Student Performance Q&A:
2013 AP® Latin Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2013 free-response questions for AP® Latin were written by the Chief Reader, Robert Cape of Austin College in Sherman, Texas. 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 question assessed students' ability to translate as literally as possible a passage of Latin poetry (Vergil, *Aeneid*, 2. 608-613).

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 4.35 out of 15 possible points. The full range of scores was used, although most scores clustered in the bottom range. Many students confused this passage with the scene of Neptune calming the sea in Book 1.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- *Hic* in lines 1 and 5 as *this* instead of *here* or *in this place*.
- Compound verbs translated with only verb stems.
- *Eruo* as *rushes* instead of *digs out*.
- *Portas* as *ports* instead of *gates*.
- *Prima* as the adverb *primum* or *primo* instead of an adjective describing *Iuno*.
- Participles as participles (*disiectas*, *avulso*, *mixto*, *undantem*).
- Many students got the whole passage wrong because they saw the words *Neptunus*, *tridenti*, and *undantem* and wrongly assumed that the passage was from the storm scene in Book 1. As a result, they wrote a paraphrase of the scene in which Neptune calmed the waves instead translating this scene from Book II.

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?

The standards do not allow for poetic license or more figurative interpretations of the text. The allowed meanings for the Latin include only definitions found in standard texts and dictionaries. Students sometimes presented metaphorical translations that capture the general meaning of the text without a clear demonstration that they understand the Latin literally and may be presenting recollections of a published translation.

As teachers prepare students for this section of the test, it is important to stress that the standards are exacting in tense, number, and voice. An otherwise correct translation will not receive credit if a plural noun is translated in the singular, for example. This passage from the second book of the *Aeneid* does not include historical presents, and so a present verb translated in the perfect did not receive credit in this question.

Some suggestions for students:

- Check tense, number, and voice of each verb and be sure that the translation properly reflects the Latin. Check the number and case of every noun and adjective. Be sure to translate participles as participles, reflecting proper tense and voice (e.g., *mixto* as having been mixed, not mixing or I mixed).
- Translate every word. Many translations that demonstrated that the student understood the Latin overall lost points because students skipped words or even whole lines or phrases.
- Work with the context. The students must read the passage carefully and thoroughly before they can begin.
- All of the Latin makes sense in context, so the English should, too. Students should re-read their translations and be certain that what they have written makes sense and is grammatically correct.
- Students should not forget the skills learned in the course, including scansion and rhetorical devices. In lines 2, 3/4, and 5, the students should recognize the interlocked word order and use that understanding to see how nouns and adjectives agree. Students who did not recognize this rhetorical device missed the agreements and mistranslated these lines. The same is true with scansion: students who took the time to scan the beginning of line 4 (*fundamenta*) knew that this noun was accusative neuter plural and not ablative feminine singular.
- Students should rely on simple meanings and use their first thought for a word (e.g., moved out for *emota*). Much of the time, students have crossed out correct translations and second-guessed themselves.
- Students should devote enough time to each section to complete it carefully and leave time to give sufficient attention to the rest of the exam. A number of students failed to complete this translation, and claimed that they had run out of time.
- Writing should be neat, legible, and of an appropriate size. Non-standard abbreviations (e.g., h/b for having been) are difficult to understand. Students should also proofread their translations to catch spelling errors in the English that could make their translations hard to understand or simply incorrect (raise/raze).

Question 2

What was the intent of this question?

This question assessed students' ability to translate as literally as possible a passage of Latin prose (Caesar, *Bellum Gallicum* 5.31).

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 4.69 out of a possible 15 points. The full range of scores was used. Scores clustered in the bottom third of the range, although there were also many successful translations. There were fewer off-task responses than in the past, suggesting that more students felt ready to attempt the task.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Many students had difficulty with the historical present in this passage; the often did not pick up cues such as the imperfect subjunctives in the middle of the passage that could help them be consistent with tense. The consistent use of historical present proved difficult; students who translated the present as present were often more successful.

- Students of Caesar need to be very aware of indirect constructions. *Pronuntiatur* in segment 1 should have alerted students to the indirect statement in the first sentence, but many students missed that. Only the highest-scoring students correctly construed all three indirect questions; *quare* was a particular challenge.

- A failure to notice noun and adjective endings was a frequent problem, including noun endings that look similar but are not (cf. *noctis* and *vigiliis*), and the neuter endings (cf. *sua* and *omnia*).

- Precision in vocabulary is important. This includes vocabulary with many meanings (*cum*), common words (*miles*), "q" words, and similar words (as when students confused *circumspicere* with *conspicere* or *cogitare* with *cogere*).

- Students need to demonstrate that they recognize the tense, voice, and mood of verbs. When a verb is passive, it should be rendered accordingly; students need to know how to show that they recognize the subjunctive tense.

