



Student Performance Q&A:

2006 AP® French Literature Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2006 free-response questions for AP® French Literature were written by the Chief Reader, James Day of the University of South Carolina in Columbia. 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: *Analyse*

What was the intent of this question?

The *analyse* consists of two directed questions that require a close reading of a text that the students have read and discussed in class during the year. The questions this year dealt with Anne Hébert's intimate and evocative poem, "*Nos mains au jardin*." Subquestion 1 asked students to establish links between the structure of the poem and the evolution of the poet's feelings. Subquestion 2 asked for commentary on the relations between the notion of *nous* (that is, *we*) in the poem and images of nature.

How well did students perform on this question?

For many, Anne Hébert's poetry is rich in sensation and imagery but open to multiple interpretations. For this reason, the exam questions directed students to comment either on poetic technique (subquestion 1) or on meaning in a clearly defined context (subquestion 2, *nous* and nature). The careful wording of these questions was intended to encourage responses that could sidestep possible obscurities. Other factors, however, such as command of written French and proficiency in expository writing, produced scores that were somewhat lower than in a typical year.

The Standard Group's* content mean score on the two *analyze* questions was 5.52 out of a possible 10 points; the Total Group's content mean score was 5.60 out of a possible 10 points. The language mean score for the Standard Group was 3.24 out of a possible 5 points; the language mean score for the Total Group was 3.40 out of a possible 5 points. The total *analyze* mean score was 8.76 for the Standard Group and 9.00 for the Total Group, both out of a possible 15 points.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Some students gave the appearance of not having learned enough literary and analytical terms with which to write incisively. Vagueness is often a problem; students must learn how to express cause and effect so as to bring out the *significance* of their observations.

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?

- Make sure that all texts have been studied, and in full (not based on summaries).
- Illustrate the difference between assertion and analysis/explanation/demonstration.
- Familiarize students with the scoring criteria (available on AP Central).
- Train students in the effective use of literary and analytical terms.

Question 2: *Essai*

What was the intent of this question?

The literary *essai* allows students to show how well they can write about a literary work they have read and discussed in class. In 2006, students were to choose either *L'Ecole des femmes* or *Candide* and to write on the didactic dimension of the work. Specifically, students were to identify the most important "lessons" put forth in the work and to comment on the author's methods of persuasion.

How well did students perform on this question?

Overall, students understood the basics of the question and were able to supply examples of "lessons" in the work chosen. Less advanced students often had trouble distinguishing between main and minor lessons, and more than a few students found it difficult to discuss the methods of persuasion.

The content mean score was relatively high: 5.36 for the Standard Group and 5.45 for the Total Group, both out of a possible 9 points. These scores equaled or exceeded those for 2005. The language mean scores, however, were all lower than in 2005: 3.13 for the Standard Group and 3.34 for the Total Group, both out of a possible 5 points. The total essay mean score was 8.49 for the Standard Group and 8.79 for the Total Group, both out of a possible 14 points.

* The Standard Group does not include students who speak French at home or who have lived for more than one month in a country where French is the native language. Decisions on cutoff scores are based on the Total Group.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Inadequate or absent discussion of methods of persuasion
- Needless rehashing of the question itself, with respect to the difference between *divertir/éduquer* and *implicite/explicite*

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?

- Provide ample practice in writing essays, both timed and untimed.
- Help students learn how to craft a cohesive essay and how to choose pertinent supporting examples.
- Use the Internet and a search engine such as Google to locate French or francophone sites where the essays of francophone students are posted. Study the terms, expressions, and strategies used by such students in their literature essays.