



## Student Performance Q&A:

### 2013 AP® French Language and Culture Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2013 free-response questions for AP® French Language and Culture were written by the Chief Reader, Pascal Ifri of Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri. 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 task assessed writing in the interpersonal communicative mode by having students write a reply to an e-mail message. Students were allotted 15 minutes to read the message and write the reply. The responses received a single holistic score based on how well it accomplished the assigned task. Students needed to be able first to comprehend the e-mail and then write a reply using a formal form of address. The reply had to address all the questions and requests raised in the message, as well as ask for more details about something mentioned in the message.

The theme for the e-mail reply task was “*la quête de soi*.” Students had to use the formal register to respond to two questions asked by the director of an international summer camp. It was implied that the student had previously applied for a position of camp counselor. The two questions asked were the following: “What knowledge, especially in languages, would you bring to the team?” and “What experiences do you have with foreign cultures?” The student was required to ask the director for further information about a point mentioned in the e-mail.

##### ***How well did students perform on this question?***

The Standard Group’s\* mean score for Question 1, the E-mail Reply (Interpersonal Writing), was 3.09 out of a possible 5 points.

##### ***What were common student errors or omissions?***

By far the most common student error was the omission of the request for further details about something mentioned in the message. Students sometimes wrote that the reader should consult an attached CV or resume to find the information requested in the e-mail. This might be a creative or realistic answer, but

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\*The Standard Group does not include students who hear or speak French at home or who have lived for one month or more in a country where French is the native language. Decisions about score distributions are based on the Standard Group.

unfortunately, it was not an answer that completed the task of explaining one's high school education, including foreign language learning experience.

**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 take into consideration the following points:

- Students need to include a request for further details about something in the message. The question needs to target something in the message, although it should be noted that the request does not have to appear in the interrogative form: “*J’aimerais savoir s’il y aura des moniteurs au camp qui parlent chinois*” is acceptable. Many students wrote to the potential employer, asking something along the lines of: “*Si vous voulez plus de renseignements sur mes compétences, n’hésitez pas à me contacter*” or “*Voulez-vous plus de renseignements?*” These requests are too general and do not ask for further details. Remind students that they must respond to the specific questions raised in the e-mail.
- Students also need to understand that they are required to “respond to all the questions and requests in the message” clearly and directly. Many students simply directed the potential employer to consult “*une pièce-jointe*” or “*un cv*” with information about the student’s high school language courses and/or cultural experiences. This does not fulfill the task of explaining one’s education and background. Emphasize the importance of fulfilling all of the elements of the task as outlined in the instructions.
- Students should not merely recycle language from the stimulus. Because the students are directed to answer questions specific to the stimulus, they often avoid reformulating ideas in their own words. Varied vocabulary is indicated as a strength in the scoring guidelines and so it behooves the students to try to bring in words and expressions beyond those included in the stimulus.
- Concerning register, it seems that teachers spend a great deal of time discussing the proper form of address to use in the greeting. On the AP® Central discussion board for French AP® teachers, there are debates, for example, on whether “*Cher Monsieur Dubois,*” “*Cher Monsieur Robert Dubois,*” “*Cher Monsieur,*” or “*Monsieur*” is best. Any of those salutations would be acceptable. It is more important to make sure that students understand how to maintain the formal register they establish with any one of those openings. The principal problems are the use of both “*tu*” and “*vous*” forms in the response (sometimes in the same sentence) and the use of inappropriate vocabulary (“*Ce poste est super!*” or “*Moi je suis hyper-excité!*”).
- Work with students on finding alternatives to writing simple lists. Perhaps this was partially a result of the stimulus, but many responses, even some of the very strong ones, contained a list of languages spoken as an answer to the first question and a list of countries visited or studied for the second question. Such answers were not necessarily problematic; however, better responses (responses that provided elaboration and more fully appropriate exchanges and thus often scored higher) provided more in-depth information about one or two languages and/or one or two cultural experiences.