- Many students were unfamiliar with the text and were attempting a sight translation. These students were clearly at a disadvantage.

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 need to do more work with Caesar's vocabulary, especially his military vocabulary. This work may need to begin in the earlier years of Latin study, as the common elementary texts do not feature a lot of Caesar's words.

- Students need more help with identifying and rendering Caesar's indirect constructions, which occur so frequently.

- It is very important to complete the syllabus.

- Students need clear and direct instruction about the demands of "literal translation" for the AP® exam. When students understand the text but do not show their understanding precisely, they are not successful with this task. Teachers who need help with the chunking strategy or other aspects

of teaching literal translation should be encouraged to attend an AP® Latin Workshop or Summer Institutes.

Question 3

What was the intent of this question?

This question tested students' ability to analyze how both Caesar and Dido (*Bellum Gallicum* 1.7 and *Aeneid* 1. 562-578) reveal their leadership styles.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 2.56 out of 5 possible points. Most students recognized that the Caesar passage dealt with the Helvetian migration through Roman territory. Likewise, most students recognized that in the passage from the *Aeneid*, Dido is meeting the Trojans for the first time. The majority of students were able to develop some argument about the leadership styles of Caesar and Dido. Although the prompt did not require it, many students chose to address the question as a comparison of the leadership styles of Caesar and Dido.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Passage A: Caesar

Lines 1–4: *Caesari . . .rescindi*

- Many students were confused by the troop movements.
- Students often were unable to translate *rescindi* so they could not know what was happeneing to the bridge.
- Some students did not understand the import of *erat omnino in Gallia ulteriore legio una*.

Lines 4–5: *Caesar . . .putabat*

- Although most students recognized that Cassius had been defeated by the Hevetii and that this affected Caesar's decision-making process, there was confusion about the details.
- A number of students had trouble recognizing the indirect statement with the gerundive of obligation.

Lines 5–6: *neque . . existimabat*

- Many students either entirely ignored this passage, or they misinterpreted the ablative absolute, taking it as permission granted by Caesar to the Helvetii.

Lines 6–7: *Tamen . . sumpturum*

- A significant number of students ignored this passage, and many did not understand Caesar's hidden agenda. The latter students assumed that Caesar was delaying his response simply to deliberate.

Passage B: Vergil

- There was some confusion about whom Dido was addressing.
- The following lines were the ones that students most frequently used to support their argument: 1, 4, 5, part of 6, 10–13.
- The following lines were often omitted or misconstrued: 2–3, 7–9, 14–17.

- In line 6, *non obtunsa* was often used to modify Dido, and in line 15, *equidem* was frequently interpreted as cavalry.

- Too many students tried to form arguments based on Dido's use of imperatives and rhetorical questions. On the other hand, there was markedly reduced reliance on irrelevant analysis of rhetorical figures as a substitute substantive commentary.

- Students often drew irrelevant information from material that was not in the passage as a substitution for support from the passage itself.

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 to be vigilant about including appropriate citations in their essay. Students should be urged to review their essay and make sure that the citations are there.

- Students should remember that the first task in a passage analysis is to situate that passage within a context.

- Students should be encouraged to use ellipses when citing the Latin instead of writing out an entire sentence.

- Teachers should make sure their students know the military terminology used by Caesar.

- Students should read the instructions carefully. This prompt did not ask for a comparison, but many students took that approach successfully.

- The essay prompt recommends citing Latin from throughout both passages. Given that there are two extensive passages of Latin, the best essays will cite copiously. Have students practice breaking the text into segments and identifying the main ideas of each one.

- Teachers should encourage students to identify themes as they read the text.

Question 4

What was the intent of this question?

This question tested the students' ability to give short answers to content/comprehension, context, translation, and grammar questions about a poetry passage (*Aeneid* 4. 279-284).

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 4.77 out of 8 possible points. The full range of scores was used.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- **To Whom**: A large number of students thought that Aeneas was talking to Dido either prior to his departure or in the Underworld in Book 6. When they could identify that Aeneas was reacting to a god, they often misidentified that god, suggesting, among others, Apollo, Venus, Mars, etc. A number of students thought that Aeneas was reacting to the ghost of Hector, his father Anchises, or, less commonly, Creusa.

  - o **To What**: A number of students could have been more specific and forthcoming about the command of the gods or the content of that command. Many students left out the appearance of the god and simply said that Aeneas was going to leave Dido or Carthage

and failed to include Italy as his destination. Many students characterized the words of Mercury as a casual suggestion, advice, or a prophecy to Aeneas. Some students did not seem to take into account the textual citation of Book 4 provided with the question. As a result, they thought that the scene took place after the storm in Book 1, or at the fall of Troy in Book 2, or in the Underworld in Book 6. A number of students believed that *vero* meant "truth."

