



Student Performance Q&A: 2013 AP[®] Music Theory Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2013 free-response questions for AP[®] Music Theory were written by the Chief Reader, Teresa Reed of the University of Tulsa, Tulsa, Oklahoma. 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 content and skills that challenge students most frequently 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:

- hear a minor melody in simple meter;
- hear tonic and dominant;
- hear and notate the dotted rhythm in the first measure of the melody;
- hear and notate the raised 7th scale degree of harmonic minor;
- differentiate between conjunct and disjunct motion; and
- notate pitches correctly in treble clef.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for this question was 3.72 out of a possible 9 points.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Missing the dotted rhythm in the first measure.
- Forgetting to put a flag on the eighth note in the first measure.
- Missing the eighth notes in measure three.
- Notating the end of the melody an octave higher than actually played.
- Missing the accidental for the raised 7th scale degree.
- Writing noteheads without stems.
- Notating the quarter note at the beginning of measure three as two eighths on the same pitch.

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?

- Teach students to listen and remember before notating on the page.
- Expose students to lots of melodies.
- Do more sight singing.
- Stress proper notation, including correct use of stems, beams, dots, etc.
- Teach the correct notation of accidentals in minor keys.
- Discuss question strategy with students; tell them that they can expect straightforward rhythms, a range of approximately one octave, a likely ending on tonic, etc.

Question 2

What was the intent of this question?

This question assessed students' ability to:

- hear a major melody in compound meter;
- hear and notate the raised 4th scale degree;
- hear and notate dotted rhythms;
- hear and notate melodic leaps;
- hear scalar and triadic patterns in a major key; and
- notate pitches correctly in bass clef.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for this question was 3.03 out of a possible 9 points.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Notating in $\frac{6}{4}$ instead of in $\frac{6}{8}$ meter.
- Notating in simple meter ($\frac{3}{4}$ meter).
- Failing to hear the arpeggiation/inversion of the V⁷ chord in the penultimate beat.
- Writing noteheads without stems.
- Notating the final note as a dotted half note instead of as a dotted quarter note.
- Writing the dot on the wrong side of the notehead.
- Failing to recover after missing the octave leap in the first measure, then writing everything off by a step thereafter.

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?

- Give students frequent practice and provide prompt feedback on dictation exercises.
- Provide lots of exercises in compound meter.
- Help students practice identifying the tonic pitch.
- Help students practice identifying pitches at phrase beginnings and endings.
- Work to help students think more holistically.

- Teach students to memorize the melody as they listen and then to mentally rehearse the melody between hearings.
- Help students find a consistent procedure for dictation that works for them.
- Teach correct rhythmic notation, including appropriate placement of dots and beams.
- Emphasize the importance of legible notation.
- Sight sing regularly.
- Remind students to follow the directions for the exercise.
- Advise students to use pencil rather than pen to complete dictation exercises.

Question 3

What was the intent of this question?

This question assessed students' ability to:

- hear a four-part progression in a minor key and notate the outer voices;
- provide the correct Roman numeral analysis of the chords;
- demonstrate a knowledge of common chord progressions;
- hear and notate chords in root position and in inversion;
- demonstrate a knowledge of the interaction between the chord progression and the line;
- demonstrate an understanding of standard cadences; and
- hear and properly label the outer voices and Roman numerals of the passing six-four chord.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for this question was 13.09 out of a possible 24 points.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Omitting the sharp needed for the leading tone in a minor key.
- Failing to recognize the passing six-four chord.
- Incorrectly notating the skips in the bass line.
- Identifying a secondary dominant in the progression.

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?

- Work consistently on ear training skills.
- Teach common cadential chord progressions.
- Teach the ii^{°6} chord.
- Teach the passing six-four chord.

Question 4

What was the intent of this question?

This question assessed students' ability to:

- hear a chord progression in four parts in a major key;
- notate the soprano and bass lines of the progression;
- provide the correct Roman numeral analysis of the chords;
- hear falling thirds in the soprano;
- hear and properly notate the outer voices and the analysis of the applied dominant chord;
- hear and notate chromaticized pitches relevant to the tonicization of the dominant;
- hear, properly notate, and label the deceptive progression;
- hear, notate, and analyze a half cadence;
- hear and notate seventh chords in first inversion; and
- hear and notate ascending chromatic motion in the bass line.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for this question was 10.08 out of a possible 24 points.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Writing a note a step off, resulting in displacement of the entire line by a step.
- Missing the 7ths in the secondary-dominant and supertonic seventh chords.
- Adding unnecessary accidentals to the progression .
- Failing to follow the $V \overset{6}{5} / V$ chord with a resolution to the dominant.
- Failing to hear the half cadence.
- Failing to hear the opening leap of a third in the bass.
- Failing to hear the descending fifth leap in the bass out of measure 3 into measure 4.

