



Student Performance Q&A:

2014 AP[®] Chinese Language and Culture Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2014 free-response questions for AP[®] Chinese Language and Culture were written by the Chief Reader, T. Richard Chi of the University of Utah. They give an overview of each free-response question and of how students performed on the question, including typical student errors. General comments regarding the skills and content that students frequently have the most problems with are included. Some suggestions for improving student performance in these areas are also provided. Teachers are encouraged to attend a College Board workshop to learn strategies for improving student performance in specific areas.

Presentational Writing Task: Story Narration

What was the intent of this task?

This task assessed writing ability in the presentational mode of communication by requiring students to narrate a story, depicted in a series of four pictures, to a friend. Students were allotted 15 minutes to write the narration. The response received a single holistic score based on how well it accomplished the assigned task. The purpose of the task was to determine how well students can write a coherent story with a clear progression of ideas — including a beginning, middle, and an end — based on the picture sequence. The task also allowed students to demonstrate their ability to produce paragraph-level discourse using appropriate transitional elements and cohesive devices.

How well did students perform on this task?

The mean score for the Standard Group¹ was 3.61 out of a possible 6 points, higher than last year's mean of 3.18. The mean score for the Total Group was 4.40, higher than last year's mean of 4.03. Readers felt that, in general, students performed reasonably well on this task.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Compared to previous years, the four pictures in this year's Story Narration contained many more details, some of which the students did not address in their narrations. For instance, in the first picture, many students did not describe what the young man sees on the ground: weeds, trash, old tires, an oil drum, bricks, paper, and a pile of wood. Many students did not mention the graffiti on the wall. Some students also missed information in the second picture: a nicely manicured lawn with a tree and flowers, a bench, stone steps, and the wall painted with a scene showing the sky, a rainbow, and clouds. The third and fourth pictures seemed particularly challenging because they depicted a variety of activities.

¹ The Standard Group refers to students who generally receive most of their foreign language training in U.S. schools. It does not include students who regularly hear or speak Chinese or who have lived for one month or more in a country where Chinese is spoken. Decisions on cutoff scores in score setting are based on the Standard Group performance.

Common errors and omissions included the following:

- Typing errors
- Choosing incorrect characters
- Not directly addressing the gist of the picture sequence
- Omitting important details

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?

Readers offered some very practical suggestions for improving students' performance on the Story Narration task:

- Remind students to follow the instructions carefully.
- Encourage students to practice typing.
- Stress the importance of sentence structure, linking words, etc.
- Help students expand their vocabulary.
- Make sure students know that their task is to narrate a story based on the picture sequence, not to write an essay. Therefore, they need to write a narrative of the events shown in the pictures, not simply provide a general summary.
- Let students know that the best strategy is to tell a story based on the pictures in a straightforward manner. Flowery language (such as four-character phrases) is generally not helpful.

Interpersonal Writing Task: E-Mail Response

What was the intent of this task?

This task assessed writing ability in the interpersonal mode of communication by requiring students to write a response to an e-mail received from a friend. Students were allotted 15 minutes to read the e-mail and write a response. The response received a single holistic score based on how well it accomplished the assigned task. Students had to be able to comprehend the e-mail and then write a response that addresses all the questions posed in the e-mail.

How well did students perform on this task?

The mean score for the Standard Group was 3.28 out of a possible 6 points, higher than last year's mean of 2.96. The mean score for the total group was 4.32, slightly higher than last year's mean of 4.24. Readers felt that students performed well on this task.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Confusing homophonous words (for example, 联系 and 练习)
- Presenting a progression of ideas that is not sufficiently clear
- Using inappropriate vocabulary
- Using inappropriate grammatical structures
- Not responding directly to the specific questions posed in the e-mail. For example, the e-mail asked students to offer an opinion on a school policy that requires each student to participate in community service, which is different from giving an opinion on the more general topic of students participating in community service.

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?

Emphasize the following points in helping students prepare for the E-Mail Response task.