## Question 2

### ***What was the intent of this question?***

This task assessed writing in the presentational communicative mode by having students write a persuasive essay on a given topic while referencing three sources of information about the topic. Students were first allotted 6 minutes to read the essay topic and the two printed sources. They then had to listen to one audio source. Afterward, they had 40 minutes to write the essay. The response received a single holistic score based on how well it accomplished the assigned task. Students had to be able first to comprehend the three sources and then to present their different viewpoints. They needed to also present their own viewpoint and defend it thoroughly, using information from all of the sources to support the essay. As they referred to the sources, they had to identify them appropriately. Furthermore, the essay had to be organized into clear paragraphs.

The course theme for the persuasive essay task was “*les défis mondiaux*.” Students had to write a persuasive essay on the following topic: “Should we stop eating meat and become vegetarian in order to be healthy?” The first source was a 2009 online article titled “Should we stop eating meat?” The article stated that eating meat, especially red meat, can be harmful to one’s health, though eating no meat at all can also cause health problems. It concluded that people should consume a well-balanced diet including less red meat and more poultry and fish. The second source was a graph that showed that meat consumption in France fell between 1996 and 2006 but rebounded in 2007. The third source was a 2009 radio interview of the head of a vegetarian association who explained why he became a vegetarian and why vegetarianism is good for the environment. He also claimed that it is easier and easier to find alternatives to animal products.

### ***How well did students perform on this question?***

The Standard Group’s mean score for Question 2, the Persuasive Essay (Presentational Writing), was 3.12 out of a possible 5 points.

### ***What were common student errors or omissions?***

- The most common problem was the failure to integrate information from all three sources to support the essay or to refer to them explicitly.
- Most students appeared to be well trained in the organization and the structure of the essay, but often at the expense of the language.

### ***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?***

- It would be helpful for teachers to incorporate listening exercises with authentic resources and acquaint students with interpreting graphs.
- In view of providing students with the tools to improve their writing, it is suggested that teachers introduce students to the uses of the subjunctive (in particular following conjunctions such as “*bien que*”; “*à condition que*”; “*pour que*”), as well as appropriate transitional words and phrases.
- In order to enrich students’ vocabulary resources, teachers should ensure that vocabulary is taught in context rather than as a list of stock phrases. Teachers should make students aware of common anglicisms and “*faux amis*” and incorporate classroom practice with circumlocution, so that students will be better prepared to explain themselves without having recourse to English.

- Teachers should make sure that students are familiar with the persuasive essay task and its required elements. Classroom practice with planning and writing persuasive essays, with particular emphasis on using information from all three sources and discussion of strategies for incorporating them are highly recommended. Give students the opportunity to practice developing their own points of view in writing, and reminded that this task requires a clear statement of their own opinion rather than a mere restatement of the opinions expressed in the source materials.
- Teachers should make students aware of appropriate use of register and remind them to use the formal register throughout (avoid popular or colloquial vocabulary and expressions).

### Question 3

#### ***What was the intent of this question?***

This task assessed speaking in the interpersonal communicative mode by having students respond as part of a simulated oral conversation. Students were first allotted 1 minute to read a preview of the conversation, including an outline of each turn in the conversation. Then, the conversation proceeded, including 20 seconds for students to speak at each of 5 turns in the conversation. The series of 5 responses received a single holistic score based on how well it accomplished the assigned task. The responses had to appropriately address each turn in the conversation according to the outline as well as the simulated interlocutor's utterance.

The theme for the conversation task was "*la vie contemporaine*." In this task, the student received a phone call from Véronique, a friend from a Québécois school where the student is spending the semester. The student needed to respond to the following five audio prompts:

1. Véronique, who did not see the student that day at school, asks him/her if everything is all right. The student had to respond to the question.
2. Véronique asks the student whether he/she can return some notes for a history class that she lent him/her earlier because a history test is coming up and she needs the notes to prepare for it. At that point, the student was asked to react to Véronique's statement and apologize.
3. Véronique adds that she would like to have her notes back that evening because she is getting anxious about the test. The student had to agree to return the notes to Véronique that evening and suggests a place and a time.
4. Véronique proposes to the student that they meet and study together for the upcoming exam. The student had to accept and explain why it is a good idea.
5. Véronique is delighted and says good-bye to the student. The student had to end the conversation in an appropriate manner.

