



Student Performance Q&A:

2013 AP® German Language and Culture Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2013 free-response questions for AP® German Language and Culture were written by the Chief Reader, Johanna Watzinger-Tharp, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, 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.

Task 1: E-mail Reply

What was the intent of this task?

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 response 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 to 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.

In this exam, and within the theme of Contemporary Life (*Alltag*), the student replied to an e-mail from Christine Bernhard, a math teacher, who offers her services as a tutor. Students were to indicate how much help they needed and when and how often the tutoring should occur (*Meine Frage an Sie ist, wie viel Hilfe Sie denn wohl brauchen, d.h. wie oft und wie lange*), and to describe their study strategies (*Beschreiben Sie bitte die Strategien, die Sie beim Lernen benutzen*). They also had to respond to Christine Bernhard's suggestion to meet during the weekend and confirm acceptance of the tutoring offer. The student had to open with a formal greeting and conclude with a formal closing.

How well did students perform on this task?

Students performed well on Task 1, the E-mail Reply, with a mean score of 3.65 out of a possible 5 points. Very few students earned a score of "0" or "1", which suggests that the great majority of students were able to handle this interpersonal writing task.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Students had some difficulty sorting out the different actors in the scenario and understanding the relationship between the person who wrote the e-mail, her nephew, and the addressee (the student), because they were referenced not only with proper names, but also with personal and possessive

pronouns. As a result, some students misunderstood the basic purpose of the e-mail prompt – to invite the addressee to respond to an offer for math tutoring.

Most students used proper formal openings and closings, but some were not able to sustain a formal register throughout their entire 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?

An interpersonal task requires comprehension of relationships between individuals, which, in turn, are often expressed with personal and possessive pronouns. Students will benefit from practice of pronouns in various contexts with different interlocutors.

While an e-mail response can be relatively brief, this task also requires some elaboration and details. Teachers should provide students not only with a variety of prompts, but also establish parameters for their responses, for example, by having students practice giving examples, formulating pertinent questions, and providing certain information and details. The content of the prompt should align with and reinforce such requirements.

Finally, teachers should provide many opportunities for students to examine features of formal and informal registers, and to produce them appropriately in different contexts. Students need to understand that registers are marked not only by pronouns, but also formulaic expressions and phrases, openings and closings, vocabulary, and sentence structure.

Task 2: Persuasive Essay

What was the intent of this task?

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. Then they listened to the 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 needed to be able first to comprehend the three sources and then to present their different viewpoints. They also had to present their own viewpoint and defend it thoroughly, using information from all the sources to support the essay. As they referred to the sources, they needed to identify them appropriately. Furthermore, the essay had to be organized into clear paragraphs.

In this exam, and within the theme of Global Challenges (*Globalisierung*), students wrote their persuasive essay in response to the question whether young men should perform compulsory military service (*Sollen junge deutsche Männer Militärdienst machen?*). The print source (*Quellenmaterial 1*) presented three reasons in support of compulsory military service, for example that 50 percent of career soldiers in the German military are drawn from those who have completed their compulsory service. *Quellenmaterial 2*, a table, showed which European countries still maintain compulsory military service, which countries have eliminated it after 1990, and which have never required it. *Quellenmaterial 3*, the audio to which students listened twice, presented a viewpoint that contrasted with that of the print source and rejected the need for compulsory military service. It argued, for example, that today's military requires highly trained and specialized personnel, which a six-month compulsory military service cannot provide.

How well did students perform on this task?

Overall, students performed well on the Persuasive Essay with a mean score of 3.28 out of a possible 5 points. Students were able to take a position on the essay prompt (“*Should young German men perform compulsory military service?*”) and to include references to the three sources into their essays.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Students did not always refer to all three sources, or integrate them well into the argument for their own position. Many students also misinterpreted the chart, principally because its correct interpretation rested on understanding a less common meaning of a single verb (*einstellen*). Other students referenced the sources, but did not cite them properly.

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?

Students need guidance and training so that they do not just mention sources, but rather integrate and cite them properly in support of the argument. In order to succeed in this task, which is presentational, but relies on interpretive skills as well, students need a lot of exposure to authentic audio and print material, including charts and graphs. It is important for students to learn how to draw on the sources even if they do not understand them in their entirety. Teachers should equip students with listening comprehension strategies, such as listening for the idea and for global understanding, as well as listening for details that relate to a specific topic.

For writing a persuasive essay, students need linguistic means that help them present and support their point of view cohesively, contrast it with opposite perspectives, and organize their essay with connecting elements, using expressions such as *meiner Meinung nach*; *ich habe die Auffassung* or *bin der Auffassung*, *dass...*; *ich meine, denke, finde...*; *mein Standpunkt ist...*; *einerseits – andererseits*; and *im Gegensatz dazu*. In addition, students should conclude their essay effectively with certain stock phrases, for example, *Zum Abschluss möchte ich noch sagen, dass...*; *Zusammenfassend kann man sagen, dass*; or by restating a particular argument from their essay.

