



## Student Performance Q&A:

### 2006 AP® Latin: Vergil Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2006 free-response questions for AP® Latin: Vergil were written by the Chief Reader, John Sarkissian of Youngstown State University in Youngstown, Ohio. 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 V1 (Translation)

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

The question measured students' ability to translate literally by asking them to translate as literally as possible lines 378–385 of Book 1 of the *Aeneid*.

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

Student responses spanned the full range of scores, but there were more scores at the lower end than at the higher. Most students received credit for segments 1 (*Sum pius Aeneas*), 3 (*raptos ... Penates*), 4 (*ex hoste*), 7 (*super aethera*), and 12 (*matre dea monstrante viam*). Many students were very strong on the first three lines (segments 1–9) but had difficulty with the remaining lines. The mean score was 3.25 out of a possible 9 points.

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

The most common mistakes were vocabulary errors: for example, “I drag” for *veho* (segment 2), instead of “I carry”; and “monster” for *monstrante* (segment 12), instead of “showing.” Other words such as *classe* (segment 5), *summo* (segment 9), *secutus* (segment 13), and *supersunt* (segment 14) also caused problems. All but the strongest students had difficulty with *conscendi* (segment 11), *convulsae* (segment 15), *egens* (segment 16), and *peragro* (segment 17). Students were surprisingly weak on the numerical terms *bis* (segment 10), *denis* (segment 10), and *septem* (segment 14). Incorrect case use was another problem. Students had trouble differentiating among words ending in *-a*, confusing accusative neuter plurals (*data fata*, segment 13) with singular ablatives (*fama*, segment 6). Noun–adjective agreement was a problem (*notus* was often made to modify *fama* in

segment 6), as were nouns being mistaken for adjectives (*Italiam* as “Italian” in segment 8 and *Libyae* as “Libyan” in segment 17). Many students, confused by the fact that the passage was written in the first person, translated using the third person. The many participles also troubled students who did not know what they modified or what the tenses were. Many simply omitted common words such as *qui* (segment 2), *mecum* (segment 5), and *-que* (segment 15). More than a few did not recognize the proper names *Penates* (segment 3), *Phrygium* (segment 11), and *Euro* (segment 15), and confused *Iove* (segment 9) with Juno.

**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 emphasize the importance of the direction to “translate . . . as literally as possible” and impress upon their students that they should be precise in agreement of nouns and adjectives, tenses of verbs, and the rendering of participial phrases. A basic knowledge of scansion can help students distinguish the ablative long *-a* from the short neuter *-a*. Knowledge of the epic in general, particularly with regard to proper nouns and place names, can be helpful. Students should practice dividing reading passages into translation segments and scoring their own translations in order to better understand the AP scoring guidelines. Finally, there is no substitute for a good knowledge of Vergil’s vocabulary and the fundamentals of Latin grammar.

## Question V2 (Translation)

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

The question measured students’ ability to translate literally by asking them to translate as literally as possible lines 560–566 of Book 2 of the *Aeneid*.

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

Students received the full range of scores, but a majority fell in the 1–4 range. They generally received credit for segments 13 (*me circum*) and 18 (*ad terram*), which were discrete prepositional phrases. Many also successfully translated segment 8 (*deserta Creusa*). The fact that the passage consists of three sentences allowed students to “start afresh” if any of the sentences caused confusion. The increasing difficulty from the beginning to end of the passage helped ease the students into the translation. The mean score was 2.96 out of a possible 9 points.

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

Students had particular difficulties with specialized vocabulary, for example, *subiit* (segment 2); *aequaevum* (segment 5), which was confused with *aequus*; *direpta* (segment 9); *lustrum* (segment 11), which was confused with *lux* and English “lust”; *copia* (segment 12); and *salu* (segment 15), which was confused with *sal*. The difficulty with translating *subiit* resulted in students’ commonly construing subjects as objects, which potentially affected four segments: 3 (*cari genitoris imago*); 8 (*deserta Creusa*); 9 (*et direpta domus*); 10 (*et parvi casus Iuli*). In addition, the verb *misere* (segment 15) was often confused with forms of the adjective *miser*. Students frequently did not recognize the indirect question in segment 12. The alternate third-person plural perfects *deseruere* (segment 14), *misere* (segment 15), and *dedere* (segment 16) were often mistranslated as present indicative or taken as infinitives. Also, *corpora* in segment 17 often was treated as the subject of these verbs. Many students missed the sense of entire segments because they overlooked conjunctions such as *et*, *ut*, and *aut*.

***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 encourage students to review the entire syllabus, especially passages they read at the beginning of the course. They should stress the importance of reading Latin in “sense units” rather than translating word by word.

### **Question V3 (Long Essay)**

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

This two-part question assessed students’ understanding of the ways in which Vergil creates sympathy for Marcellus in lines 868–886 of Book 6 of the *Aeneid* and asked them to posit the reasons why he wrote the passage in this way. The first and major part of the question tested their ability to analyze a Latin passage by requiring them to support their arguments with direct citations from throughout the passage. Latin citations were not required for the second part.

