



Student Performance Q&A: 2014 AP[®] Art History Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2014 free-response questions for AP[®] Art History were written by the Chief Reader, Robert Nauman of the University of Colorado in Boulder, Colo., and the Chief Reader Designate, Heather Madar of Humboldt State University in Arcata, Calif. 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 30-minute question asked students to identify two examples of the creation or representation of landscape that communicate meaning within the cultures that produced them. At least one example must have come from beyond the European tradition. Using specific evidence for each example, students then had to analyze both how that landscape is created or represented and how that landscape communicates meaning within its culture. The intent of this question was to measure students' ability to analyze how works are created, as well as how visual and contextual characteristics of those works are used to communicate meaning within specific cultural contexts.

How well did students perform on this question?

Students found this question difficult, which was surprising given that the content addressed in this question is one that is covered in most art history surveys and applies to many works of art from around the world. The mean score was 3.01 out of a possible 9 points, which is similar to the mean for the question dealing with art beyond the European tradition in recent years. (Last year's mean score on this question was 2.91; the year before, it was 3.01.) On this year's exam, there was once again a varied selection of student choices from beyond the European tradition, indicating that teachers are covering a much broader range of material in this area than before. Appropriate examples from the European tradition included Thomas Cole's *The Oxbow*, John Constable's *The Hay Wain*, Frank Lloyd Wright's *Fallingwater*, as well as various works by Albert Bierstadt and Caspar David Friedrich. Appropriate examples from beyond the European tradition included Fan Kuan's *Travellers Among Mountains and Streams*, Huang Gongwang's *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains*, Song dynasty *Shan Shui* paintings, Oceanic Bisj poles and the Zen garden at Ryoan-ji.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Students who chose less appropriate examples had greater difficulty with the question. The question asked students to address not only how the landscape was created or represented, but also how it communicated meaning within the culture that produced it. Students who picked landscapes where the meaning was primarily personal to the artist who created it, such as landscape paintings by Van Gogh, or who discussed landscapes that are primarily about formal experimentation in intent, such as many landscapes by Cezanne, had difficulty addressing both aspects of the question. Similarly, works of art where little information exists about the original context, such as the Great Serpent Mound, were also less appropriate choices. Some students did not discuss specific works of art or architecture, but instead discussed a tradition of landscape painting in general terms, such as discussing Impressionist landscapes rather than Monet's *Impression, Sunrise*. These responses earned lower scores, as responses needed to clearly address two specific works of art.

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 best responses came from students who were interested and engaged in examining other cultures actively. They were able to answer this question easily. These students' teachers are clearly teaching at least one culture beyond the European tradition in depth and with great skill. Art beyond the European tradition needs to be studied and addressed in a substantial manner by students, who should be taught to examine various cultures in all their richness. Some students also seemed to be confused as to what "counted" as art beyond the European tradition. In particular, students seemed to mistakenly interpret art from the United States (e.g., 19th-century American landscape paintings) as falling outside of the European tradition. Students should be taught clearly which traditions are considered on this exam to be beyond the European tradition. In addition reading a question, considering what tasks are involved in answering it, and sketching out possible strategies for a response (including the selection of appropriate works) would help students. The two long questions provide space in the exam booklet for outlining answers and time for doing so, yet few students take advantage of this opportunity and too many responses show evidence of insufficient thought. (Remind students that notes and outlines they make outside of the response itself are not considered in scoring the response.) Combining the standard chronological approach to art history with a thematic approach — considering, for example, how and why different cultures depict the natural world through representations of landscape — would help students develop the necessary flexibility to apply what they know to broad-based contextual questions like this one.

Question 2

What was the intent of this question?

This 30-minute question asked students to identify two works of art made between 1960 C.E. and the present that investigate issues of identity. Issues of identity include, but are not limited to, gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, class, and sexual orientation. The works had to be made by two different artists and could be in any media. Students then had to analyze both how each artist investigates issues of identity in the work and how those investigations relate to larger cultural concerns. The intent of this question was to have students demonstrate an understanding of how art can reinforce, promote, question, or challenge established cultural norms and contexts; in this case, through an exploration of identity.

How well did students perform on this question?