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?

- Encourage students to check that their bass and soprano lines match their Roman numeral analysis.
- Emphasize distinguishing seventh chords from triads.
- Practice hearing and notating inverted chords.
- Teach students to identify cadence types and to work backwards from the ends of phrases.

Question 5

What was the intent of this question?

This question assessed students' ability to:

- realize a figured bass progression in Common Practice style;
- demonstrate an understanding of diatonic harmony including chord spelling in a four-part texture, voice leading, and doubling;
- analyze chords using Roman numerals;
- notate an authentic cadence;
- correctly prepare and resolve the chordal 7th; and
- correctly realize inverted seventh chords utilizing all chord members.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for this question was 16 out of a possible 25 points.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Incorrectly realizing the figures for the $ii^{\overset{4}{2}}$ chord.
- Writing and resolving the V^7 chord incorrectly at the cadence.
- Writing parallel fifths and octaves.
- Writing hidden fifths and hidden octaves.
- Changing the given notes.
- Writing unnecessary seventh chords instead of triads.
- Failing to correctly prepare and resolve the chordal 7th.
- Using incorrect spacing.
- Writing overlapping voices.
- Writing incomplete inverted seventh chords.
- Failing to resolve the outer voice-leading tone to tonic.

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?

- Encourage students to think about voice leading before working on vertical realization.
- Review the meanings of the figures, giving special attention to identification of chordal roots.
- Teach students to use stepwise motion and to keep the common tone whenever possible (think like a singer).
- Remind students to complete this exercise in compliance with the norms of Common Practice style.
- Drill chord spelling and remind students that chord spelling errors result in a 5-point deduction.
- Teach students to properly prepare and resolve chordal 7ths.
- Teach various procedures for correctly realizing the V^7 to I cadence.

Question 6

What was the intent of this question?

This question assessed students' ability to:

- write a four-part chord progression from Roman numerals;
- spell chords in a minor key;
- demonstrate an understanding of chord inversions;
- demonstrate command of voice-leading procedures, including both stepwise root progressions and root progressions by fifth;
- demonstrate knowledge of secondary dominant chords;
- demonstrate an understanding of tendency tones and their resolutions;
- write and resolve a cadential six-four chord; and
- write a deceptive cadence with proper voice leading.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for this question was 6.02 out of a possible 18 points.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Missing the G-sharp on the secondary dominant chord.
- Missing the D-sharp on the primary dominant chord.
- Adding incorrect accidentals.
- Omitting or adding chordal 7ths.
- Using incorrect spacing.
- Writing parallel octaves and fifths, especially at the deceptive cadence.
- Writing hidden octaves.
- Confusing iv and VI (apparently reversing the components of the Roman numeral).
- Writing incorrect inversions (generally putting all chords in root position).
- Writing improper melodic leaps, most notably the augmented second, augmented fourth, and diminished fifth.
- Writing incomplete inverted chords.

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?

- Focus on realizing progressions with stepwise root motion, especially V–VI in minor.
- Avoid overemphasis of doubling the root, as this is not always appropriate.
- Drill inversions and their figures, carefully distinguishing triads from seventh chords. Students should be aware that they will not receive any points for a chord if the inversion is incorrect or if a 7th is added or omitted (i.e., does not match the analysis provided).
- Focus on chromatic voice leading and the importance of approaching and resolving chromatic notes smoothly.
- Focus on proper treatment of dissonance, especially the approach to and resolution of the chordal 7th.
- Encourage students to use smooth voice leading.
- Advise students not to add embellishing tones unless specifically required by the figures.

- Address issues of notation, particularly the proper way to write a notehead, accidentals, and how to portray doubling.
- Encourage students to use contrary motion in the outer voices.
- Encourage students to write the outer voices first and to fill in the inner voices as a pair after the outer voices have been carefully checked.
- Discuss the appropriate use of charts, diagrams, and other memory aids. Writing charts and diagrams often seems unhelpful for this particular question: it takes time; the information is not always relevant to the question; and the layout sometimes seems to cause mistakes because the student confuses the layout of the diagram with the actual music notation.

Question 7

What was the intent of this question?

