



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

The following comments on the 2014 free-response questions for AP[®] European History were written by the Chief Reader, Paul Deslandes of the University of Vermont. 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?

The question required students to use the documents provided to identify causal factors that contributed to the emergence of a dissident workers' movement in Poland between 1956 and 1981, to arrange the documents into analytically useful groups, and to provide examples of point of view implicit in the documents.

How well did students perform on this question?

Students performed well on this question, earning a mean score of approximately 4.04 out of a possible 9 points. Students seemed to address the question with well-formulated theses and they generally understood the documents and used them effectively in their essays.

Many students developed at least three clear groupings of factors such as Communist party oppression, economic discontent, desire for political rights, and the influence of other groups such as intellectuals and the Catholic Church.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Some students were only able to identify two factors and then had difficulty in developing three distinct groupings.

Many students failed to provide at least three examples of point-of-view analysis.

Documents 12 (Jaruzelski's memoir), 6 (Table of aid provided to workers by a NGO), and 2 (two professors expressing dissent) were the most commonly misinterpreted.

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 should be aware that the current rubric requires them to develop three appropriate groupings (many students often provide only two groups) and that these groupings must support the thesis.

Teachers should continue to train students to read carefully and to provide significant point-of-view analysis. They should also introduce them to a broad range of textual and non-textual sources. In utilizing non-textual sources in their classes, it would be helpful if teachers employed statistical charts, art, maps, political cartoons, and photographs (among other materials).

Question 2

What was the intent of this question?

The question required students to analyze the views on church-state relations of at least two Protestant groups (or their founders, leaders, or other representatives); students then had to identify differences in the ways these Protestant groups' approached the subject of religion and politics. The question deals with a mainstream topic, but rewards an approach that reverses the way in which many textbooks present the material — i.e., instead of analyzing state responses to the growth of Protestantism, students were asked to consider Protestant approaches to the state.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was approximately 3.51 out of a possible 9 points. Student scores were a bit lower than anticipated for such a mainstream topic, with fewer than expected reaching the upper ranges of points because so many wrote narratives about the Protestant Reformation without engaging with the prompt throughout the essay.

What were common student errors or omissions?

The most common error was found in responses that produced long narratives detailing elements of the Protestant Reformation that bore little direct relevance to the question (Henry VIII's wives, Luther nailing the *95 Theses* to the church door, etc.). Students might not have understood "various" as requiring more than two examples, and frequently students reverted to a description of state approaches to Protestants rather than the task of Protestant approaches to the state, resulting in off-task responses.

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 should develop the critically important practice of analyzing the question tasks and conditions before embarking on an answer. Since many responses begin well and then seem to detach from the assigned task, emphasis on essay organization that includes the development of topic sentences linked to the thesis would also help students develop more effective approaches to essay writing. Classroom practice and debriefing using this question would provide students and teachers with a valuable experience.

Question 3

What was the intent of this question?

The intent of this question was to have students analyze similarities in the methods that various monarchs utilized to consolidate and increase their power. Students needed to identify "methods" and then explain how the methods increased or consolidated (or both) the monarchs' power in a similar manner and why

the monarchs used the methods in a similar way. Although not explicitly required, the question also provided students with an opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of the “methods” in achieving the monarchs’ goals.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was approximately 3.33 out of a possible 9 points. Overall, students responded reasonably well to the question. Absolutism is a mainstream topic, which is well covered by all of the major textbooks. Because of this, the majority of students chose this essay in selecting their question in Part B. Many students were able to identify more than one method utilized by absolute monarchs to consolidate authority and demonstrate reasonable analysis about how a particular method was instrumental to their rule. Students most often identified Louis XIV of France and Peter the Great of Russia as absolute monarchs in their responses. In doing so, they were able to cover both the 1600s and 1700s, which was the time frame of the question.

The part of the question “consolidate and increase their power” was often conflated by students which was allowable by the scoring standards.

What were common student errors or omissions?

The most common error made by students was identifying monarchs or leaders who are not in the period, e.g., Henry VIII, Elizabeth I, Napoleon, Bismarck, etc. Some students organized their essays by monarch, which meant that their responses often became a narrative about each selected monarch rather than the comparative response required by the question.

Because the task in questions of this sort is comparative (analyze similarities), it is important for students to identify at least one method and more than one monarch. Weaker responses identified a method or methods but then discussed in a very general manner a country or the concept of absolutism and did not identify a specific monarch or house, e.g., Romanov, Habsburg, Bourbon, etc.

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?

It is important that students understand the task of the question (analyze similarities in the methods) and learn how to organize their response appropriately.

To improve student performance, it is important that teachers create opportunities for them to practice the historical skills of periodization, contextualization, and comparison using appropriate historical evidence.

It is also important that teachers instruct students on how to break down the question; identify the task(s) and begin to outline/organize according to the task/terms of the question.

Question 4

What was the intent of this question?

