



## Student Performance Q&A:

### 2014 AP<sup>®</sup> Spanish Language and Culture Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2014 free-response questions for AP<sup>®</sup> Spanish Language and Culture were written by the Chief Reader, Jeffrey Reeder, of Sonoma State University in Rohnert Park, 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 task assessed writing in the interpersonal communicative mode by having the student write a reply to an e-mail message. Students were allotted 15 minutes to read the message and write the reply. The response received a single holistic score based on how well it accomplished the assigned task. Students needed to be able first to comprehend the e-mail and then to write a reply using a formal form of address. The e-mail must include a greeting and a closing. The reply must address all the questions and requests raised in the message, as well as ask for more details about something mentioned in the message.

##### *How well did students perform on this question?*

The mean score for the Standard Group<sup>1</sup> was 3.25 out of a possible 5 points, with a standard deviation of 1.09. The mean score for the Total Group was 3.30 out of a possible 5 points, with a standard deviation of 1.08.

##### *What were common student errors or omissions?*

Students did not always ask a question requesting more information as they were told in the task description.

The variety of vocabulary used in the printed e-mail was diverse enough in that it allowed most students to understand the entire message. Even if they did not understand a couple of words, they were able to imply the meaning. The questions that the students were to respond to in the printed e-mail were clear and easy to answer. The name of the person in the printed e-mail (María José Rodríguez de Cerna) caused some confusion with students that were less culturally aware of Hispanic naming conventions.

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<sup>1</sup> The Standard Group does not include students who hear or speak Spanish at home or who have lived for one month or more in a country where Spanish is the native language. Decisions about score distributions are based on the Standard Group.

***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 train students that they really have to read the task carefully so that they understand what they ultimately have to do. Students need to learn that they cannot assume that they will know what to do in order to complete this assignment simply by reading the printed e-mail and responding to it. Also, teachers need to remind students that the e-mail reply should have a greeting, a closing, responses to all questions, and request for details with elaboration.

## **Question 2**

***What was the intent of this question?***

This task assessed writing in the presentational communicative mode by having the student write a persuasive essay to submit to a Spanish writing contest, in which they were supposed to answer the question “Is it better to participate or not to participate in social media?” The essay topic was based on three sources (two print sources and one audio source), which presented different viewpoints on the topic. In the persuasive essay, the student was asked to present the sources’ different viewpoints on the topic, as well as to indicate and thoroughly defend their own viewpoint on the topic. The student was asked to use, refer to, and appropriately identify information from all the sources in order to support their essay. The student was asked to organize their persuasive essay into clear paragraphs.

***How well did students perform on this question?***

The mean score for the Standard Group was 3.21 out of a possible 5 points, with a standard deviation of 1.08. The mean score for the Total Group was 3.20 out of a possible 5 points, with a standard deviation of 1.09. What were common student errors or omissions?

Students often did not refer to all three sources even though the instructions required them to do so.

Students did not always write a persuasive essay in which they gave their viewpoint, but often simply answered the question and included personal experiences in order to support the information that they had read/heard in the sources. They wrote very long and opinionated essays in which they shared their thoughts with the reader, but they did not always try to “persuade” the reader of their viewpoint. Even though students listened to the audio source twice, many students appeared unprepared or unable to use that resource effectively.

***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 explain and practice writing with a special focus on the persuasive essay. They must explain to students that they have to give their own point of view (there is no right or wrong point of view) from the beginning and support it with information from all three sources.

Teachers should tell students that they must (not just should) include information from all of the sources. Teachers need to help students expand their vocabulary, so that they are not forced to “recycle” words found in the sources, and they should expose students to all kinds of texts so that they are able to easily handle the different types of sources that could be used in the exam.

### Question 3

#### *What was the intent of this question?*

This task assessed speaking in the interpersonal communicative mode by having the student respond as part of a simulated oral conversation. The task elicited responses based on a recorded conversation and an outline that asked the students to perform different linguistic tasks. Instructions in both English and Spanish informed students that they had 1 minute to read the directions and 1 minute to read a preview of the conversation. Shortly thereafter, the conversation began and students had 20 seconds to record their response. Students were instructed to participate in the conversation as fully and appropriately as possible.

#### *How well did students perform on this question?*

The mean score for the Standard Group was 3.09 out of a possible 5 points, with a standard deviation of 1.28. The mean score for the Total Group was 4.02 out of a possible 5 points, with a standard deviation of 1.29.

#### *What were common student errors or omissions?*

Students had to immediately engage in the exchange and many of them misinterpreted Raul's comments as if he were looking for a roommate rather than soliciting an opinion about moving into a student dorm at the university. The third exchange caused grammar errors for many students when they attempted to address the exchange using the *if* clause construction. For prompt five, some students confused the word "*campus*" for "*campo*" and spoke about an experience or trip that they took to the country.

#### *Based on your experience of student responses at the AP<sup>®</sup> Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?*

Throughout the year the teacher should simulate this task by creating similar conversations and practicing them often. This will familiarize the student with the format of the exam and it will help students give full and thorough development of the topic. This is especially important with this task; some students are unfamiliar with the idea of conversing with a recorded interlocutor. Teachers should provide students with guidance toward creating their own simulated conversations.

Students, teachers, and proctors should be familiar with the operation of the equipment and with the examination protocol prior to the testing day so that the students' responses are recorded properly. As the number of digital recording increases annually, there is an increase in the number of problems that are encountered at the Reading; most are due to the fact that they have not been saved appropriately as .mp3 files. Teachers should encourage their proctors or technicians on campus to familiarize themselves with the format of the response and how to burn it correctly to the CD. Teachers should work with the technology department of their schools by simulating the examination.

### Question 4

#### *What was the intent of this question?*

This task assessed speaking in the presentational communicative mode by having students make a comparative oral presentation on a cultural topic. Students were allotted 4 minutes to read the topic and prepare the presentation and then 2 minutes to record the presentation. The students were asked to make a comparison between their own community and to an area of the Spanish-speaking world. Students were required to demonstrate their understanding of the cultural features of the Spanish-speaking world.

The question had two parts: first, a preamble that asked the students about the opinion of people in their home community regarding the importance of language learning; the second part asked the students to compare their observations of their home communities with those of a region in the Spanish-speaking world they knew through their studies or personal experience. The students had 1 minute to read the instructions, 1 minute to read the question, and 4 minutes to prepare their presentation. After that, they were given 2 minutes to record their presentation.

***How well did students perform on this question?***

The mean score for the Standard Group was 3.18 out of a possible 5 points, with a standard deviation of 1.43. The mean score for the Total Group was 3.11 out of a possible 5 points, with a standard deviation of 1.58.

***What were common student errors or omissions?***

Some students misinterpreted the question and addressed the curricular theme of *La belleza y la estética* rather than the question. Others often gave their opinion rather than expressing the perspective of their community. One error was that some students only addressed one community and did not make any comparison to a target culture community.

***Based on your experience of student responses at the AP<sup>®</sup> 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 for teachers to clarify the terms of what constitutes the target culture for the purposes of this exam (the Spanish-speaking world) as opposed to cultural areas that are geographically, politically, or culturally connected with the Spanish-speaking world, but are not in this category (i.e., Brazil and other non-Spanish-speaking areas in Latin America).

For students who are members of a Spanish-speaking community in the United States, emphasize the focus of the task. The goal is to make a topic-specific cultural comparison between the home community and *another* community in the target culture as defined. Teachers also need to emphasize organization and focus on linguistic elements that improve cohesion and proper transitions in oral presentations.