



## Student Performance Q&A:

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

The following comments on the 2013 free-response questions for AP® Japanese Language and Culture were written by the Chief Reader, Sufumi So of George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia. 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.

#### Interpersonal Writing Task: Text Chat

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

This task evaluated writing skills in the interpersonal communicative mode by having students respond as part of a simulated exchange of text-chat messages. The prompt comprised a statement in English identifying an interlocutor and conversation topic, and a series of six brief messages to which the student responded. Each message consisted of a chat entry in Japanese and a brief direction in English that provided guidance on what is expected in the response. Students were asked to participate in an exchange of text-chat messages with a pen pal, Hiro Kawada, about commuting to high school. Students were asked to (a) respond to the question about their commuting time, (b) respond to the question about their means of transportation for commuting to school, (c) explain their opinion about which is better—taking a bus or train (public transportation) or driving to go to school, (d) give their opinion about high school students driving to school, (e) give at least one example of activity that they do on the way to school, and (f) pose a specific question about Japanese high school students' commute.

Students had 90 seconds to read the message and respond at each turn in the text-chat exchange. Each of the six responses received a holistic score based on how well it accomplished the assigned task, and all six scores counted equally in calculating the total score.

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

The mean score for the Standard Group<sup>1</sup> was 19.08 out of a possible 36 points. The mean score for the Total Group was 22.09. Most students were able to perform the task relatively well.

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<sup>1</sup> The Standard Group does not include students who hear or speak Japanese at home or who have lived for a total of one month or more in Japan, a country where Japanese is the language spoken predominantly. Decisions on cutoff scores are based on the Standard Group.

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

The text chat involved communicating with a Japanese pen pal about commuting to high school. The topic seemed to be a familiar one to most students and all of the six prompts were expressed in straightforward language at the appropriate level. Students were generally able to respond to all of the prompts. However, a number of responses were provided in the past tense for the questions asking about the current daily routine and therefore did not address the prompt. Also there were lengthy responses that were reasonably well-written, but lacked all or some of the information required to complete the task.

The keyword in this task, 通学, appears to have posed a problem for a number of students, even though the English directions explain that this written conversation is about commuting to school. Approximately one-sixth of the students may have interpreted the word as attending or being in school and provided inappropriate answers, such as 7時から3時まで and 7時間 for prompt 1 (あなたは通学に、どのくらい時間が、かかりますか?), and writing questions about school in general rather than commuting to school for prompt 6 (日本の高校生の通学について、何か聞いてください).

Some students responded to prompt 2 (ふつうは、どうやって学校に行くんですか) by giving specific directions for how they go to school without providing means of transportation used for commuting. Many responses to prompt 3 did not include a justification for one's preference for going to school by bus, train, or by car, attesting to the fact that the students did not read the English pointer *Justify your opinion*. For the same prompt, some students were confused about what was to be compared (e.g., comparing a commute by bus with that by train, a commute by bus or train with that by walking). A common error in responses to prompt 6 was that personal questions were asked about the interlocutor's commute rather than general questions about Japanese high school students' commute.

Overall, a significant number of responses contained basic errors in orthography (e.g., 来るま for 車, 面鏡 for 免許, すうがく for 通学), vocabulary (e.g., ~時 for ~時間), and grammar (e.g., バスを乗る, verb -te form, -tari -tari sentence structure), many of which were significant enough to interfere with comprehensibility.

### ***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?***

Remind students that they should carefully read the instructions on how to respond to each prompt and respond as fully and appropriately as possible each time it is their turn. Students should write as much as possible in response to each prompt and not be content with a minimal answer, even one that may be appropriate in real life under certain circumstances. However, emphasize the importance of meeting the task requirements and tell students to concentrate on completing the task before elaborating. Remind students that there is a 90-second time limit for each response and that they should read the prompt and write their response within that time limit.

