is not on the list. Students were asked to analyze the effect of the literary devices used by the authors in both texts to develop the theme, to analyze the duality of being (*la dualidad del ser*), and to compare the presentation of the theme in both texts.

How well did students perform on this question?

On this year's exam, the mean content score on Question 4 was 2.38 out of 5 possible points. The mean language score on Question 4 was 3.14 out of 5 possible points.

Both, *Don Quijote de la Mancha, Segunda Parte* and *Niebla* deal with the theme of the duality of being. Specifically, both of the fragments used in this year's exam center on the feelings of duality and fragmentation experienced by the main characters. In *Don Quijote de la Mancha, Segunda Parte*, don Quijote's literary insanity caused by his excessive reading of chivalric novels is brought to a halt by death. During the brief period of agony prior to his death, don Quijote recovers sanity and acknowledges his mental illness ("*ya no soy don Quijote de la Mancha, sino Alonso Quijano*"; "*ya conozco mi necedad... Yo fui loco y ya soy cuerdo: fui don Quijote de la Mancha y soy ahora, como he dicho, Alonso Quijano el Bueno*"). In *Niebla*, Augusto, the fictional character, comes to life to confront his creator ("*Empecé [...] como una sombra, como una ficción; durante años he vagado como un fantasma, como un muñeco de niebla... pero ahora [...] me siento, ahora me palpo, ahora no dudo de mi existencia real*") and proclaims the power of literature to influence our perception of reality ("*no se incomode tanto... si yo a mi vez dudo de la existencia de usted y no*").

de la mía propia. Vamos a cuentas: ¿no ha sido usted el que no una, sino varias veces, ha dicho que Don Quijote y Sancho son no ya tan reales, sino más reales que Cervantes?"). Thus, by explicitly drawing attention to each fictional character's belief that they are real, both texts pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality (metafiction). Each text makes use of a rich array of literary devices associated with narrative prose to develop the theme of the duality of being, such as dialogue, narrative voice, change of verbal tense and perspective, theme, antithesis and paradox, polysyndeton, and the device of multiple frames or a story within a story.

The best responses to Question 4 clearly analyzed the effect of literary devices in both texts in relation to the development of the specified theme. In their essays the students discussed the effect of antithesis and paradox ("*Yo fui loco y ya soy cuerdo*"; "*fui don Quijote de la Mancha y soy ahora . . . , Alonso Quijano*"), polysyndeton ("*ya yo no soy don Quijote*"; "*Ya soy enemigo de Amadís*"; "*ya me son odiosas*"; "*ya conozco mi necedad*"), and change of tense and perspective ("*fui loco y [ahora] soy cuerdo*"; "*fui don Quijote de la Mancha y soy ahora . . . Alonso Quijano*") in *Don Quijote de la Mancha* to underscore the main character's sense of duality. In *Niebla* the students commented on the use of dialogue to set up multiple frames and perspectives, or a story within a story, to highlight the ability of fictional characters to outlive their creators ("*. . .no eres, pobre Augusto, más que un producto de mi fantasía y de las de aquellos de mis lectores que lean el relato que de tus fingidas venturas y malandanzas he escrito yo*"; "*No se exalte usted así, señor de Unamuno. . . ¿no ha sido usted el que no una, sino varias veces, ha dicho que Don Quijote y Sancho son no ya tan reales, sino más reales que Cervantes?*") and to call into question the relationship between reality and fiction (metafiction). In their essays the students were able to accurately identify the theme in both texts, discuss and illustrate differences between them based on the effect the use of literary devices had in the theme's presentation and treatment through well-chosen textual examples. Some of the most insightful responses began by identifying common elements in both texts and provided important information about don Quijote's sense of duality ("*Yo fui loco y ya soy cuerdo; fui don Quijote de la Mancha y soy ahora . . . , Alonso Quijano*"). By contrast, in *Niebla* students pointed to Unamuno's dialogue with Augusto, his literary character, ("*¿no ha sido usted el que no una, sino varias veces, ha dicho que Don Quijote y Sancho son no ya tan reales, sino más reales que Cervantes?*") to highlight the power of literature to construct reality (metafiction). Other superior responses were able to draw attention to the fact that not only is Augusto a fictional character in *Niebla* but don Quijote is also the main fictional character of *Don Quijote de la Mancha*. Thus when in *Niebla*, Augusto states that don Quijote and Sancho are even more real than Cervantes, the author, the essays further underscored the interrelation between literature and reality. These students constructed well-developed and well-organized essays with an explicit statement of purpose, a coherent structure, a cohesive and logical progression of ideas, and a conclusion based on their comparative analysis. In lower-scoring responses the analytical component was outweighed by an overreliance on summary and paraphrase. In such responses the development of the theme was described rather than analyzed; similarly, rhetorical devices were accurately identified or mentioned but the students were less successful in analyzing how such features affect the theme's presentation. While their answers included textual examples, these were not always clear or relevant to their discussion. They included a stated topic, an introduction, and a conclusion but their essays were not well developed. The weakest responses to Question 4 were multiply flawed: some students focused mostly or solely on one of the two texts, they may have omitted all references to structural or rhetorical devices; description or summary predominated at the expense of relevant textual evidence; their answers either contained significant errors of interpretation or demonstrated a lack of understanding of one or both texts, especially seen in the inclusion of irrelevant comments. Such responses were also characterized by an inability to structure ideas in an appropriate essay format; often there was no statement of purpose and the students' ideas were presented in random fashion rather than in a coherent and logical progression.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Students did not realize the importance of connecting literary devices to meaning of theme
- Students had difficulty understanding what literary devices are in narrative prose