- Read the e-mail carefully to identify the topic and the questions being posed.
- Directly address the topic in the first few sentences of the response, and make sure that the progression of ideas is sufficiently clear.
- Practice completing the task within 15 minutes.
- Start to practice typing in Chinese one or two years before taking the AP[®] Chinese Exam.
- Do not use the format of a formal letter for responding to the e-mail.
- Become familiar with the scoring guidelines.

Interpersonal Speaking Task: Conversation

What was the intent of this task?

This task assessed speaking ability in the interpersonal mode of communication by having students respond to a series of questions in a simulated conversation. The task comprised a statement identifying an interlocutor and conversation topic followed by six questions. Students were allotted 20 seconds to speak at each turn in the conversation. Each of the six responses received a 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 14.98 out of a possible 36 points, lower than last year's mean of 16.29. The mean score for the Total Group was 23.78, slightly lower than last year's mean of 23.93. Readers felt that students performed very well on this year's Conversation task.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Misunderstanding 课外活动, interpreting it as “hobby” or “interest” rather than “extracurricular activity”
- Not addressing all aspects of the question. For example, some praised Chinese calligraphy and painting without describing their characteristics, as required
- Not recognizing the word 社长 (in 书画社的社长) and substituted other words (such as 总统, 校长, 会长, 署长, 院长, 教授, 老板, 经理, 头人) in their response
- Short responses without any detail or elaboration (such as 书法历史悠久; 画山, 画水, 用很多颜色; 我最喜欢王羲之; 每个星期三放学以后因为那个时间我不忙)
- Not addressing the part of the question that asked “why?”.
- Using inappropriate time expressions in response to the question about scheduling activities: 昨天可以, 去年也行; 唐、清代都可以, 因为那时候的画都很漂亮, 大家一定很喜欢.

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?

- Strengthen grammar instruction. For example, make sure students understand that 参加过的 activities are something that has already happened, while 要做的 and 想做的 express a desire to do something in the future.

- Strengthen students' cultural understanding, such as 课外活动, which refers to extracurricular activities that are related to and often sponsored by schools for educational purposes.
- Practice role-playing activities to strengthen skills in spoken interpersonal communication.
- Give students opportunities to practice the free-response tasks that they will encounter on the AP[®] Chinese exam by making use of the questions from previous exams that are available on AP[®] Central. For the Conversation task, students should practice answering each prompt within the 20-second response time.
- Emphasize the importance of including elaboration and detail in responses. Model how this is done.
- Emphasize the importance of paying attention to and answering all the questions in a prompt; in particular, do not leave the “why” question unanswered. To practice this skill, give students a scenario and require them to ask and answer the question. For example, ask the students to think of three reasons or steps to take in simple everyday life situations: 明天我要早起，因为... (give three reasons for getting up early or state what will be done when getting up early tomorrow morning).

Presentational Speaking Task: Cultural Presentation

What was the intent of this task?

This task assessed speaking ability in the presentational mode of communication by requiring students to give an oral presentation on a specific Chinese cultural topic as if they were speaking to their Chinese class. It comprised a single prompt, which identified the cultural topic and asked students to select an example of that topic, describe it, and explain its significance. Students were allotted 4 minutes to prepare the presentation and 2 minutes to deliver it. The response received a single holistic score based on how well it accomplished the assigned task. In addition to language skills, the task assessed students' cultural knowledge as presented in their responses.

How well did students perform on this task?

The mean score for the Standard Group was 2.52 out of a possible 6 points, significantly lower than last year's mean of 3.22. The mean score for the Total Group was 3.69, slightly lower than last year's mean score of 3.76.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Describing a movie that is not a Chinese-language movie
- Not mentioning the title of the movie
- Omitting certain aspects of the movie
- Not discussing the significance of the movie
- Describing classic Chinese novels
- Stating they had never watched a Chinese-language movie.

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?

- Ensure that students have watched at least one Chinese-language movie before taking the AP[®] Chinese exam.
- Practice with students on producing discourse of paragraph length and using discourse connectors (cohesive devices).