The intent of this question was to have students analyze more than one idea held by one Enlightenment figure, and more than one idea held by at least one other Enlightenment figure concerning the roles of women in European society. The task required students to identify historical figures from the European Enlightenment and discuss those figures’ different ideas of women’s roles in society. Although not specifically required, the question provided students with an opportunity to contrast the ideas of those Enlightenment thinkers who argued for extending liberty and equality to women and emphasized reason, education, etc. with the ideas of those Enlightenment thinkers who offered new arguments for the exclusion of women from the public sphere, based on emerging bourgeois ideas of domesticity or on supposedly natural differences between the sexes.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was approximately 2.12 out of a possible 9 points. The students grasped the nature of the question, and were able to at least report Enlightenment figures that had opinions on gendered roles. Performance was uneven, however, as many students failed to relate those ideas clearly and specifically to women's roles (e.g., offering as evidence the fact that Diderot wrote an encyclopedia); or reported only one set of ideas (and not the plural "differences"). Because the question is written in such an accessible manner, almost all essays had a thesis that was clear and responsive to the prompt. Almost all essays (lower to higher scoring) were organized into 4 paragraphs: an introduction and conclusion with 2 paragraphs explaining the ideas of 2 different points of view. The lowest performing responses merely gave an overview of gender roles, irrespective of time and place. Lower performing responses typically did not support assertions with accurate evidence, did not balance representation of "differences," or did not link evidence specifically to women's roles. Higher performing responses were able to specify figures' ideas with a clear relationship to women's roles and present a balance of differences of Enlightenment figures' ideas.

What were common student errors or omissions?

On the whole, students are aware that new ideas about gender emerged during the Enlightenment. Most students can identify the figures associated with differing ideas that most often appear in popular textbooks (e.g., McKay, Hunt, Spielvogel) — predominantly that of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (separate spheres) and Mary Wollstonecraft (women's political rights, access to education). Because the scholarly investigation into gender and the Enlightenment is still a relatively new field, textbooks do not go much beyond the ideas that either (a) women were to remain in the private sphere, or (b) women should be on equal footing with men in the public sphere. While most students refer to Rousseau and Wollstonecraft, those who do not name figures specifically tend to address the issue of 'women's rights' in general terms. In their responses, students also tended to conflate periods (e.g., suffrage movements) and, on occasion, geography (American women rather than European figures), especially when they had difficulty providing specific examples.

Some students incorrectly associate Enlightenment figures with particular ideas (e.g., that Montesquieu argued avidly against the inclusion of women in political life, that John Locke made specifically gendered arguments for individual liberties, or that Voltaire was passionately committed to women's rights). Better responses specifically and accurately engaged those writings from figures that specifically addressed women's roles.

Other common errors included incorrect periodization (e.g., placing Castiglione as an Enlightenment figure or listing "women getting jobs in factories"). Many essays were imbalanced essays and focused only on one idea without acknowledging that there were intellectual debates in the period.

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 ensure that students are familiar with the tenets of each intellectual movement and their corresponding figures and thinkers.

Students should be instructed to consider the nuances of issues like "equality" (e.g., if the question concerned the Industrial Revolution, that women working in factories does not mean women were on equal footing with their male counterparts).

Students should be encouraged to think about the importance of women's and gender history in serious ways. The use of primary sources by Rousseau and Wollstonecraft might help students gain an even stronger grasp of this issue.

Finally, teachers should carefully instruct students to respond to these kinds of questions carefully and to think seriously about what the term “analyze” means and to consider the importance of plural nouns (e.g., “roles,” “figures,” “ideas”) in the prompt.

Question 5

What was the intent of this question?

The intent of this question was for students to analyze multiple (more than one) factors responsible for rural to urban migration in the 19th century. The question required analysis, meaning that students were expected to identify factors and place these factors in a proper historical context, explaining how and why the factors led to migration and urbanization. The question offered students the chance (but did not require them) to organize their responses by analyzing “push” factors (mostly related to the Agricultural Revolution and transformation in farm landholding patterns) and “pull” factors (mostly related to industrialization).

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was approximately 2.91 out of a possible 9 points. Many students performed well on this question. It was clear, and the prompt made it easy for students to construct a thesis statement, and a large percentage of them chose to answer it. Most students know something about the Agricultural Revolution of the eighteenth century and the first Industrial Revolution and used that information to explain factors that caused people to leave the countryside (e.g., the enclosure movement shut off previously common lands, making it difficult for small farmers to support themselves, while inventions such as the spinning jenny and water frame led to the mechanization of textiles and the demise of the putting-out system, leaving people in the countryside to look for work in the textile factories). Students also knew about the influence of the first and second Industrial Revolutions on the creation and growth of cities in the 19th century. Some essays also included information about improvements in cities, cultural opportunities and entertainment outlets that drew people to urban centers in the 1800s.

What were common student errors or omissions?

While essays usually demonstrated some knowledge of the Agricultural Revolution and the Industrial Revolution(s), some failed to use specific evidence to back up their assertions and relied on more general statements. Other students failed to link the evidence to migration. There were some very informative essays on the techniques and inventions of the Agricultural Revolution and/or the Industrial Revolution that, while factually correct, did not connect the innovations to migration, and failed to fully address 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?