This question assessed students' ability to:

- compose a bass line following the rules of eighteenth-century counterpoint;
- write standard cadences;
- recognize and correctly use a secondary dominant chord;
- use conventional harmonic patterns; and
- use embellishments correctly in a two-part framework.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for this question was 5.00 out of a possible 9 points.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Using the I^7 and IV^7 chords and their inversions, resulting in inappropriate harmonizations in this style.
- Using leaping embellishments and various accented nonchord tones.
- Using unnecessary nonchord tones, which resulted in additional errors.
- Writing harmonic perfect fourths between the soprano and bass.
- Overusing the vii° chord in root position.
- Writing a bass note at the fermata that did not match the rhythmic value of the soprano note.
- Doubling the leading tone.
- Incorrectly resolving the secondary dominant.
- Ignoring the secondary dominant.
- Writing harmonic retrogressions.

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?

- Teach students that unaccented passing tones are the only appropriate melodic embellishment for this exercise.
- Discourage the use of six-four chords, except for the cadential six-four chord if appropriate at a cadence.
- Teach students to keep the bass line simple; avoid unnecessary ornamentation that may cause more errors.
- Encourage the use of root position chords at cadences.

- Teach the use of the vii° chord in first inversion only as a linear passing chord, and not as an acceptable dominant substitute at a final cadence.
- Teach students to think of the bass as two- or three-note linear patterns rather than only as a vertical entity.
- Teach students to strive for contrary motion whenever possible.

Question S1

What was the intent of this question?

The intent of this question was to test students' ability to:

- differentiate between major and minor mode;
- perform common rhythm patterns;
- perform dotted rhythms;
- perform conjunct motion;
- sing a two-phrase unit with motion from *do* to *la*;
- perform compound meter correctly;
- retain a sense of tonic;
- read in treble clef; and
- perform chordal skips on the tonic, predominant, and dominant.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for this question was 4.20 out of a possible 9 points.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Singing the first segment incorrectly.
- Singing segments two and four as *sol-do* instead of *sol-mi*.
- Singing segment five as *fa-la-sol*.
- Failing to hold the last note for its full value.

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?

- Sight sing regularly in class.
- Practice common rhythmic patterns in various meters.
- Emphasize holding notes for their full value.
- Give practice AP® Music Theory Exams.
- Encourage students to ghost-finger along as if playing their instruments while singing.
- Allow students to use a neutral syllable if, by March, they are struggling with solfège or numbers.
- Encourage students to keep going even if they make a mistake.
- Encourage students to sing using contour and not just rhythm on tonic if they struggle greatly with pitch.
- Encourage students to sing aloud during the 75-second practice time.
- Encourage students to practice rhythm first during the 75-second practice time.
- Encourage students to write on the test during the 75-second practice period.
- Review the recording directions with the proctor.

- Encourage students to conduct while they practice so they establish a good tempo.
- Encourage students to sing strongly so they can be heard.
- Encourage students not to hum, but to sing on a vowel sound. Humming obscures accurate pitch.
- Encourage students to sing the tonic triad to assist with establishing the key/tonic.
- Encourage students to select a starting pitch that is comfortable for their individual range.

Sight-Singing Question 2

What was the intent of this question?

This question assessed students' ability to:

- sight read and sing a melody in minor mode, using various forms of the scale;
- sing an upward leap from *me* to *do*;
- sing a downward leap from *sol* to *ti*;
- sing a melody with simple chromaticism, that is, the raised 3rd and 7th scale degrees;
- sing in simple meter;
- sing note values at the beat, the division, and the subdivision level;
- sing the rhythmic pattern of dotted eighth–sixteenth note;
- retain a sense of tonic; and
- read bass clef.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for this question was 3.36 out of a possible 9 points.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Singing a scale at the beginning, thus using valuable performance time.
- Singing in major instead of in minor mode.
- Failing to hold the last note for its full value.

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?

- Practice singing in all forms of minor (especially the upper tetrachord).
- Emphasize the difference between major and minor scales and triads.
- Practice minor triad arpeggios, both throughout the octave and with just pairs of notes, for example, *do–me*, *sol–me*, *sol–do*.
- Practice executing rhythms, including dotted rhythms.
- Practice *descending* scalar and intervallic patterns in all forms of the minor key.
- Practice melodies that contain common altered tones.
- Practice looking at and singing melodies in various clefs and ranges.
- Coach students on where to place a melody in a range of the voice that is both comfortable and executable.
- Teach students to choose an appropriate tempo for singing. The tempo of this exercise was marked *moderato*. Although points were not deducted for an incorrect tempo set at the start of the exercise, students tended to fare worse if they chose to perform at a painstakingly slow tempo.