



Student Performance Q&A:

2002 AP[®] German Free-Response Questions

The following comments are provided by the Chief Reader about the 2002 free-response questions for AP German. *They are intended to assist AP readers as they develop training sessions to help teachers better prepare their students for the AP Exams.* They give an overview of each question and its performance, 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 included. Readers are encouraged to use their expertise to create strategies for teachers to improve student performance in specific areas.

In the following section, each part of the free-response section is first described with the rationales for posing that question, followed by notes on general performance and common errors or omissions made by students.

Paragraph Completion

What was intended by the question?

This part of the examination is designed to elicit precise and accurate responses. Students demonstrate that they understand the text passage by inserting a correct German word or words in a blank. In developing passages, the Development Committee often uses authentic material, slightly modified. In this case, the Committee opted for a fairy tale composed specifically for the exam. The deletions for testing purposes offer the candidate the opportunity to demonstrate a breadth of vocabulary, sensitivity to structure and idiom, and precision of spelling and capitalization, all within the context of the passage. The vocabulary and idioms required to fill in the blanks were all relatively high frequency.

How well did students perform?

Compared with the same section on the 2001 exam, the selection for 2002 yielded lower scores for the standard group than in 2001, but higher scores than in 2000 (mean raw scores: 10.71 in 2000, 13.79 in 2001, 11.42 in 2002).

Readers generally found the section to be well designed; their impression was that the scores reflected the candidates' abilities. At the debriefing they found it to be a fair and reasonable approach to this type of exercise and also found the variety of aspects tested to be good.

What were common errors or omissions?

Capitalization or lack of capitalization was sometimes a cause for lost points. Problems on individual questions were as follows.

1. *der, welcher*. The most common error was in case form of the relative pronoun.
2. *zu*. Readers noticed no pattern of error.
3. *Familie, Bande*, etc. The most frequent errors were in word choice.
4. *da, weil*. The most frequent errors were in word choice.
5. *musste, mußte, konnte*. Errors came most frequently in the verb forms.
6. *Tages, Morgens*, etc. The most frequent errors were in word choice.
7. *ob, wann*. The most frequent errors were in word choice.
8. *mit, aus*. The most frequent errors were in word choice.
9. *in, innerhalb von, nach, nicht vor, binnen*. The most frequent errors were in word choice.
10. *Nacht, Puppen, Früh*. The most frequent errors were in word choice.
11. *müde, vergesslich, ärgerlich*, etc. The most frequent errors were in word choice.
12. *war, gewesen ist, wurde, geworden ist*. Errors occurred most frequently in the verb forms.
13. *finden, sehen entdecken, orten*, etc. The most frequent errors were in word choice.
14. *sich, die Dinge, das Zeug*, etc. Readers noticed no pattern of error.
15. *brachte, stellte, rollte*, etc.; also *hinein* or *herein* + V. The most frequent errors were in word choice.
16. *den, seinen, diesen, jenen, den* + adjective. The most frequent errors were in case forms.
17. *am, an dem*. The most frequent errors were in case forms.
18. *er, dieser, der König, jener, der, derjenige*. The most frequent errors were in case forms.
19. *Haus, Schloss, Schloß, Gebäude, Heim, Landhaus, Traumhaus, Holzhaus, Traumschloss, Traumschloß*. The most frequent errors were in word choice.
20. *sind*. The most frequent errors were in word choice.

Composition

What was intended by the question?

In selecting topics for compositions, the Development Committee looks for areas of relevance and interest to AP students. Topics and subtopics are chosen to allow candidates to demonstrate a broad range of vocabulary and structure. For higher scores, candidates needed to write a good answer to the question and show a sustained control of structural features of German. High-scoring compositions normally employed complex sentences, linked by cohesive discourse strategies.

The 2002 question asked the candidates to make a case for living in the city or the country. Candidates almost without exception had much to discuss, and readers were on the whole satisfied that language samples could be accurately and fairly scored. An important component in the design of the question was the requirement that candidates provide counterarguments to their own view. This higher-order cognitive task allowed the more advanced learners to distinguish themselves.

How well did students perform?

The question for 2002 elicited responses evaluated comparably to responses in recent years. (Mean score in the standard group was 6.24 on a scale of 9.) Candidates easily related to the context of the question and there were very few performances that simply missed the mark. Consequently the scores reflect what candidates did with what they knew. Readers at the debriefing were quite positive about the question, expressing the conclusion that candidates were able to relate readily to the context.

What were common errors or omissions?

The most common omission was the failure to discuss counterarguments. An equally telling discriminator was control of the language.

Directed Response

Nummer 1. *Ich fahre heute in die Stadt einkaufen. Kann ich dir etwas mitbringen?(I'm going to town. Can I bring you anything?)*

What was intended by the question?