Students found this question very difficult. The mean score was 1.93 out of a possible 9 points. This is a notably lower mean score than the mean score of the last 30-minute essay dealing with contemporary art, which appeared on the 2008 exam. On a more positive note, students chose a wide range of works made

between 1960 C.E. and the present, and it was encouraging to see that many students had been exposed to a number of examples of contemporary art. Many students also chose works of global contemporary art, and many of those responses were quite strong and scored well. Appropriate examples included works by Cindy Sherman, Judy Chicago, Kara Walker, James Luna, Faith Ringgold, Yasumasa Morimura, and Yinka Shonibare.

What were common student errors or omissions?

The most fundamental error that students made in answering this question was the selection of inappropriate examples. Some students appeared to select any works of art since 1960 C.E. that they knew, regardless of whether or not the works explored issues of identity. Others seemed to mistakenly think the question dealt with Pop Art, perhaps due to the requirement to use works created after 1960 C.E.

Continuing a trend from recent years, chronology also appeared to be a problematic area for many students. Weaker responses sometimes confused works done prior to 1960 C.E. with those done later. Frida Kahlo's works, in particular *Two Fridas* (1939 C.E.), were chosen by a number of students to answer the question. In cases where one example dated prior to 1960, the highest score a student could earn was a 5 out of 9 possible points. Responses that chose two works dated prior to 1960 C.E. earned 0 out of a possible 9 points.

Many students also appeared not to understand the meaning of the term "identity" in this context and were unfamiliar with issues of identity politics as they relate to contemporary art. This is despite the fact that numerous works of contemporary art deal with issues of identity and many appropriate examples are discussed in the major textbooks. A number of students chose examples within the correct date range that were nevertheless inappropriate examples because they do not engage with issues of identity (e.g. the abstract paintings of Mark Rothko). Other responses reflected a confused or inaccurate understanding of identity issues in contemporary art, with students writing about celebrities, consumer culture, or their own personal identity. In other cases, students conflated works of art with political content with works of art investigating issues of identity: for example, by discussing how Maya Lin's Vietnam Veteran's Memorial deals with identity simply because individual names are visible on the wall. Such responses earned lower scores.

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 be sure to cover contemporary art. It is clear that some students were simply unequipped to deal with this question due to a lack of familiarity with contemporary art. There has been a question on contemporary art on the exam for a number of years now and this area will continue to be important on future exams. The new AP[®] Art History exam (launching in 2016) will include a number of works of global contemporary art, as they are part of the required course content. Teachers also should cover issues of identity and identity politics in contemporary art, as this is a key concern. There are a number of resources available to teachers that deal with these topics, including several segments of the PBS series *Art21*. Students should also be made aware that their own sense of identity and the ways in which they personally express their identity is not necessarily the same as issues of identity politics (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, nationality).

Question 3

What was the intent of this question?

This 10-minute question asked students to compare and contrast the late Classical figure *Aphrodite of Knidos* with an earlier Archaic depiction, the *Peplos Kore*. Students were then asked to use specific evidence to analyze how the representation of the female form in ancient Greek art changed between the Archaic period and the late Classical period. In addition, students were required to support through analysis a plausible reason as to why this shift in the representation of the female form in ancient Greek art occurred. The intent of this question was to provide students with the opportunity to analyze stylistic changes; in this case, how and why Greek art shifted from an emphasis on stylization in the 6th century B.C.E. to a blend of naturalism and idealism in the 4th century B.C.E.

How well did students perform on this question?

Students scored exactly in the mid-range on this question. The mean score was 2.00 out of a possible 4 points. While it seemed relatively easy for students to score 2 points on this question by describing the stylistic changes that they saw, scoring 4 points proved difficult because to earn higher scores, students had to demonstrate deeper contextual knowledge about why these changes might have occurred. While these works were identified in terms of which was Archaic and which was Classical, students had to explain not only how but also why stylistic changes occurred in order to be able to earn an upper level score. Comparisons such as this, using both male and female Greek sculptures, appear in all of the major survey texts.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Students did relatively well in comparing and contrasting the formal elements of these works, but the contextual analysis of why styles change over time was more difficult for them. Some responses were biased by a perception that art always strives toward a more naturalistic or idealistic approach that is “better” than earlier styles. The more complex contextual circumstances that informed this stylistic change between the 6th century B.C.E. and the 4th century B.C.E. was ignored in those responses. Students also confused vocabulary terms, such as “realism” and “idealism.” Weaker responses tended to ignore the fact that both works are, to varying degrees, idealized. There was also a confusion with issues of proportion, with weaker responses often citing the lack of proportion in the *Peplos Kore*, instead of more accurately noting that the proportional system was changed or refined in the *Aphrodite of Knidos*. Stronger responses also seemed to know the original setting of the *Aphrodite of Knidos*, which was situated within an open-air circular temple where visitors could view the sculpture from all angles.