Instruct students to pay careful attention to the pointer given in English above each of the interlocutor's messages. In this particular text chat, the pointers were to "respond," "justify your opinion," "give your opinion," "give at least one example," and "ask a specific question" in response to the interlocutor's text messages. Some students provided minimal responses that did not follow these instructions and therefore, did not fully address the prompts. Have students practice these linguistic functions so that they become more familiar with various grammatical and syntactic structures that can be used to fulfill these functions. In particular, help students develop their skills in producing accurately compound and complex sentences appropriate to the AP® level. Review a range of question words that may be used in the interlocutor's text messages (e.g., どのくらい, どうやって, どちら, どう, どんな in this particular text chat) and have students practice formulating proper questions and responses.

Give students regular opportunities to type Japanese so that they feel comfortable switching between hiragana and katakana, converting to kanji when appropriate, and producing geminate consonants (っ, ッ) and the kana ん and ん correctly. Have them practice reading kanji words correctly, spelling their readings accurately on computer, and recognizing and choosing the most appropriate kanji from the dropdown list. Students should also be encouraged to re-read and check their responses for accuracy before submitting them. Proper use of Japanese punctuation could improve readability. Some students used unnecessary spaces between words (分かち書き), which can be time-consuming for them and distracting for Exam Readers.

## **Presentational Writing Task: Compare and Contrast Article**

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

This task assessed writing skills in the presentational communicative mode by having students write an article for the student newspaper of a school in Japan. It comprised a single prompt in English, which identified two related topics and details how they should be discussed in the article. Students were asked to compare and contrast typing in Japanese and handwriting in Japanese. They were asked to describe at least three aspects of each and highlight the similarities and differences between the two. They were also asked to state their preference and give reasons for it.

Students were given 20 minutes to write an article of 300 to 400 characters or longer. The article received a single holistic score based on how well it accomplished the assigned task.

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

The mean score for the Standard Group was 3.78 out of a possible 6 points. The mean score for the Total Group was 4.25. Most students were able to perform the task very well.

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

The task asked students to compare and contrast typing in Japanese and handwriting in Japanese. Although the topic should be a familiar one to the test takers of AP<sup>®</sup> Japanese, a number of students of all skill levels did not pay close attention to the way the prompt was phrased and ended up writing an article that was slightly off topic (e.g., comparing characteristics of typing and handwriting in general but making no reference to Japanese; writing about handwritten and typed products).

Many responses included all of the required elements (i.e., introduction, body, and conclusion), describing three aspects of comparison and expressing preference and reasoning, but some omitted one or more of these parts. A notable omission was expression of preference and reasoning. Some responses began with self-introduction or remarks irrelevant to the topic, which detracted from the overall quality of an essay.

Many students were able to use such conjunctions as *そして*, *でも*, *しかし*, and *それから* that helped to improve sentence-to-sentence connection and enhanced overall coherence. They also used paragraphs as devices to structure an essay, using such transitional phrases as *第一に*、*第二に*、*第三に*; *一つ目は*、*二つ目は*、*三つ目は*; and *まず*、*次に*、*最後に*、*けつろんとして* at the beginning of respective paragraphs. Nonetheless, students would still benefit greatly from expanding their repertoire of transitional elements and cohesive devices. Some were also able to use such phrases as *なぜなら*、*～からです* and *なぜかと言うと*、*～からです* to explain one's preference.

On the other hand, there were some essays that did not use paragraphs effectively or lacked a logical flow or a smooth progression of the message. Use of unconventional paragraph styles (e.g., no paragraph

indentation, English-style indentation, paragraphs separated by skipping a line between them) could interfere with readability.

Many students were not familiar with Japanese technical terms needed to address the topic (e.g., ローマ字入力, 漢字変換, キーボード, スペースバー) and used circumlocution with varying degrees of success (e.g., ひらがなを書いたら漢字にする, バトンをおすと漢字になる). Further, lack of nontechnical rich vocabulary and idioms often led to repetitive or inappropriate use of basic and common words or to interference from the student's primary language.

Failure to use complex sentence structures (e.g., relative clauses, comparative structures, and explanatory phrases) or a variety of grammatical and syntactic structures often marred presentational writing and detracted from the impression of ease of expression. Furthermore, orthographic errors (incorrect kanji use in particular), lack of kanji, and omission of punctuation could interfere with readability or comprehensibility.

