



## **Student Performance Q&A: 2005 AP<sup>®</sup> Spanish Literature Free-Response Questions**

The following comments on the 2005 free-response questions for AP<sup>®</sup> Spanish Literature were written by the Chief Reader, Gwyn E. Campbell of Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia. 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: Poetry Analysis**

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

This question assesses the student's ability to write an essay analyzing the way in which a given theme is treated in a poem that is not on the required reading list for the course. On this year's exam, the selection was a four-stanza poem from José Martí's collection titled *Versos sencillos*. Students were asked to analyze the theme of friendship in the poem and discuss how poetic language and devices communicate that theme.

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

Each of the exam's three essay questions counted for 20 percent of the exam score. Each question received two scores. The first score was for the content of the analysis, which counted for 70 percent of the question's score; the second score was for language, which counted for 30 percent.

The poem selected for the poetry analysis question this year was short, and its theme of friendship was readily accessible to students. This question had the highest mean score of the three questions on the exam, and both the content and language mean scores were higher than the respective mean scores for this question on the 2004 exam.

<b>Standard Group*</b>			
	<b>2004 Mean Scores</b>	<b>2005 Mean Scores</b>	<b>Possible Points</b>
<b>Content</b>	5.3	5.33	9
<b>Language</b>	3.27	3.69	5

<b>Total Group</b>			
	<b>2004 Mean Scores</b>	<b>2005 Mean Scores</b>	<b>Possible Points</b>
<b>Content</b>	5.	5.1	9
<b>Language</b>	3.31	3.94	5

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

Essays with scores in the high range were well developed and provided specific textual references in a clear, thorough analysis of the poem's theme of friendship and of the poetic devices Marti uses. Essays in the midrange, while showing an understanding of the poem and the question, were less well developed, less explicit, and contained errors of analysis. Essays that fell in the lower ranges often lacked focus; included unsupported, unclear, or incorrect statements; and contained description that outweighed an analytical response.

Errors of omission related to the requirements of the question itself included:

- discussing the theme of friendship without focusing on the question and/or the poem itself;
- paraphrasing the poem in a descriptive essay;
- listing poetic devices present in the poem and even defining the devices themselves without integrating them into an analysis of how they communicated the poem's theme;
- failing to include specific textual references; and
- failing to mention form (e.g., the progression of the theme in each stanza) related to content

General issues related to essay writing included:

- lack of an introduction or thesis statement;
- poor development of the analysis;
- weak conclusions, such as one that merely repeated the opening statement or summarized the previous paragraphs; and
- lack of organization.

Common language problems included:

- frequent grammatical errors;
- limited vocabulary; and
- lack of control of spelling, including accent marks.

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\* The Standard Group does not include students who speak the language at home or who have lived for more than two months in a country where Spanish is the native language. Decisions on cut-off scores are based on the Total 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?***

The poetry question appears on the exam every year. While the poem for the 2005 question did not come from the required reading list, students did have the advantage of having the text before them while they planned and wrote their responses. By reading new poems and practicing ways to respond to this type of prompt under conditions and constraints that are similar to those of the exam, students refine their skills and become better able to produce a well-developed and coherent treatment of the question. Teachers can further help by teaching their students how to explain their ideas clearly, so the exam Readers are not left to infer the points students have made.

Although the instructions for this question did not specifically suggest that students set aside a few minutes to read the question, think about the topic, and outline a response, this is a useful technique for them to practice. Their planning process should begin with a careful and thorough reading of the entire question or prompt. Teachers might wish to teach their students to underline or circle each part of the question (e.g., how the theme of friendship is presented, how the poetic devices and technical devices are used to reflect this theme) in order to better ensure that they address the entire question. Students also benefit from reserving a few minutes of their allotted time to proofread, correct, and/or edit their work.

As part of their preparation for answering the question and to help them better outline their essays, students can be taught to read through the poem carefully, making note of the forms, poetic devices, and rhyme that support the poem's theme as indicated in the prompt. It is important to analyze these poetic devices and integrate comments on their usage into the essay instead of merely listing them. In order to develop students' ability to notice and understand the manner in which such devices are used, an effective classroom strategy is for teachers to discuss poetic devices and language in the context of actual poems and explore how they serve to communicate ideas, feelings, and so on.

Well-developed, well-organized essays are key to students' success with this question. Teachers can help by doing the following:

- give students writing practice (e.g., prewriting, outlining, writing, editing) in class;
- use small groups or the entire class in the prewriting phase of the process to brainstorm collectively and briefly about the poem's theme, its poetic devices, and its language;
- teach students how to write effective thesis statements and conclusions as well as how to develop and properly support their ideas in the analysis;
- help students learn how to stay on task by pointing out superfluous or irrelevant commentaries in their students' work and showing how these detract from the overall analysis;
- teach students to distinguish analysis from paraphrasing or plot summary;
- encourage students to write more than one draft of an essay on any given poem; and
- develop and practice a list of vocabulary, expressions, and transitional phrases in order to link sentences and paragraphs and integrate comments of an analytical nature.

Exam Readers assess both the content and language in responses to the poetry analysis question (as they do for the other two questions on the exam). When evaluating student work, AP teachers should also provide feedback in both of these areas. It is also helpful for students to be familiar with the scoring guidelines for the questions on the AP Exam. These guidelines, along with sample questions from exams from previous years, are available on AP Central® (<http://apcentral.collegeboard.com>). Students can practice with poems and questions from these past exams and evaluate their own essays as a class or in small groups by reviewing the student samples and accompanying scoring commentaries.