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 continue to examine and analyze stylistic changes in art, but not simply in formalist terms. Change in styles over time should be seen as an opportunity to discuss why styles change, and what factors might have contributed to those changes. Those factors may include political changes, contact with other cultures, and social or economic changes. In this particular case, the comparison offers an opportunity to discuss the changing status of women within Greek society. Comparisons such as these also provide an opportunity to discuss the continuum of history within an overall framework of tradition and change: one of the three “Big Ideas” that will form the foundation of the new AP[®] Art History exam (launching in 2016).

Question 4

What was the intent of this question?

This 10-minute question asked students to analyze both how a building's design served its original function and how its design incorporates elements from earlier building types. This question asked students to combine skills of both formal and contextual analysis. The intent of this question was to prompt students to analyze the relationship in architectural design between form and function, as well as to analyze the influence of earlier works.

How well did students perform on this question?

Students scored almost exactly in the mid-range on this question. The mean score was 1.96 out of a possible 4 points. The building, its art historical period, and its original function (a mausoleum) were identified for students in the question, and the building is discussed at length in the major survey texts. Questions on medieval architecture have been difficult for students in the past, so it is encouraging to see an improvement in student performance in this area.

What were common student errors or omissions?

A number of students had problems with chronology, confusing what was built before Santa Costanza with what was built after. Students would mistakenly claim influence in particular from Hagia Sophia, but also from later buildings such as San Vitale, the Tempietto, and the Dome of the Rock. Similarly, some students discussed the work as Romanesque, situating the building in the context of pilgrimage and the cult of saints. In some cases, students clearly did not understand the word "mausoleum," leading to an inaccurate discussion of the building as a Roman catacomb, further misunderstanding the catacombs as Christian hiding places. Others identified the work's original function as a church, missing the fact that the building was not converted into a church until 1256 C.E.

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 sure that they directly address influence in questions that ask about artistic or architectural influence. In some cases, students discussed parallel monuments rather than monuments or building types that actually influenced the design of Santa Costanza. For example, students discussed how Santa Costanza is similar to the Dome of the Rock as they both have a central dome. A stronger and more accurate discussion of influence would be to explain the way that Santa Costanza's central dome was influenced by a structure like the earlier Roman Pantheon.

Students also seemed to have difficulty with the larger historical context of Christian Rome, and the way that this context shaped both the design and the function of Santa Costanza. Monuments or works of art such as this provide an opportunity to discuss the continuum of history with students. This early Christian work, from late antiquity, is a transitional work and may be discussed within an overall framework of tradition, continuity, and change. Students should be encouraged to investigate these aspects in their analysis. Santa Costanza is an example of a structure whose function changed over time. Teachers should stress the original function of a building (in this case, funerary) and clarify to students the ways in which buildings can be repurposed.

Students also need greater guidance on how to read architectural plans. While many students were able to identify Santa Costanza as a central plan structure with the help of the plan, students clearly still struggle to read plans correctly. (This became more apparent in Question 6, in which students were given a plan of the Giza pyramid site.) In discussing architecture, teachers should show plans when applicable and teach their students how to read them.

Question 5

What was the intent of this question?

This 10-minute question asked students to correctly attribute a painting to the artist who painted it. Students were asked to justify the attribution by discussing specific characteristics of the work commonly associated with the artist's *oeuvre*. These characteristics did not have to be strictly visual; they could include content or context as well as formal elements. The intent of this question was to have students apply their knowledge of the characteristics of an artist's painting to their discussion of a presumably unknown work.

How well did students perform on this question?