***Based on your experience of student responses at the AP<sup>®</sup> Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?***

Remind students to carefully read and address all aspects of the prompt in their responses. Taking time to outline ideas before beginning to write will help students organize their thoughts and structure their essay clearly and logically. Teach students to think in terms of a task completion checklist (i.e., three comparisons, personal preference, and reasons) while asking themselves “What exactly am I supposed to compare?”

Spend time helping students learn appropriate ways to introduce and summarize a topic. Have students practice appropriate essay layouts. Further, paragraphing and indenting the first line of each paragraph in Japanese style are important in improving the flow of an essay and its readability. Students should also practice in using a range of appropriate conjunctions and transitional phrases. Help them practice appropriate use of such expressions.

For better readability, students should avoid excess use of spaces between words (分かち書き) and they should use punctuation properly. Make sure students understand that to convert to kanji from hiragana, they should hit the space bar after the complete word or phrase is typed, not in the middle of it. Students should also be reminded to carefully read and confirm the kanji conversion they have selected. If they are unable to recognize the kanji, they should opt not to convert. Give students regular opportunities to type Japanese to feel comfortable switching between hiragana and katakana and converting to kanji correctly when appropriate, using the space bar rather than function keys for shortcuts as the AP<sup>®</sup> Exam setup does not support function keys.

Encourage students to continue expanding their repertoire of vocabulary, idioms, kanji, and grammatical and syntactic structures (e.g., nominalization, relative clause, complex and compound sentences, particle use, verb conjugation), which will help achieve natural, easily-flowing expression of ideas.

## **Interpersonal Speaking Task: Conversation**

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

This task evaluated speaking skills in the interpersonal communicative mode by having students respond as part of a simulated conversation. It comprised a statement in English identifying an interlocutor and conversation topic, and a series of four related utterances in Japanese. Students engaged in a conversation

with Yumiko Tanaka, a Japanese student, about working. Students were expected to (a) respond to Yumiko’s opening statement, (b) give some examples of part-time work their classmates do, (c) state their opinion about whether high school students should or should not work, and (d) offer advice to those wanting to work part-time.

Students had 20 seconds to speak at each turn in the conversation. Each of the four responses received a holistic score based on how well it accomplished the assigned task, and all four scores counted equally in calculating the total score.

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

The mean score for the Standard Group was 12.93 out of a possible 24 points. The mean score for the Total Group was 15.66. Most students were able to perform the task relatively well.

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

The conversation was with a Japanese friend about working or part-time jobs, consisting of four turns; first, to respond to an opening statement with a formulaic expression, second, to describe and elaborate on part-time jobs held by students at the respondent’s school, third, to give an opinion about whether high school students should or should not work, and lastly, to give advice to those wanting to work part-time. The topic seemed to be a familiar one to most students and all of the four prompts were expressed in straightforward language at the appropriate level. Thus, the students were generally able to respond to all of the prompts.

However, many students did not respond as fully as possible as they were directed to do so, in particular, to prompt 1 (今日は、高校生のアルバイトについてお聞きしたいと思います。よろしくお願ひします) and prompt 2 (あなたの高校の生徒は、どんなアルバイトをしていますか). Also, some responses were limited only to the respondent’s direct and immediate personal experience and did not provide general remarks about high school students’ part-time jobs.

Some students misunderstood お聞きしたい of prompt 1 and asked questions about アルバイト where a formulaic expression to greet the interlocutor was expected in this opening exchange. Prompt 3 (高校生がアルバイトをするのとしなひのと、どちらがよいと思ひますか) seemed to have discrimination power to meaningfully distinguish more from less capable students in interpersonal speaking. More capable students provided responses that were not only thorough and appropriate, but also included elaboration and detail. Less capable students, on the other hand, responded very simply (e.g., アルバイトが好きです). In response to prompt 4 that asked for advice, some students did not use most appropriate sentence structures such as ~した方がよい and ~しなひ方がよい and instead responded by giving a simple statement (~します), expressing their desire (~したいです), or asking questions.

Conspicuous errors in language use included inclusion of の in relative clauses (e.g., アルバイトをするのほう, 働くの経験). Overuse of hesitation markers in English (e.g., “um”, “uh”), Japanese (e.g., あのう, えつと), or both detracted from the quality of responses even when the prompts were addressed appropriately.

