



Student Performance Q&A: 2001 AP[®] German Free-Response Questions

The following comments are provided by the Chief Faculty Consultant regarding the 2001 free-response questions for AP German. *They are intended to assist AP workshop consultants 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. Consultants are encouraged to use their expertise to create strategies for teachers to improve student performance in specific areas.

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 choosing passages, the Development Committee uses authentic material, often edited to eliminate very low frequency vocabulary or structures. The deletions for testing purposes offer the candidate the opportunity to demonstrate a breadth of vocabulary, sensitivity to structure and idiom, precision of spelling and capitalization, all within the context of the passage. This year's passage was a letter written by a student in Berlin to his grandmother. 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 2000 exam, the selection for 2001 yielded higher scores (mean raw scores: 10.71 in 2000, 13.79 in 2001). The higher scores in 2001 may reflect a slight change in the Development Committee's intentions for the paragraph completion, specifically in constructing passages with contexts very likely to be familiar to the students. To the extent the committee was successful with this item, the students' performance is more likely to depend on the usage of familiar lexical items than comprehension of less frequent items and contexts.

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. *ist*. The most frequent error was *hat*.
2. The most frequent error was *dich* for *dir*.
3. *mich*. Case errors were the most frequent.
4. There was no perceptible pattern in errors.
5. The very few errors were in the form of the word *haben*.

6. *des*. Case errors were the most frequent.
7. *in*, etc. The most frequent errors were in word choice.
8. *weit*. The most frequent errors were in word choice.
9. *kann, könnte*. The most frequent errors were in the form of the verb.
10. *Woche*. The most frequent errors were in word choice.
11. The most frequent errors were case errors.
12. The most frequent errors were in word choice.
13. *Weil*, etc. The most frequent errors were in word choice.
14. Readers noted no perceptible pattern to the errors.
15. *spielen*. The most frequent errors were in the form of the verb.
16. *ist*, etc. The most frequent errors were in word choice.
17. *Brüder*, etc. The most frequent error was an incorrect plural form.
18. *Schluss*, etc. The most frequent error was word choice resulting from misunderstanding of the context.
19. *nach*, etc. The most frequent errors were in word choice.
20. *Grüße*. The most frequent error was spelling.

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 need to show a sustained control of verb tenses and moods, pay attention to case usage and write complex sentences, linked by cohesive discourse strategies. The 2001 question focused on the students' relation to technology and the media. Candidates almost without exception had a lot to say about this topic, and readers were on the whole satisfied that they had good language samples to deal with.

How well did students perform?

The question for 2001 elicited responses evaluated marginally higher than the parallel question in 2000. Students had no trouble relating to the context of the question (the role of technology in their lives) and there were very few performances that simply missed the mark. Consequently the scores reflect what candidates did with what they knew.

What were common errors or omissions?

The most common omission was the failure to discuss the disadvantages in the forms of technology under consideration. The question explicitly asked this and those compositions that did not follow this instruction had to be downgraded. The true discriminators had less to do with content however, than with control of the language.

Directed Response

Nummer 1. Was hast du den ganzen Tag in der Stadt gemacht? (What did you do all day in the city?)

What was intended by the question?

The first prompt is intended to be fairly open to ease students into this part of the examination. Often a list is acceptable as an answer. In this case, the student could have given a list of activities appropriate to an urban setting: shopping, movies, restaurants, etc. All of these can be expressed with high frequency vocabulary items, and complex structures are not required to answer the question. The question provided an opportunity to use past-tense forms.

How well did students perform?

Almost all candidates answered the question well with lists of activities. The past-tense markers were more fully developed and more consistently employed in the score range of 4 to 5.

What were common errors or omissions?

Many candidates did not attend to the past tense, or employed past tense forms inconsistently.

*Nummer 2. Was? Du kannst morgen nicht mit zum Fußballspiel kommen? Warum nicht?
(What? You can't come to the soccer game tomorrow? Why not?)*

What was intended by the question?

This prompt provides an opportunity to give an excuse, one of the crucial communicative functions. It also uses adverbial time reference to the future.

How well did students perform?

This item is slightly more difficult than #1, and students did not do as well, but only marginally so.

What were common errors or omissions?

Only infrequently did they fail to actually try to excuse themselves. More frequently the lower-scoring candidates failed to recognize the future time frame, sometimes even assumed that the game was yesterday.

*Nummer 3. Es ist schon Mitternacht! Warum bist du noch nicht im Bett?
(It's already midnight! Why aren't you in bed already?)*

What was intended by the question?

This item provided a second opportunity to give an excuse.

How well did students perform?

Students performed slightly better on this item than on the second, possibly because there is no relevant time reference in the question. Most mentioned homework as the reason for staying up late. Many responded to a "Mutti" or mother figure.

What were common errors or omissions?

Readers did not perceive a pattern in the omissions and errors.

*Nummer 4. Sie haben Ihr Flugzeug verpasst! Wie ist das nur passiert?
(You missed your plane! How did that happen?)*

What was intended by the question?

The item provided an opportunity for narration. Projection into the scene of the question required imagining a fairly specific setting and problem, and provided many chances to go wrong. Furthermore the item depended entirely on understanding *verpasst*, not an extremely high frequency word in German. The Committee intended it as the most difficult prompt in the directed response section.

How well did students perform?

As expected, the performance on this prompt was below the level of the others. Only the best students were able to narrate a coherent reason for missing the plane while using appropriate past-tense markers.

What were common errors or omissions?

Many said little or nothing. Others gave an answer that had nothing to do with airports or being late.

*Nummer 5. Du bleibst also in den Sommerferien zu Hause. Warum willst du denn nicht wegfahren?
(You are staying home for the summer vacation! Don't you want to get away?)*

What was intended by the question?

The prompt offers an opportunity to give an explanation. The demands for vocabulary were not particularly demanding and were fairly open-ended.

How well did students perform?

The performance was about the same as for #3.

What were common errors or omissions?

No particular pattern of error or omission was noted.

*Nummer 6. Du bist aus den USA und sprichst so gut deutsch! Wo hast du das gelernt?
(You are from the US and speak such good German. Where did you learn it?)*

What was intended by the question?

The final item intends to give the students a positive conclusion to the section. The Committee further wanted to give them a chance to show appreciation for the irony possibly embedded in the compliment.

How well did students perform?

Students performed well on this item. It was particularly rewarding for readers to hear sincere testimony from so many candidates about their own German teachers.

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 student using visual stimuli. Unlike the directed responses – in which creativity is required to come up with answers to the questions posed – this section requires students to tell a 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 2001 sequence was 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 students 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; students could almost always find appropriate resources to express the content of the pictures. The truly difficult items like *Spanner* (wrench) in picture 4 and *Schildkröte* (turtle) in picture 2 could easily be left out.

There was a weakness in managing transitions and using cohesive devices to link sentences and produce a narrative. Students 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.