



Student Performance Q&A:

2006 AP[®] World History Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2006 free-response questions for AP[®] World History were written by the Chief Reader, Kenneth R. Curtis of California State University in Long Beach, and the Question Leaders for the exam: C. Barton Keeler of Palmetto Ridge High School in Naples, Florida; Sally West of Truman State University in Kirksville, Missouri; and Merry Wiesner-Hanks of the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee. 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?

The document-based question asked students to use eight documents to analyze the social *and* economic effects of the silver trade while demonstrating specific analytical skills. The documents contained ample evidence to support a number of different thesis statements ranging from class divisions to the effects of inflation to globalizing international trade. Each of the documents offered a clear opportunity for point-of-view analysis. Moreover, the language of many documents prompted such analysis based on tone. None of the documents could be categorized as purely social or purely economic, which resulted in a variety of grouping opportunities. The need for additional documents was clear, given the absence of documentary evidence from Japan, Portugal, Chinese peasant farmers, or South American miners.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score of 3.27 out of a possible 9 points was significantly lower than in the two previous years (the mean was 3.91 in 2005 and 4.32 in 2004). The reason for the lower scores in 2006 had less to do with student performance than with changes in the generic scoring guidelines that were introduced this year. Specifically, students are now required to use *all* the documents; they are required to analyze point of view in *two* documents; and the requirements for *analysis* have been augmented.

Despite the lower scores associated with the rigor of the scoring process, the mean score on the document-based question was still the highest of all the free-response questions in 2006, indicating that most students were able to work with documents in at least a basic way. This year's question and the documents were clear and specific. As a result, many more students attempted to marshal the evidence in support of a thesis statement. Essays were generally longer this year than in the past. Thesis statements continued to improve from those in previous years as more students moved beyond simple restatements of the question to more analytical statements. As might be expected, better thesis statements have resulted in improved use of evidence taken from the documents. In short, more students are using evidence from the documents rather than merely quoting from them.

The 2006 responses to the document-based question also demonstrated improvement in grouping of the documents and explaining the need for additional documents. The language of the question suggested a social and an economic grouping of the documents. Although many essays followed this logic, many others went beyond this simple categorization to more analytical assemblages that included the origins of the documents, the authors' occupations or frame of reference, socioeconomic class, and the changing character of international trade. Students who addressed the need for additional documents also explained the purpose of such documents to a greater degree than in years past.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Point of view continues to be the most problematic issue in responses to the document-based question. It is clear that a large number of students do not understand point of view or its significance in historical analysis. Many continue to treat it simply as "bias." For example, essays often indicate that an author is biased because of nationality or occupation but then offer no explanation as to *why* or *how* the author's nationality or occupation affects his or her point of view. The 2006 responses also demonstrated a new phenomenon in that a large number of essays included a paragraph at the end that addressed general characteristics of point of view but failed to analyze the viewpoint of specific documents. This may be a reflection of classroom attempts to teach point of view more effectively, but it did not significantly improve scores because students spoke only in generalizations.

In general, essays that asked for an additional document did a better job of explaining the rationale for that request than in past years. However, there continue to be large numbers of essays that make no attempt at all to respond to this prompt. The need for additional documents may be the last point of the generic scoring guidelines, but it should not necessarily be the last point of a student 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?

The 2006 essays suggest that thesis statements and the analysis of the documents in groups have gotten better. To a lesser extent, this is also true of the use of evidence. Teachers can further improve performance by instructing students in the meaning of point of view and its importance in historical analysis. It is clear that many of the essays were written by students who had advanced writing skills and extensive historical knowledge but who lacked any cognizance of point of view or its role in understanding primary sources. Students who were able to analyze point of view and explain why an additional document was needed were better equipped to write a clear and

analytical essay. Student performance clearly improves when students understand the *underlying rationale* of point-of-view analysis and requests for additional documentation in relation to historical-thinking skills, and when those tasks are performed in relation to overall document analysis and not as separate tasks pegged on to the end of the essay.