### ***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?***

Remind students that they should read and listen very carefully to the instructions on how to respond and then respond as fully and appropriately as possible each time it is their turn. They should say as much as possible that is relevant and appropriate in response to each prompt and not be content with a brief, albeit appropriate, answer. Students sometimes respond to only part of a prompt or to just one phrase within it

rather than to the entire prompt. Very careful listening and spontaneous response are required, and frequent simulated practice is highly recommended.

Students should always keep in mind the context of the conversation so as to provide most appropriate responses. They should practice using and responding to set phrases (e.g., greetings, apologies, expressions of appreciation, requests for assistance or advice) until they become automatic, and they should also practice elaborating appropriately when using different levels of discourse. Have students practice using—but not overusing—typical Japanese hesitation sounds (e.g., あのう, えーと) rather than “um” and “uh,” which will help the utterance sound more natural.

Have students practice using a range of grammatical phrases (e.g., relative clause, ～という) as well as such conjunctions as それに and だから in interpersonal speaking situations. Also, help them expand their repertoire of expressions that fulfill the same linguistic functions (e.g., なぜならば, どうしてかと言うと, なぜかと言うと for “The reason is that ...”).

## **Presentational Speaking Task: Cultural Perspective Presentation**

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

This task assessed speaking skills in the presentational communicative mode by having students give a presentation on a cultural topic to a Japanese class. It consisted of a single prompt in English, which identifies a cultural topic and details how it should be discussed in the presentation. Students were given 4 minutes to prepare the presentation and 2 minutes for its delivery. Students presented their view or perspective on annual Japanese cultural events. They began with an appropriate introduction, discussed at least five aspects or examples of annual Japanese cultural events, explained their own view or perspective about them, and ended with a concluding remark.

The presentation received a single holistic score based on how well it accomplished the assigned task. In addition to language skills, the score reflected the level of the student’s cultural knowledge exhibited in the presentation.

### ***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 3.77. Most students were able to perform the task relatively well.

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

The task asked students to present their own view or perspective on annual Japanese cultural events. The topic seemed to be a familiar one to most students and they were able to speak on the topic, covering a wide range of choices, including lesser-known annual events such as ポッキーの日 and ねこの日. However, some responses lacked clear organization or transitional phrases. In addition, the absence of appropriate cohesive devices from sentence to sentence sometimes led to the presentation of scattershot bits of information. Insufficient detail or elaboration was another common characteristic in many speeches. Some speeches included inaccurate cultural information ranging from minor (e.g., calling “ホワイトデー” “白の日” and “ゴールデンウィーク” “金の週”) to more serious (e.g., お正月にたくさん人はそばを食べます; 成人の日に、お年寄りひとに、ほめる、ほめることができます) errors. Furthermore, some were unable to explain their own view or perspective fully or clearly and presented very simple views or perspectives (e.g., すごいです; おもしろいと思います).

Additional difficulties included the lack of rich vocabulary and idioms and the inability to use complex grammatical and syntactic structures correctly. Most responses were constructed with a limited variety of

simple sentence structures. Some students had trouble producing a speech of the appropriate length and finished extremely early, and others ran out of time due to too much material to cover or because of frequent pauses, repetitions, and hesitation.

***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?***

Remind students to address all the requirements of the prompt and to outline their ideas before beginning to speak so as to ensure that they address all aspects of the prompt—including their own view or perspective—in a well-organized manner. Students need more than superficial exposure to many different aspects of Japanese culture including their historical backgrounds, as well as many opportunities to practice describing those Japanese cultural products, practices, and perspectives and expressing their own opinions about them.

Additionally, students should have the opportunity to practice structuring their oral presentation with appropriate introductory and concluding remarks. Summarizing or restating what they have already said in different words at the end could serve as a conclusion. They also need practice in using a variety of transitional elements and cohesive devices appropriately, expressing themselves with a range of grammatical and syntactic structures, and building from simple to complex sentences.

Using a moderate amount of typical Japanese hesitation sounds such as あのう and えっと rather than “um” and “uh” will help make the speech sound more natural and flow more easily. Students should practice producing a speech of the appropriate length so they will know how much they can say in two minutes.