Students found this question moderately difficult. The mean score was 1.86 out of a possible 4 points. Even if the students missed the identification, they could earn points through a cogent discussion of stylistic characteristics that could possibly overlap with the work of another artist. The adjusted mean of the score (calculated by omitting scores of zero points) was revealing, in that it was slightly over 2 points. That means that if students did attribute the work to an artist or attempted to answer the question, they mostly received credit. Notably, this was the highest scoring attribution question since the 2008 exam.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Many students were correct in attributing this work to Rembrandt. In terms of misattributions, many students still attributed the work to a Baroque artist (Caravaggio and Velazquez were the most frequently cited misattributions) and were able to make a convincing argument that earned them partial credit. Misattributions that were more difficult to justify included artists such as Leonardo da Vinci. Students often justified their attributions with formal characteristics, such as the painterly brushstroke, color, or the use of light (often expressed in terms of chiaroscuro, tenebrism, or sfumato). Choice of terminology often paralleled their attributions (Rembrandt with chiaroscuro, Caravaggio with tenebrism, Leonardo da Vinci with sfumato). Significantly, some students answered the question with double-, triple-, or quadruple attributions, mentioning as many names as possible in the hope of hitting upon the correct one if they just listed enough names. This tactic, of course, did not earn high scores, not only because the question specifically called for an attribution to a single artist but also because this multi-attribution approach meant that students could not fully justify an attribution to any one artist. The highest score a student could receive for an incorrect attribution was 2 points. This question required an attribution to a specific artist, not to an art-historical period or movement, and mere description of the work was not adequate as a justification for an attribution. If a student did not identify an artist at all, the student obviously could not justify the 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?

Attribution skills are a kind of applied formal analysis, and a basic tool of the art historian. Students should be reminded to discuss characteristics that they observe in the specific work that is shown. Moreover, students need to be reminded that if they are presented with an attribution question, they must supply an answer that specifically responds to the question. In this case, students were asked to specify a single artist. Responses that provided several short paragraphs for all possible artists, combining Rembrandt, Caravaggio, and Velazquez into one response, earned lower scores. Students should at least attempt to attribute the work to a single artist whose work they can justify in terms of stylistic characteristics as they relate to the image shown. Students also need to learn correct terminology in describing characteristics of a work. While students should be encouraged to develop an expanded vocabulary of art historical terminology, that vocabulary should also be made relevant by association to contextual specifics so that that discussion of terminology is not simply a matter of memorization. In this particular work, for example,

the term chiaroscuro (as opposed to tenebrism) was specifically linked to Rembrandt's style and was often used in the higher scoring responses.

Question 6

What was the intent of this question?

This 10-minute question asked students to use specific evidence to analyze how both the beliefs and the practices of Old Kingdom Egypt shaped the pyramid complex at Giza. The evidence could be both visual and contextual. The intent of the question was to prompt students to demonstrate an understanding of how the design of a specific architectural site is determined by the need to accommodate both the beliefs and the practices of the culture that built it.

How well did students perform on this question?

Students scored almost exactly at the mid-range on this question. The mean score was 1.93 out of a possible 4 points. The complex was identified in the question as the pyramid complex at Giza, and the work is discussed at length in the major survey texts. Many students are also familiar with Egyptian culture through television, cinema, and popular media, but not all of that material was relevant to answering this question.

What were common student errors or omissions?

The primary problem with weaker responses was that they were not connected to specific discussions of the site. There were many generic discussions of mummies, tomb robbers, gold, and the afterlife, but these responses often did not specifically relate the discussion to how this particular site was shaped by specific beliefs and practices of ancient Egyptians. The notion that these large outdoor religious, spiritual, and burial sites are connected with facilitating a specific practice (function) was not discussed in those weaker responses. Some weaker responses also discussed practices associated with other stepped pyramids, which may not have been applicable to this particular pyramid complex.

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 encourage students to break down the component parts of these questions. In this case, they had to draw on specific evidence, analyze and examine that evidence, and apply it to this particular pyramid complex and to the beliefs and practices of Egyptian culture. They did not necessarily have to relate their discussion to aspects depicted in the images provided. Students could, for example, discuss aspects of the pharaohs' divinity that were not clearly displayed in the images provided, but they did have to comment on how those aspects shaped this specific site.