Question 2

What was the intent of this question?

Students were to discuss and analyze significant changes and continuities in political structures and institutions, and in cultural practices and institutions, during the late classical period in one of three civilizations: Chinese, Roman, or Indian. In all three, this era saw the breakdown of centralized political institutions due to internal problems and external threats. Students were to place these developments within a world historical context.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score on the continuity/change-over-time question for 2006 was 3.02 out of a possible 9 points (intermediate between the previous years' means of 2.46 in 2004 and 3.40 in 2005). Student responses varied considerably. Some essays included a great deal of specific information, going beyond standard textbook coverage of the issue and including very sophisticated analysis of causation and discussion of world historical context. Many students grasped the major developments in this era, particularly if they wrote on Rome, and were thus able to score in the middle range. Answers focusing on China tended to elicit the most general and vague answers, though this was also true of the other two civilizations. Fewer students wrote on India than the other two choices, but their essays appeared stronger and addressed the topic of the question more directly.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Students were much better at tracing changes than continuities; many completely forgot to discuss continuities at all, or they did so but went far beyond the time period ("This is why the Roman Empire has been important until today"). Some had clearly been taught that the continuity/change-over-time question should be answered with a tripartite beginning, middle, and end structure, but they did not relate this structure to any actual developments within the time period, just choosing several arbitrary dates and then discussing things very vaguely or with incorrect information. Students often included a lot of information about developments outside the time frame, such as the Qin dynasty or the transformation of Rome from a republic to an empire, which often left them little time for writing about the actual period; information from outside the time frame received no points. Some students discussed economic developments without relating these to culture or politics. Many forgot to include even the vaguest reference to world historical context.

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 need to be reminded to consider continuities as well as changes and to include some mention of continuities in their thesis statements. They need to develop clearer thesis statements that elaborate on or qualify the changes and continuities discussed in the essay and do not simply

restate the question. “There were many important changes and continuities” is *not* a thesis statement.

Points of evidence need to be accurate for the time period *and* specific. “There were new religions” is not specific enough to count as evidence, and “The Roman Republic became an empire” is outside the time period. “The Roman Empire became a republic” is not accurate for any time period, though many students wrote this.

Some change-over-time questions lend themselves to a tripartite beginning-middle-end structure, which helps move students away from turning a change-over-time question into a compare-and-contrast question; that is, it helps them avoid merely saying “At the beginning of the period things were like this, and at the end, things were like that.” Not every change-over-time question can fit this pattern, however, so students should not be encouraged to use it as a trick but to tie their answers to things that really happened during the period under consideration. In this year’s question, for example, China would fit the tripartite structure well in terms of political change—late Han dynasty, regional kingdoms, reunified Sui/Tang dynasties—though very few essays were this specific. India and Rome would *not* fit a tripartite pattern, however. It is more important for students to address the *process* of change than to try to impose a rigid pattern for every question.

Students need to be encouraged to include words that indicate analysis in their essays, such as *because*, *as a result*, and *therefore*. With these, a series of narrative sentences discussing things that happened in chronological order can be turned into analysis of causation. For example, the following is not analysis: “The Roman Empire grew very large and hard to defend. The emperor divided it into two parts. Barbarian invaders won.” This is analysis: “The Roman Empire grew so large that the emperor divided it into two parts. Because it was hard to defend, barbarian invaders won.” It is, however, important that words indicating analysis not be used without the analysis itself. Students should learn how to compare and contrast processes and how to communicate their analysis.

Question 3

What was the intent of this question?

This question asked students to do six things: address revolution in two countries; explain similarities and differences between their revolutionary processes (compare and contrast); and focus on the goals and outcomes of those revolutions. The question asked about *goals and outcomes*, rather than causes of revolution, and this emphasis ran throughout all the points on the scoring guidelines.