Teachers should have students look at the question carefully and to seek opportunities to demonstrate their historical thinking skills as well as their knowledge. Students should be encouraged to think about what it means when a prompt begins with the word “analyze.” Teachers should tell students that when they see this word, they should use explicit language in making the links between factors that led to a development and specific effects. This question offered opportunities to discuss both factors that pushed people away from the countryside as well as factors that drew people to relocate to cities, and the best essays explored both opportunities and linked those factors to migration in explicit and well-developed ways.

Question 6

What was the intent of this question?

The intent of this question was to have students analyze the effects of warfare and totalitarian regimes on art in the first half of the 1900s. The aim is to assess the students' ability to analyze the impact of the traumatic events of World War I and its aftermath on cultural creativity and artistic output. The question rewarded approaches that connected specific artists, artworks, or art movements to the historical context of the Interwar period, showing how and why the war and the subsequent establishment of totalitarian regimes resulted in changes in artists' choice of styles, subject matter(s), and general sensibilities.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score on this question was approximately 3.02 out of a possible 9 points. There were many essays that lacked the specific evidence needed for an effective response to this prompt. They offered very general arguments about the effects of war and totalitarianism on art. Some discussed Cubism, surrealism, and Dadaism, but responding to both aspects of the question proved to be a challenge. Many essays were imbalanced, and some merely provided general statements about war and dictatorships.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Some essays did not treat both aspects of the question. We found that students referred to warfare and its effects (sometimes quite well) but that they were much less effective in dealing with totalitarianism. Some students even ignored the impact of the rise of totalitarian regimes. The question privileged the skill of making an argument using appropriate evidence. Students who understood Cubism or Dadaism, did not always address the suppression of modern art by totalitarian regimes. Many students also wrote rather thinly about "propaganda". Some students got distracted in writing about the war and fell into the use of relatively simplistic clichés.

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 look carefully at the visual material in their textbook and to read the captions. A number of textbooks support this question, and successful students did use images from textbooks. The other point is for teachers to familiarize students with art in each era, not just in the Renaissance. This doesn't have to be for a whole period, but spending time with a few images (e.g., Picasso's *Guernica* and possibly a DuChamp) could be worthwhile. Modernism in art is effectively covered in the textbooks, so teachers should be attentive to the topic. Also, in work on essay writing, teachers could more closely show how to make a causal argument relating to cultural trends. In other words, they should give students an opportunity to establish links between historical context and culture.

Question 7

What was the intent of this question?

The intent of this question was to have students identify and explain the main events or processes (or both) that influenced the changing balance of power among European states between the failed revolutions of 1848 and the outbreak of World War I in 1914. Students were required to discuss multiple (at least two) such "factors". Implicit in the question (but not specifically required) is the expectation that student responses could address the pre-1848 or post-1918 balance of power in Europe or relations between individual European countries in these two periods.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was approximately 3.66 out of a possible 9 points. Overall, students performed quite competently on this question. The topic was accessible and covered a sufficient time span for students to develop multiple arguments. The prompt aligned well with coverage in major text books and thus the majority of the students were able to offer some effective evidence. Although not required, students frequently chose to open their essay with a description of the pre-period status quo as a result of the 1815 Congress of Vienna and the resulting Concert of Europe.

The unification of Germany and Italy, New Imperialism, and the alliances between the European States featured prominently in the essays. Essays often described these events at length before turning to their influence on the changing balance of power. Many essays also discussed the Crimean War, the Eastern Question, ethnic divisions within the Dual Monarchy, industrial rivalry, and nationalism as factors. A few students tried to link the failed revolutions of 1848 and the rise of Marxism to the changing balance of power, but these efforts were often ineffectual.

In completing all tasks, students struggled somewhat with creating theses that showed explicit linkages to the changing balance of power.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Although not persistent, the most common error in the responses related to the use of evidence that fell outside the chronological period of the question. Students who had trouble situating the time period wrote about Napoleon Bonaparte, Metternich, the Bolshevik Revolution, and Nazi Germany. Despite their familiarity with the topic, even solid essays might include minor chronological confusion.

Since this essay asked students to analyze major factors (i.e., two or more prominent events/processes) from a wide range of possibilities, omission was not an issue in this essay. A few students limited themselves to describing one development like the rise of Germany, but then often still offered multiple factors that influenced the balance of power. However, some essays did suffer from either an overly narrative approach, or conversely, a lack of factual detail in linking events/processes to changing balance of power.

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 should be encouraged to see the difference between narrative and analysis. Given a question with a broad reach, students tend to try to write as much as they can to the factual developments. This causes essays to become overly narrative, and state rather than explain causation and linkage. Evidence should support an analytical argument; not the other way around. Teachers should help students understand that it is about the why rather than the what.

Students should be encouraged to consider historical events in terms of causal linkage. In questions with a broad scope (analyze major factors) and/or open prompt (affect changing balance of power), it is essential that students show causality in their arguments, both in the thesis and in the arguments in the main body of the essay. Teachers could help students practice this by having them perform exercises that ask them to think carefully about cause and effect and show how one development precipitated and affected another.