Students should examine sites such as these as they connect to rituals; in this case, the ritual of burial. Other religious sites could be used as contrasting examples to discuss, for example, rituals such as baptism or initiation. In these discussions, observe how architecture takes on meaning and how the specific forms reflect the functions.

Question 7

What was the intent of this question?

This 10-minute question asked students to analyze how and why Dorothea Lange's photograph was purposefully composed to convey meaning to a general public. The intent of this question was for students to apply skills of formal and contextual analysis to a photograph and to recognize that photographs, such as the one shown, may be composed with the same degree of intentionality as other works of art.

How well did students perform on this question?

Students found this question very difficult. The mean score was 1.13 out of a possible 4 points. Although the photographer was identified in the question, and many students seemed to know the work (perhaps from classes in U. S. History), students had problems with moving beyond description to analyzing how and why the photograph was composed to convey meaning to a general public.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Students were often able to connect this image to the Great Depression or the Dust Bowl, and there was much discussion of how the mother in the photograph looked tired and distressed. Weaker responses, however, to analyzing how and why the composition itself was intended to elicit empathy in the general public and inspire the public to action. Generalizations of empathy and awareness resulted in weaker essays. Stronger responses were able to explain techniques that Lange used to emphasize the mother's features (for example, close cropping and pyramid composition) as well as why such techniques might be effective in fostering awareness of the plight of migrant workers at the time that the photograph was taken. Some weaker responses also assumed that this image was simply a random snapshot, thus missing the intent of the image altogether, even though the question clearly stated that "Lange's photograph was purposefully composed."

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 aware that there are critical issues involved in the analysis of photographic images, just as there are in paintings. How and why documentary photography has been used in general, and how government-sponsored images were used specifically to promote a variety of agendas in the 20th century could be a rich discussion that could overlap with discussions of mediated images in the 21st century. The socio-political content of these images also overlaps with propaganda, and could be folded into discussion dealing with that topic. Broader discussions of how photographs operate within the context of visual imagery would also be a good topic of discussion. Those discussions could include questions such as whose agendas are being served by these images, whether the photographs are documentary, landscape, travel, or war. Teaching students to understand the intentionality of images would assist them not only in succeeding on the AP[®] Art History exam, but in learning to interpret the visual culture surrounding them more generally.

Question 8

What was the intent of this question?

This 10-minute question asked students to correctly identify the art-historical movement with which Jacques-Louis David is associated as Neoclassicism. Students were then asked to make specific reference to the quotation and to *The Battle of the Sabines* to analyze how both reflect the ideals of Neoclassicism. The intent of the question was to prompt students to analyze how statements made by an artist are visually expressed in the same artist's work.

How well did students perform on this question?

Students found this question moderately difficult. The mean score was 1.71 out of a possible 4 points. Students seemed to be familiar with Neoclassicism, David, and the classical tradition in general.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Students were clearly familiar with the style of Neoclassicism and many were able to correctly identify the period. A minority selected periods of ancient art, such as Hellenistic or Roman, with fewer naming the Renaissance or Baroque. Many were also familiar with Jacques-Louis David, although most were only aware of his *Oath of the Horatii*. A common error was to address only the painting or the quotation, not both. Responses that failed to address both could only earn a score of 2 points out of a possible 4 points. Students tended to identify relevant aspects of the image to discuss, noting the idealized forms and proportions, for example. In discussing the quotation, students often failed to go beyond the quotation itself, and often recycled language from the quotation without providing any analysis or elaboration.

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 give their students practice with text-based questions in the classroom and as take-home exercises. Various sourcebooks of quotations exist, and teachers can draw sample quotations from those and relate them to images that appear in the students' text. Teachers should encourage students not to simply write everything they know about an artist but to use this exercise to hone their skills of observation, relating a specific quotation to a specific work. It also helps to remind students to use quotation marks in citing the specifics of the quotation, so that the relationship between the quotation and the painting is clear (both to the students and to the exam readers). Students who think through their responses prior to beginning to write earn higher scores. There were also a number of blanks for this question, suggesting that some students may have run out of time. Students should be reminded to allot sufficient time to answer each question.