The intent was to allow students to compare revolutionary *process* in regard to goals and outcomes. This meant that students could write to their strengths by comparing selected points in each country’s history after the dates specified. They did not have to know the entire chronology to achieve a high score, although thorough chronological coverage was a reason to give expanded core points.

To achieve any points for evidence, students needed to include specific and accurate historical evidence for *both* countries, although the pieces of evidence did not have to be explicitly comparative. Direct comparative statements, however, had to link both countries explicitly, rather than relying on the Reader to interpret a parallel essay structure. Likewise, the comparative analysis had to link both countries in a statement (not necessarily a single sentence) explaining a difference or similarity in revolutionary goals or outcomes.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score on the comparative question was 2.60 out of a possible 9 points, the lowest for all the 2006 free-response questions (a score equivalent to the 2.56 mean on the same question in 2005 and higher than the 2.03 mean on the comparative question in 2004). As in past years, the low score on the comparative question was linked to the very large number of students who either left the question blank or who wrote an answer that was not worthy of a single point. Excluding the large proportion of blank responses and scores of 0 on this question, student performance was quite evenly spread between 1 and 6 points. Few students achieved the full basic core of 7 points, although of those who did, many went on to receive expanded core points. The reason for the dramatic falloff after 6 points was the new requirement for comparative analysis.

More students attempted thesis statements than in the past, and more went beyond simply restating the question, although strong thesis statements were relatively few. Most of those who scored above 1 point had no difficulty in addressing all parts of the question, but many clearly knew one country better than the other they chose to write about. This is to be expected, but students should strive for some balance in a comparative essay; a student might do extremely well on China, for instance, and give up on the other country, resulting in a score of 0 when even an attempt at comparison would have garnered some points. Generally, students who knew something about both countries addressed direct comparison much better than we have seen in the past. With more instruction on comparative analysis in the future, we expect to see a similar improvement for that category also.

What were common student errors or omissions?

The most common student errors were:

- a. Addressing causes of revolution without tying them to goals or outcomes. For instance, a discussion of the harshness of life under the Russian tsars would not be considered relevant evidence unless it was tied to the subsequent outcomes that resulted from those conditions.
- b. Addressing the Mexican independence movement (early nineteenth century) rather than the Mexican Revolution (twentieth century). Many students wrote about freedom from Spanish colonial rule, perhaps because that was all they knew about Mexico. A stronger sense of chronology might have helped such students avoid this problem by selecting another country.

The most common omissions were:

- a. A substantive thesis statement. The bar was set quite low for a minimally acceptable thesis, but too many students are still just repeating the question.
- b. Comparative analysis. More students are addressing direct comparison than in the past, but far fewer are taking these comparisons to the next step of a linked analysis, *explaining* a difference or similarity.

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 still need to help students learn to write thesis statements that address all parts of the question and go beyond merely restating it. In particular, a comparative question will always require similarities and differences; students should take care to address both in the thesis.

The most important skill in need of development for this question is comparative analysis. Encourage students to go beyond merely stating a similarity or difference to explaining it for both countries. One way to do this might be to instruct students to always follow up a direct comparison with a clause such as: “The reason for this is . . .” Often, the historical evidence that could be used for comparative analysis is already in the essay, but the student needs to link it together explicitly. For example, an essay might discuss the major supporters of revolution in China and Russia in two separate paragraphs, but unless the student brings these points together, they do not become *comparative* analysis. The following example would achieve this: “One difference between the two was whom the revolution was focused on. The Chinese focused on the peasants, because they were the outstanding majority in China. The Russians focused on the proletariat, or working class, as Karl Marx had called for in the Communist Manifesto.”

Students perform at a much higher level when they use analytical categories to guide their analysis. For example, on this year’s essay students might have focused on land redistribution as a goal and/or outcome of two of these revolutions and analyzed similarities and differences appropriate to that topic. The result would have been a much stronger essay than those that gave separate descriptions of each of the two cases followed by an attempt at comparison that appeared as an afterthought.