



Student Performance Q&A: 2013 AP[®] Chinese Language and Culture Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2013 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 in the presentational mode of communication by having students narrate a story to a friend. It comprised a series of four pictures that depict a story. Students were allotted 15 minutes to write the narration. 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 assessed students' command of grammatical structures and vocabulary and their ability to use appropriate transitional elements and cohesive devices.

How well did students perform on this task?

The mean score for the Standard Group* was 3.18 out of a possible 6 points. The mean score for the Total Group was 4.03. In general, the students did not perform well on this task.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Common errors and omissions included the following:

- Leaving out the content of one or two pictures out of the narration
- Many students had difficulty describing pictures 2 and 3.

* The Standard Group does not include students who hear or speak Chinese at home or who have lived for more than one month in a country where Chinese is the native language. Decisions on cutoff scores are based on the Standard Group.

- Leaving out details such as:
 - The stance of the girl after throwing the ball; the ball flying toward the windows on the second floor of the house; the two backpacks, and their colors, on the bench
 - The boy holding his backpack; the girl grabbing the left sleeve of the boy's shirt
 - The doorbell ringing.
 - The paper the girl is writing on being placed against the door; the boy holding the mailbox cover open; the mailbox being mounted on the wall.
- Summarizing the pictures instead of telling a complete story
- Including excessive irrelevant information
- Not knowing common vocabulary and expressions, such as 打棒球, 球棒, 手套, 二樓, 窗戶, 玻璃, 拉住, 往裏看, 字條, 放在信箱裏
- Narrating the story predominantly in loosely connected sentences, rather than in paragraph-length discourse
- Typographical errors caused by choosing incorrect homophonous characters

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?

Help students practice the following tasks in a consistent, deliberate, and sustained manner:

- Narrate a complete story that accords with the information found in the pictures.
- Use the scoring guidelines for the story narration task to self-assess their own stories.
- Write the narration in paragraph-length discourse.
- Practice using basic grammatical structures such as the 把 and resultative complement constructions.
- Practice using discourse connectors describing sequenced events, such as 以後...就...可是; ...然後.
- Broaden vocabulary related to pre-advanced topics.

Interpersonal Writing Task: E-Mail Response

What was the intent of this task?

This task assessed writing in the interpersonal mode of communication by having students write a response to an e-mail message received from a friend. Students were allotted 15 minutes to read the e-mail and write a response. 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 2.96 out of a possible 6 points. The mean score for the Total Group was 4.24. In general, the students did not perform well on this task.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Common errors and omissions included the following:

- Not answering all three questions, particularly the last question

- Straying from the questions and providing irrelevant information in the response
- Addressing the school cafeteria instead of the sender
- Not structuring the response as a logical progression of ideas; for instance, discussing why healthy food is important and what the school cafeteria should do aside from serving healthy food before suggesting what healthy food the school cafeteria should include in its lunch menus
- Responding to the second part of the prompt with circular reasoning (e.g., the healthiest food is salad because salad is very healthy)

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 design e-mail exchange activities that help students learn how to do the following:

- Read the instructions and the prompt carefully to avoid misunderstanding what is required or leaving out important information.
- Address the task and all the questions directly.
- Use proper register (salutations, tone of the message, writing conventions) for informal messages such as e-mails.
- Practice writing paragraph-length discourse and using cohesive discourse connectors.
- Use the e-mail response scoring guidelines to evaluate e-mail writing samples.
- Use the proper format for an e-mail.

Interpersonal Speaking Task: Conversation

What was the intent of this task?

This task assessed speaking 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. All six scores were counted equally in calculating the total score. Students needed to speak clearly with good pronunciation and make sure that each of their answers addressed the prompt directly and was culturally appropriate.

How well did students perform on this task?

The mean score for the Standard Group was 16.29 out of a possible 36 points. The mean score for the Total Group was 23.93. In general, the students did not perform well on this task.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Not understanding the word 怎麼 in question 1.
- Not understanding the meaning of 能力 in question 3; students' descriptions of their skills included the following: 我學得很快; 我很能幫助別人; 我很有能力; 我的成績很好; 我很認真

負責; 我很積極工作; 我很自動自發不需要別人的提醒; 我很聰明, 很努力, 很細心. Also, some students did not understand the words 申請, 優先, and 考慮.

- Question 4 (你認為作義工對學生有什麼好處? 為什麼?) was a very challenging question. Many students spoke about the benefits of volunteering but did not answer the question “why?”. Students may have thought the benefits they identified were self-explanatory and did not need further explanation. The benefits mentioned included: 可以進入社會; 可以幫助別人; 可以碰到許多有愛心的人; students may not have felt the need to explain why these are benefits.
- In answering question 4, many students seemed to have confused 義工 with 打工, saying that they could make some money by doing 義工. And many students missed the 對學生 part of the question: they spoke about the benefits of volunteer work in general rather than specifically with respect to students.
- In question 5, many students discussed various types of movies rather than naming a specific movie. Some students said they could not recommend a movie because they do not watch movies.
- For question 6, many students responded to 你希望我們怎麼安排你的工作時間? with general and unspecific answers such as 下課以後 and 週末都可以.
- Not being able to give a complete response within 20 seconds
- Not providing elaboration, or providing insufficient elaboration

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 design conversation activities that help students learn how to do the following:

- Conduct conversations on familiar topics.
- Respond to a question within 20 seconds.
- Identify key words in the prompt and address the prompt directly.
- Elaborate with detailed information.
- Understand what the question is asking for; for example, do not answer a “why” question with a “what” or a “when” answer.
- Use correct pronunciation and tones to avoid errors that interfere with comprehension.

In addition, teachers should tell students to take the exam seriously and not give flippant or joking answers to the conversation questions.

Presentational Speaking Task: Cultural Presentation

What was the intent of this task?

This task assessed speaking in the presentational mode of communication by having students make a 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. 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 3.22 out of a possible 6 points. The mean score for the Total Group was 3.76. In general, the students did not perform well on this task.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Many students did not discuss a “regional cuisine,” speaking instead about regions in China. Others talked about specific foods like 餃子 or 月餅 without discussing their regional associations.
- Many responses did not include elaboration and detail.
- Many responses discussed the significance of specific foods rather than the “significance of food in Chinese culture.”
- Many responses were characterized by the use of incorrect or simple grammatical structures, loosely connected sentences, and limited vocabulary.

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 guide students to work in a consistent and sustained manner on completing the following tasks:

- Select a list of cultural topics appropriate for advanced-level learning.
- Work in groups to research the facts and significance of each of the selected cultural topics.
- Practice organizing information coherently and logically.
- Practice delivering oral presentations on the facts and significance of the selected cultural topics, giving particular attention to correct pronunciation.