## Question 2: Thematic Analysis

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

In the thematic analysis, two types of questions are possible: one type involves comparison of a given theme or topic in two works from the required reading list; the second type is an analysis of a given theme in one work from the reading list. This year's question was the latter type. Students were asked to write an essay treating the theme of how an individual grapples (*lucha*) with life's obstacles in one work chosen from a list of five titles.

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

The five works listed in the question were familiar to most students and clearly offered a good selection from which to choose. Students earned slightly higher mean scores on the thematic analysis question this year than they did last year.

Standard Group			
	2004 Mean Scores	2005 Mean Scores	Possible Points
<b>Content</b>	4.74	5.25	9
<b>Language</b>	2.89	3.22	5

Total Group			
	2004 Mean Scores	2005 Mean Scores	Possible Points
<b>Content</b>	4.44	4.85	9
<b>Language</b>	2.96	3.5	5

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

The most common errors and omissions included:

- inability to deal with the concepts of *lucha* and *obstáculos* and/or to fully integrate the two;
- superficial development of the theme;
- excessive plot summary and minimal analysis;
- insufficient supporting examples from the text;
- responses so general and vague as to suggest that students had not read the work;
- irrelevant or erroneous statements; and
- poor organization or limited ability to write a well-developed essay.

***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?***

A successful response to the thematic analysis question begins with a careful reading of the question and an answer that fully treats the theme, in this instance, the concepts of both “grappling” and life’s “obstacles.” Taking the time to think through the topic, jot down relevant notes concerning the character(s) through whom this theme is evidenced, and outline the essay briefly is a vital initial step that helps students write an essay that shows a cohesive treatment of the theme. Teach students to set aside a few minutes at the end of the suggested time allotment in order to proofread, correct, and edit their work.

Better essays begin with an introduction or thesis statement, followed by good supporting paragraphs and a strong conclusion. The best essays contain specific examples to illustrate the student’s ideas, and they are presented in a logical, systematic, and explicit manner. Focus is paramount in a thematic essay. Additionally, when answering this type of question, it is essential that students clearly state which work they are treating and limit their responses to that one work as stipulated by the question’s instructions. Teachers should stress to their students the need to read all of the works on the required reading list so that they will have a more fully developed perspective and a better choice when faced with this question on the exam.

Teachers are encouraged to refer to the suggestions for the poetry analysis question to develop additional strategies for improving their students’ performance on the thematic analysis question.

### **Question 3: Text Analysis**

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

The text analysis question has two possible variations: one involves an analysis of a critical commentary about one work from the required reading list; the other is the analysis of an excerpt from a work on the reading list with two separate questions to answer. This year’s question was of the latter type. It was based on Juan Rulfo’s “No oyes ladrar los perros.” In part (a) of the question, students were asked to analyze the characteristics of the dialogue in the fragment of the short story printed in the exam booklet. Part (b) asked students to discuss the significance of the work’s title in relation to the passage cited and the rest of the story.

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

The mean scores indicate that students who took the 2005 exam were better prepared for this type of question than those who took the 2004 exam, and the work in question was generally familiar to them. Nonetheless, the text analysis question again received the lowest mean score of the three essay questions on this year’s exam.

Standard Group			
	2004 Mean Scores	2005 Mean Scores	Possible Points
<b>Content</b>	4.48	5.08	10
<b>Language</b>	2.30	3.17	5

Total Group			
	2004 Mean Scores	2005 Mean Scores	Possible Points
<b>Content</b>	3.47	4.71	10
<b>Language</b>	1.87	3.47	5

The chart below shows the breakdown of content mean scores for 2005. Each part could earn up to 5 points.

Standard Group	Breakdown of 2005 Content Scores
Part (a)	2.72
Part (b)	2.36

Total Group	Breakdown of 2005 Content Scores
Part (a)	2.43
Part (b)	2.28

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

Although the exam’s instructions clearly stated that students were expected to write two separate short responses, some students still wrote one single response combining part (a) and part (b). Readers considered the single response and assigned a score to each of the two parts, since the topics shifted within the responses. Two clearly separate responses, as the instructions had directed, would have helped these students fully answer each part of the question and likely would have improved the scores of some.

The story this year was quite accessible to students and more familiar perhaps than that which appeared in the text analysis question on last year’s exam (Ricardo Palma’s “El alacrán de Fray Gómez”). However, a number of students were more prone to include plot summary than an analysis of the characteristics of the dialogue in the fragment cited, or to write repetitious responses. Many students had difficulty demonstrating that they were familiar with the whole work, since they limited themselves to commenting on the title in relation to the passage cited. Although students should be accustomed to dealing with the analysis of literary texts, many still have problems with a close reading and a focus on salient aspects of literary style, for example.

***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 text analysis question can be of two different types, so teachers should ensure their students have practice in answering both, preferably under circumstances that are similar to those of the exam. The type of question on this year’s exam required two separate answers, responses that are normally shorter than the fully developed essays required for the poetry analysis and thematic analysis questions.

Because the passage for this type of question can come from any work on the required reading list, it is important that students read all of the works in unabbreviated form in Spanish. It is helpful for any final in-class review to include questions of literary style as well as questions on theme, plot, and character study. Teachers can further help their students by including units on literary analysis with every genre they study and with all of the required texts. Close reading and careful consideration of the vocabulary used and other linguistic or stylistic features of the texts will be beneficial to students throughout their AP Spanish Literature course and, certainly, in preparation for the analytical, thematic, and textual questions on the exam.