- For the first physical effect, students often wrote the entire line of Latin and thus did not precisely support a specific physical effect. Many students had trouble realizing the significance of *comae* in the second physical effect and frequently believed that Aeneas himself stood erect in horror. When they tried the third physical effect, *haesit* posed problems and was mistranslated as "hesitated," "drained," "weakened," etc. Many students wrongly identified *obmutuit* as *mutavit*.

- A surprising number of students thought that *fuga* was a verb (usually taking it as an imperative or defining it as an infinitive) despite the inclusion of the word "case" in the prompt. There was significant and perhaps related confusion about how to render the noun form and many wrote "(to) flee." Many students thought that *fuga* was a neuter accusative plural. Many students translated *fuga* but did not attempt to identify the case.

- When asked to scan the line, many students translated and scanned the line or did not scan it at all. Many students correctly scanned the first four feet but left the fifth and sixth feet unmarked. Some students took the IO and EO near the end of the line as diphthongs. Some students did not realize that the E in *que* is short. A number of students mistakenly attempted to elide the O in *tanto monitu*.

- The majority of students attempted the first question and the most common error was to render the verb as an indicative. A number of students took the subject to be Dido. The meaning of *agat* in context was often a problem. The students who attempted the second question commonly misunderstood the force of *ambire* and thought that Aeneas was trying to soothe Dido. Many students thought that *adfatu* referred to "fate." Some students who attempted the third question did not understand the meaning of *exordia*.

- The most common error was one of sequence. Students offered the following as ways Dido tried to keep Aeneas in Carthage: by offering to share power with him; by sleeping with him in a cave; by offering to marry him; by cursing his descendants; by burning his possessions; by killing herself; by snubbing him in the Underworld. Some students simply repeated the prompt and said that she tried to prevent him from leaving with no further details provided.

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 abundance of students did not seem to understand how to scan dactylic hexameter. Encourage students to scan lines as a way to elucidate the grammatical function of words. Students need practice in providing paraphrases, as answers were often too general. Students are encouraged to read the questions very carefully before answering. Many students translated *fuga* but did not give a case for it. Further, when asked to provide one physical effect, many students gave two or three with uneven results. Some students took the Spot to be a series of short essays and as a result, they felt the need to include extraneous information. When asked to translate *fuga*, many students gave multiple answers. Teachers are encouraged to consult the Spot questions on the former Latin Literature AP® test: http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/apc/members/exam/exam_information/4557.html. The Cicero Spot was LL6; the Horace Spot was LL9; the Ovid Spot was LL12.

Question 5

What was the intent of this question?

This question tested the students' ability to give short answers to content/comprehension, context, translation, and grammar questions about a prose passage (*Bellum Gallicum* 1.3).

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 3.63 out of 7 possible points. The full range of scores was used.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Many students based answers on memory rather than on the text. As soon as students saw "what the Helvetians decide to do," they made generalizations about the story rather than work with the Latin cited (e.g., they missed *ea quae*). Students should restrict themselves to the clause cited in parentheses.

- Many students did not understand the term "grammatical construction," and gave things like figures of speech, or gave insufficient information (e.g., subjunctive clauses, *ut* clause). Many also gave two answers (or they were just wrong and put "result clause"). Teachers should ensure that students are familiar with the grammatical terminology listed in the AP® Latin Syllabus.

- Many students said that the Helvetians set out in the "third year" (which was correct information but did not address the prompt directly). Students should restrict themselves to the clause cited in parentheses and should not seek information outside of the clause. Be concise—get to the point, and do not give extra information which could contradict the correct answer.

- Many students thought that "verb form" meant that they should give the principal parts. Students and teachers must be familiar with the new AP® Latin Syllabus requirements including the defined grammatical constructions (e.g., the difference between gerund and gerundive, or periphrastic and purpose). Students should read the questions carefully and pay attention to the number of tasks required by the prompt -- two in this particular question.

- Many students answered this prompt with *Helvetii*, which was a correct answer for *sibi* in line 5, but not the required one in line 6. Students should read each prompt carefully and note the specific line number mentioned. Again, students should be concise, and do not need to repeat the prompt in their answer.

- This prompt enabled students to draw from their knowledge of *De Bello Gallico* readings in Book I. A variety of answers was accepted. However, some answers included information not relevant to the Helvetians. Teachers should emphasize that students are required to connect the Latin passages to the English readings. A strong answer will contain references to specific people, places, and events relevant to 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?

- Stress Caesar's vocabulary (especially military terminology).
- Know major geographical regions with respect to tribes and peoples (e.g., students should know that Helvetians are **not** in Britannia).
- Address major events and campaigns and locations with a brief outline.
- Note that identification of grammatical constructions are now being tested and that students need to be able to provide these specific terms as listed in the AP® Syllabus, e.g., a purpose clause or a gerundive of purpose.