The committee intends the first prompt to be a relatively simple task. The first question is designed to ease candidates into this part of the examination. Often a list is acceptable as an answer. In this case, the candidate could have given a list of items to be picked up in town: bread, butter, soap, etc. This question could be answered adequately with high-frequency vocabulary items; complex structures were not required. The question provided an opportunity to employ polite forms with the subjunctive.

How well did students perform?

The question fulfilled its function of providing candidates with a low-stress start to the section. Paradoxically, it turned out to be the question receiving the lowest scores, mostly because many miscomprehended the last sentence of the prompt.

What were common errors or omissions?

Many candidates confounded the dative with *mitbringen* for the accusative with *mitnehmen*, and responded that they would be happy to go along to town. Some elaborated on how good they were at shopping.

Nummer 2. *Du wirst heute Abend nicht zu Hause sein? Was hast du denn vor? (You won't be home this evening? What are your plans?)*

What was intended by the question?

This prompt provides an opportunity to elaborate about the immediate future, and is open ended with regard to expected communicative structure.

How well did students perform?

This item provided a greater opportunity to elaborate than did the first one. Candidates who fully comprehended the question in general performed well.

What were common errors or omissions?

The most frequent problems stemmed from miscomprehension of the second sentence. Perhaps because the first four words of the sentence seemed to anticipate a question in the perfect tense, many candidates answered by elaborating on things they had “done” (in the perfect tense).

Nummer 3. *Warum kommst du mit dem Bus zur Schule? Du fährst doch sonst immer bei deinem Freund im Auto mit. (Why did you ride the bus to school? Don't you usually ride with your friend?)*

What was intended by the question?

This item provided an opportunity for the candidates to improvise a small story about a friend and his car, and an opportunity to narrate events in the past.

How well did students perform?

This prompt proved the most difficult challenge on the directed response portion of the exam. The more advanced candidates often told entertaining stories in their 20 seconds.

What were common errors or omissions?

Many candidates failed to address both aspects of the prompt, the bus ride and the past history with the friend. A number of less advanced candidates confounded the gender of the friend.

Nummer 4. *Was würdest du im Restaurant machen, wenn du dein Geld zu Hause vergessen hättest? (What would you do in a restaurant if you had left your money at home?)*

What was intended by the question?

The item provided an opportunity for narration in the context of a contrary-to-fact-conditional. The Development Committee, by its placement of the question in fourth position, had seen this as the most challenging task.

How well did students perform?

Student performance was much better than expected. Even the least advanced candidates were able to give a sensible answer.

What were common errors or omissions?

Readers ascertained no particular pattern.

Nummer 5. *Du, wir haben gestern Hannas Geburtstag gefeiert. Warum bist du nicht gekommen? (Yesterday we had Hanna's birthday party. Why didn't you come?)*

What was intended by the question?

The prompt offers an opportunity to make an excuse. The demands for vocabulary were not particularly demanding and were fairly open ended.

How well did students perform?

Candidates performed well.

What were common errors or omissions?

No particular pattern of error or omission was noted.

Nummer 6. *Wie war denn euer Picknick am See? Erzähl mal! (How was your picnic at the lake? Tell me about it!)*

What was intended by the question?

The final item intends to give the candidates a positive conclusion to the section. The committee wanted to give candidates another chance to narrate.

How well did students perform?

Students performed well on this item.

What were common errors or omissions?

No pattern was observed.

Picture Series

What was intended by the question?

This section is designed to elicit a narration by the candidate using visual stimuli. Unlike the directed responses, in which creativity is required to come up with answers to the questions posed, this section requires candidates to tell the story suggested by the pictures. This presupposes an ability to name objects in the pictures, describe activities depicted, and use cohesive discourse strategies to form a narrative. The vocabulary needed to narrate the 2002 sequence was almost all relatively high frequency and allowed students to show how they can deal with structure without fumbling for obscure words.

How well did students perform?

Because candidates did not need to reflect much on low-frequency vocabulary, they did well on this task. The relative lack of activity in the first three pictures allowed candidates to move on with the narration and cover an adequate amount of the story.

What were common errors or omissions?

There were few problems with vocabulary resources; candidates could almost always find appropriate resources to express the content of the pictures. An exception was finding appropriate vocabulary for spilling a drink and the resulting spot on the dress in the fourth picture. These difficulties provided an opportunity for those who were truly advanced colloquial speakers to shine; for those with less experience in German-speaking countries, describing this key event was an exercise in circumlocution. Making do when one does not have all the words is an important skill in the project of second language acquisition, and many rose to the challenge in creative ways.

The least coherent productions offered the listener no help in connecting individual utterances into a connected narrative. The lack of time adverbs, of gender agreement across picture frames, and of logical connectors resulted in the lowest scores.

Candidates who dramatized the picture series generally gave a less impressive performance. AP teachers are encouraged to train their students to narrate and avoid an overuse of direct speech for the picture series.