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

Students who recognized the passage and could handle the Latin did an extremely good job. A majority of students, however, were not able to answer both parts of the question adequately. Although identification of Marcellus as a historical figure was not required, and it was possible to write a good essay without that knowledge, few students who did not recognize Marcellus in context were able to do so. Many anchored their arguments with a few words such as *heu*, *puer*, *fata*, and *miserande*. A number of students either did not address the second part of the question or gave implausible explanations. The mean score was 2.63 out of a possible 6 points.

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

Many students seemed daunted by the difficult grammar of this passage and consequently made more numerous and more careless errors than usual. Failure to recognize the addressee caused great confusion, as *O gnate* was thought to be an address to Marcellus, and *Heu, miserande puer, . . . tu Marcellus eris* was thought to be an address to Aeneas. *Superi* was not recognized as vocative and simply taken as an attribute of Marcellus (he was “outstanding”). Verb forms and tenses were a problem: students did not recognize subjunctives in lines 12–14 and accordingly spoke of Marcellus’s unattained potential as if it had actually been achieved. Similarly, many treated the future tense as past, again causing confusion about the meaning of the passage. On the positive side, many students made a clear effort to organize their essays and cited Latin properly, either writing out the lines or citing line numbers and then translating.

***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 develop strategies for recognizing two-part questions: for example, checking the question again during and after the writing of the essay. Teachers should also help students develop methods for recognizing minor characters and identifying passages in context, perhaps with exercises based on released AP Exams, with an entire question consisting of passages to identify. Grammatical features such as the subjunctive, the vocative, and interrogative adjectives should be reviewed in context and their significance stressed. Students should be aware

that introductory paragraphs that present a thesis rather than simply restating the question tend to lead to more coherent essays. Students should use the reading period to structure and organize their thoughts and to select strong supporting evidence from the passage. They should be discouraged from citing single words, as often these are not sufficient to reflect the context accurately.

#### **Question V4 (Short Essay: Passage from the *Aeneid*)**

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

The question requested that students assess whether or not Turnus is portrayed as heroic in lines 491–496 and 500–505 of Book 10 of the *Aeneid*. The question also tested their ability to analyze a Latin passage by requiring them to support their arguments with Latin citations from throughout the passage.

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

Students who began with a sound definition of *heroic* and cited Latin from the entire passage did quite well, but many had trouble formulating a useful definition and failed to discuss all parts of the selection. The question gave students great scope in defining what constitutes a hero. The majority opted for a modern idea of hero rather than a Roman or Homeric conception. The styles of citation varied widely, but most students were able to cite a line or two in support of their arguments. The mean score was 2.94 out of a possible 6 points.

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

One common error was to use the concept of the “tragic flaw/tragic hero” as a general explanatory principle for this passage. Students relying on this problematic idea tended to avoid close readings of the text, and their analysis was often too general or vague. There was a propensity to assume that excessive pride or hubris could be invoked to explain almost any perceived hostile or negative actions on the part of the characters. Although strong essays could be based on modern or ancient conceptions of heroism, students who tried to mix modern and ancient perspectives usually ended up diluting the force of their arguments. Many assumed that only one man (Aeneas) could be the true hero or protagonist in the epic, and hence Turnus by default had to be the unheroic antagonist. A number of students could not cite Latin accurately and relevantly from all parts of the passage, and quite a few did not treat the last four lines at all. Some students attempted to use assonance and alliteration and other figures of speech as substantive parts of their argument, sometimes assuming that merely pointing out the presence of such devices constituted analysis.

##### ***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 spend some time dealing with the conception of a hero in the ancient epics. Students should be encouraged to read the entire question carefully and to make sure that they know what tasks are being asked of them, and they must bear in mind that they are always asked to cite Latin from throughout the passage. They should also be counseled to use poetic devices as support for an understanding of the content rather than in a vacuum.

## **Question V5 (Short Essay: Entire *Aeneid*)**

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

The question assessed students' control of the *Aeneid* by asking them to discuss how minor characters affect the plot. The students were to choose one name from each of two lists.

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

The full range of scores was represented, but the majority of students wrote merely adequate or limited essays. Although a significant number misidentified characters or provided few details, other students showed excellent knowledge of the story line. A tendency to summarize rather than to analyze the impact of the characters on the plot adversely affected the quality of many essays. Of the choices presented, Iarbas was the most commonly selected character from the first set, whereas Juturna and Allecto were almost equally chosen from the second set. The mean score was 2.90 out of a possible 6 points.

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

One problem was that some students tried to alter the question into one that they felt confident answering. Another factor that weakened many essays was the use of supposition and hypothesis in place of analytical discussion. Limited details and compressed treatment kept many students from achieving higher scores.

### ***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?***

Over the years there has been real improvement in the answers given to question V5. To facilitate further improvement, teachers are asked to remember that the entire content of the *Aeneid* is tested in this question. They should focus on recognition of all significant characters, themes, events, and passages throughout the epic. Suggested methods for preparation include practice essays, review packets, and class discussion. Students should be admonished to read the question carefully and follow the directions precisely, not simply plug in answers from practice essays they have covered in class. Students should also be encouraged to use the reading period wisely to outline their responses.