#### ***How well did students perform on this question?***

The Standard Group's mean score for Question 3, the Conversation (Interpersonal Speaking), was 3.32 out of a possible 5 points.

#### ***What were common student errors or omissions?***

- Following the first prompt, many students limited their response to how they are but did not explain their absence from class.
- Some students misunderstood the information in the prompt concerning what/whose notes were in question.

- In response to the last prompt, many students replied with an abrupt goodbye rather than bringing the conversation to a more natural close.
- Switching between “*tu*” and “*vous*” over the course of the conversation.
- There was confusion between “*prêter*” and “*emprunter*.”
- The word “*rattraper*” seemed misunderstood.

***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 remind students to carefully listen to the prompts and to provide responses that are appropriate to the context.
- Students need to have extra practice identifying and using appropriate register. In this conversation, students needed to use “*tu*” because they were addressing another student.
- Teachers should advise students to elaborate rather than give simple and brief answers. They may wish to have students practice highlighting key words in prompts that will help them identify the components necessary to include in their responses.
- It is suggested that teachers include conversational exercises in class so that students can acquire and assimilate colloquial vocabulary and expressions. At the same time, however, teachers should clarify that using advanced structures does not necessarily equate with fluency unless they are used in a culturally appropriate context.
- In order to best prepare students for this task, teachers should have students practice in the conditions of the exam and familiarize students with the scoring guidelines used to evaluate their performance.

#### **Question 4**

***What was the intent of this question?***

This task assessed speaking in the presentational communicative mode by having students make a comparative oral presentation on a cultural topic. Students were allotted 4 minutes to read the topic and prepare the presentation and then 2 minutes to deliver the presentation. The response received a single holistic score based on how well it accomplishes the assigned task. The response had to compare the student’s own community to an area of the French-speaking world, demonstrating understanding of cultural features of the French-speaking world. Furthermore, the response had to be organized clearly.

The course theme for the cultural comparison task was “*l’esthétique*.” Students had to respond to the following question: “What is the attitude of the people in your community toward visual arts such as painting, photography, sculpture, and drawing?” Students had to compare their observations of their own community to their observations of a Francophone country or region. Students could make reference to what they have studied, observed, or experienced in order to support their response.

***How well did students perform on this question?***

The Standard Group's mean score for Question 4, the Cultural Comparison (Presentational Speaking), was 3.07 out of a possible 5 points.

***What were common student errors or omissions?***

- Many students did not explicitly compare the attitude vis-à-vis the visual arts of the members of their community with that of people in a Francophone region and therefore did not complete the task.
- Instead, many students made comparisons based on their own opinions of art in their community versus art in a Francophone area, but neglected to discuss the attitudes of people toward the visual arts in these communities. This type of response did not respond to the precise topic provided in the prompt.
- In some cases, students simply made general comparisons between their community and a Francophone area without focusing on the topic of the presentation, i.e., the attitudes of peoples in these communities concerning the visual arts.

***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?***

- It would be helpful for teachers to discuss with students various strategies for making an effective comparison, introducing transitional phrases, vocabulary to present one's opinion, and structures needed to compare and contrast. In particular, students should practice making a reasoned presentation rather than a list.
- Teachers should emphasize that an effective comparison requires the students to discuss both their own community and another Francophone community, and that they must explicitly articulate the points of similarity and difference between them. Readers will not "join the dots" for students, but will only score student samples as they are recorded.
- Most importantly, teachers should remind students to not only read the question instructions carefully, but also to read the subject of the presentation carefully (i.e., they do not have the option to choose their own focus for the presentation).
- Students should focus on their presentation and not use recording time by merely restating the prompt because there is very limited time to respond.
- Because this is the only portion of the AP® French Language and Culture exam entirely devoted to "culture" as understood within the course description, students should be encouraged to demonstrate their cultural competence to the best of their abilities.