- Students did not understand the fact that narrative prose also uses literary devices. For that reason, students were unable to identify them or understand their effect
- Lack of analysis of literary devices
- Lack of comparative analysis
- Plot summary or paraphrasing of both fragments with no attempt to analyze
- Focused exclusively on a single text
- Although, theme comparison was attempted, there was inability to analyze literary devices, lack of knowledge of what this means
- Inability to analyze use of literary devices in connection with thematic intent
- Listing literary devices without explaining them or connecting them to the theme
- Genre confusion: mentioned literary devices associated with poetry. Unfamiliarity with rhetorical devices associated with prose as opposed to poetry
- Unfamiliarity with common narrative rhetorical devices
- Students wrote forced interpretation of the texts because they were not familiar with literary devices in prose narrative
- No mention of literary devices
- Although many attempted to analyze literary devices they were unable to relate them to the theme
- Errors regarding literary device terminology
- Inability to make connections between literary devices and theme
- Unbalanced focus on one of the texts
- Tendency to discuss texts separately with little or no comparison
- Lack of comparison of theme
- No inclusion of textual references or did not integrate them effectively
- Inability to organize ideas in paragraph format. Difficulty integrating complex ideas in a logical progression
- Frequent use of false cognates
- Some were able to compare the texts but unsuccessful in analyzing literary devices
- Inability to use rhetorical transition words in Spanish to organize ideas
- Inability to express oneself well in Spanish (errors in syntax, grammar) even if they understood the question

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?

Keeping in mind those student errors and omissions mentioned above, to help students better prepare for and perform on the Text Comparison question, teachers might also:

- Expose students to the literary devices proper of narrative prose and focus on literary analysis of these devices in a given text (s)
- Instruct students to read assigned texts not just for content but also paying attention to the use of literary devices, supplying examples that illustrate and foreground the theme (s)
- Provide practice analyzing literary devices in prose narrative and relate their use to the theme in a single text. Proceed to compare with another text related by theme. Then, practice writing a comparative essay taking into consideration the effect of devices in the treatment of the theme in the two texts
- Train students to fully read and break down tasks on prompts. Prioritizing tasks in prompts
- Provide practice reading and understanding a variety of prompts; practice constructing responses to prompts
- Provide practice analyzing texts that share familiar themes and devices but are new
- Provide sample essays that include a thesis statement, effective analysis, examples and supporting commentary, explicit comparisons with appropriate transitions
- Have students analyze a well-written essay a week to serve as models

- Explain to students how prose and poetry are constructed and how messages are conveyed within these two different genres
- Inform the students that passages in the exam usually list the names of the authors and the dates of the work
- Explain to students that writing an essay implies organizing ideas into paragraphs
- Integrate literary devices in every lesson
- Teach students to justify their response / analysis with textual evidence and explanation related to the theme they are asked to analyze
- Don't focus on previous knowledge of texts (plot summary) but point them to the task at hand: analysis of effect of literary devices and comparison
- Teach students what comments are not necessary or are irrelevant and why. Limit their responses to the theme required in the prompt / unit
- Give students unfamiliar but thematically related texts and ask them to identify, comment, and analyze the use and effect of literary devices. Ask them to identify the theme and explain its connection to the literary devices used
- Teach students how to effectively compare the treatment of a theme in two texts. What accounts for the difference in treatment?
- Teach students how to present analysis in writing
- Teach basic essay structure to support analysis and organization
- Give students the opportunity to re-write essays after they receive feedback so they develop awareness
- Teach students how to break down complex essay questions in order to identify tasks and organize ideas better (effects of literary devices, comparative analysis of the presentation of the theme supported by well-chosen textual examples)
- Encourage students to write longer essays paying attention to structure and organization; show them how to use rhetorical transition words to organize ideas and make points
- Provide students with the opportunity to read and deconstruct well-written exemplary essays so they can see what needs to be done
- Use the rubric with your students; make students use rubric when evaluating others
- Teach students vocabulary, or the linguistic tools necessary to organize ideas and compose essays (thesis statement, transitions, and integrating textual quotations, concluding remarks)