Most importantly, students should regularly perform a variety of authentic writing tasks that integrate the interpretive with the presentational mode of communication, and that lead up, but are not limited to, the persuasive essay format of the AP® Exam.

Task 3: Conversation

What was the intent of this task?

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 five turns in the conversation. The series of five 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.

In this exam, within the theme of Personal and Public Identities (*Persönliche und Öffentliche Identität*), the interlocutor (Daniel) greeted the student and asked, “What’s new?” (*Gibt’s was Neues bei dir?*) The student was supposed to respond and then ask a similar question. The interlocutor described a problem (his father wanted to be his Facebook friend) and asked for the student’s opinion. In the third turn, the interlocutor

responded by stating his own opinion, and then asked another question, *Warum will mein Vater auf meine Facebook-Seite* (Why does my father want to have access to my Facebook page?). After the student responded, Daniel expressed a concern and asked for advice. The student offered advice and, in his final turn, Daniel asked another question. The conversation concluded with the student's response.

How well did students perform on this task?

As with the other free response tasks, students performed well, with a mean score of 3.45 out of a possible 5 points. Generally, students were able to participate in the conversation and to respond to the prompts as directed by the conversation overview. Very few students had to give up on turns or resort to statements such as *ich weiß nicht*, or *ich verstehe das nicht*.

What were common student errors or omissions?

A number of students missed their first turn in the conversation because they did not start the recording on time. The reason for the delay may be because of the instruction to push the record button being given **in German only**, in contrast to all other directions, which are given both in English and in German. Test administrators who do not speak German need this critical instruction in English to help students start the recording at the right moment.

Some students did not have the means to open the conversation properly with some common phrases or greetings.

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?

Students should regularly participate in purposeful conversations with a variety of interlocutors. In some of these conversations, students follow directions for the way in which they respond to their conversational partner rather than control the nature of their responses completely themselves. Teachers might give each student guidelines, in German, which they have to follow during a brief two-way conversation, for example, "convince your friend of your viewpoint"; "ask your friend for advice"; or "describe a problem." In these directions, teachers should use vocabulary and phrases that appear regularly in the conversation overview, such as *Rat geben*; *um Rat bitten*; *Meinung sagen*; *nach Meinung fragen*; *eine Feststellung machen*; *eine Frage stellen*.

Task 4: Cultural Comparison

What was the intent of this task?

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 accomplished the assigned task. The presentation needed to compare the student's own community to an area of the German-speaking world, demonstrating understanding of cultural features of the German-speaking world. Furthermore, the presentation had to be organized clearly.

In this exam, within the theme of Contemporary Life (*Alltag*), students were asked what role famous people, such as actors, athletes, or politicians, play in their community (*Welche Rolle spielen berühmte Personen, z.B. Schauspieler, Sportler, Politiker, in Ihrer Umgebung?*). In their oral presentations, students had to compare perspectives on this question in their home community with those in a German-speaking region, and were also invited to describe their own observations, experiences, or what they had learned in school.

How well did students perform on this task?

Of the four tasks, the cultural comparison continues to be the most challenging, as demonstrated by the mean score of 3.10 out of a possible 5 points. Students must make an oral presentation that compares two cultures based on their knowledge and their experiences in the classroom and beyond. They must also recognize that their comparison is to be built around a specific topic, or prompt, and cannot remain general in nature.

What were common student errors or omissions?

A number of students, much like last year, overlooked the specific topic (*Welche Rolle spielen berühmte Personen in Ihrer Umgebung?*) and instead presented a general comparison of perspectives in their own community and those in a German-speaking region. In addition, students who did attend to the specific topic had difficulty speaking specifically to the role that famous people play in their community. Students mostly described celebrities, for example, actors, athletes, or musicians in both the U.S. and in Germany, but said little about the position or status they might have in their own and the target culture.

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 that the cultural comparison always involves a specific topic, which is given to them as “*Thema des Vortrags*.” The general “*Thema*,” one of the six global themes of the AP[®] Language and Culture Course and Exam, for example *Alltag* or *Globalisierung*, has no bearing on the content of the students’ presentation.

Students should have opportunities to produce spoken connected discourse on a variety of topics, and give presentations to the class or record them for their teachers, classmates, and others. As students engage in the presentational mode of communication, teachers may provide them with some stock phrases that appropriately open and close a presentation.

The cultural comparison requires that students gain familiarity with German-speaking cultures through authentic materials and sources. However, teachers should not attempt to prepare students for specific topics, but rather encourage them to learn as much as they can about German-speaking cultures and regions in and outside the classroom. If students are well-informed and interested, they will be able to handle a variety of topics.