



Student Performance Q&A:

2004 AP[®] German Language Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2004 free-response questions for AP[®] German Language were written by the Chief Reader, Truett Cates of Austin College in Sherman, Texas. 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.

Paragraph Completion

What was the intent of this question?

This part of the exam is designed to elicit precise and accurate responses. Students demonstrate that they understand the text passage by filling in a blank with a correct German word or words. When creating these passages, the Development Committee often uses authentic material, slightly modified. In this case the committee opted for a letter composed specifically for the exam. The deletions for testing purposes offered students the opportunity to demonstrate a breadth of vocabulary, sensitivity to structure and idiom, and precision of spelling and capitalization, all within the context of the passage. The vocabulary and idioms required to fill in the blanks were all relatively high frequency.

How well did students perform on this question?

Compared with the same section on previous exams, the selection for 2004 yielded somewhat lower scores. The table following shows the Standard Group mean scores for recent years. (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 German is the native language. Decisions on cut-off scores are based on this group.)

Standard Group			
Year	2002	2003	2004
Points Possible	20	20	20
Mean Score	11.4	12.6	9.3

Total Group			
Year	2002	2003	2004
Points Possible	20	20	20
Mean Score	12.9	13.7	10.7

Readers generally found the selection to be well designed; their impression was that the scores reflected students' ability. At the debriefing Readers said they found the selection to be a fair and reasonable approach to this type of exercise and the variety of aspects tested to be good.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Capitalization or lack of capitalization was sometimes a cause for lost points. Problems on individual questions were as follows.

Item #	Correct Answers	Common Errors
1.	<i>dass, daß, warum, wieso, weshalb</i>	Wrong conjunction
2.	<i>als</i>	Wrong conjunction
3.	<i>habe, hatte, hab, hab'</i>	Incorrect verb forms
4.	<i>gehört, geträumt, geschwärmt, erfahren, gewusst, gewußt, gesprochen, geschrieben, erzählt, geredet</i>	Incorrect verb forms
5.	<i>Mal</i>	Inappropriate item
6.	<i>machen, gehen, wandern, laufen, wählen, erkunden, versuchen, probieren, marschieren, schaffen, latschen, erledigen, mögen, unternehmen, planen, absolvieren, bewältigen</i>	Incorrect verb forms
7.	<i>um</i>	Wrong preposition
8.	<i>wollte, sollte, mochte</i>	Incorrect verb forms
9.	<i>Jahr, Mal</i>	Inappropriate item
10.	<i>als, weil, da, wie, dass, daß, in dem, während, sobald</i>	Wrong conjunction
11.	<i>ich, man</i>	Wrong word
12.	<i>schlief, wartete, pennte, ruhte mich aus, wachte nicht auf, schnarchte, träumte, blieb, lag, sang, habe geschlafen, habe gewartet, habe gepennt, habe mich ausgeruht, habe geschnarcht, habe geträumt, bin geblieben, habe gelegen, bin nicht aufgewacht, habe gesungen (plus acceptable adjectives, like <i>fest, gut, and super</i>)</i>	Incorrect verb forms
13.	<i>fühlte, glaubte, bewegte, fand, (13) wo + (14) fühlte wie (13) habe + (14) gefühlt wie</i>	Incorrect verb forms
14.	<i>wie, wie noch</i>	No discernable pattern
15.	<i>sich, etwas, etwas Überraschendes, irgend etwas, irgendwas, die Einsamkeit</i>	No discernable pattern
16.	<i>am, nach dem, an dem, so um den, um den</i>	Case errors, wrong preposition
17.	<i>dem, meinem, diesem, jenem, dem weiteren, einem, halbem (plus possible adjectives, like <i>schwierigen, steilen, and einsamen</i>)</i>	Case errors
18.	<i>die, welche, weil sie (auch)</i>	Case errors
19.	<i>ein, sein</i>	Case errors
20.	<i>werde, will, würde, könnte, möchte, darf, sollte, soll, dürfte, mag, kann, muss, muß</i>	Incorrect verb forms

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 who offer students more practice with this form of exercise should expect better results on the paragraph completion, since one factor in student performance is familiarity with the task at hand. I do not think teachers profit by devising cloze passages that test particular points of grammar and vocabulary. It is more important for teachers to use cloze passages composed of fill-ins, not multiple-choice questions, to provide students with extensive practice with this form. A reasonable strategy is for teachers to simply remove every eighth or ninth word, regardless of its form, and then the next week do another similar exercise. All forms of language acquisition will lead to better scores on the paragraph completion section of the exam.

Composition

What was the intent of this question?

When selecting topics for compositions, the Development Committee looks for areas of relevance and interest to students. Topics and subtopics are chosen to allow students to demonstrate a broad range of vocabulary and structure. For higher scores, students need to write a good answer to the question and show a sustained control of structural features of German. High-scoring compositions normally employ complex sentences linked by cohesive discourse strategies.

This year's question asked students to imagine themselves as filmmakers and discuss the genre and audience for their next production and to describe their first scene. The exact wording of the question follows:

Stellen Sie sich vor, Sie sind Filmemacher. Was für einen Film drehen Sie als nächstes Projekt, z.B., eine Komödie oder einen Actionfilm?

Besprechen Sie in Ihrem Aufsatz die drei folgenden Punkte:

Warum interessieren Sie sich für diesen Filmtyp?

Für welches Publikum würden Sie diesen Film machen und warum?

Beschreiben Sie die erste Szene Ihres Filmes!

The weakest students sometimes failed to understand what was meant by *Publikum*. Students almost without exception had much to discuss, however, and Readers gave the question high marks for producing imaginative compositions. This higher-order cognitive task suggested by narrating a scene allowed the more advanced learners to distinguish themselves.

How well did students perform on this question?

This year's question elicited compositions that Readers evaluated somewhat higher than compositions in recent years, as the following table shows.

Standard Group			
Year	2002	2003	2004
Points Possible	9	9	9
Mean Score	6.2	5.6	6.3

Total Group			
Year	2002	2003	2004
Points Possible	9	9	9
Mean Score	6.7	6.2	6.8

There were very few performances that simply missed the mark. Consequently, the scores reflect what students did with what they knew, and the language samples could be accurately and fairly scored. Readers at the debriefing were generally positive about the question, expressing the conclusion that students were able to relate easily to the task demanded by the prompt and the context of the question.

The 2004 Standard Group's total mean score for writing was 15.6 out of a possible 29 points; the Total Group's total mean score for writing was 17.5.

What were common student errors or omissions?

The most common error was the failure to discuss the public for which the film would be produced or to give a cogent reason for why a student had chosen this public.

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 most productive classroom strategy for preparing for the composition part of the exam is to conduct frequent, timed, in-class writing sessions that are evaluated according to the same standards used at the Reading. These scoring guidelines are available at AP[®] Central (apcentral.collegeboard.com). To ensure that all students are familiar with the assessment scale, many teachers sometimes involve them in scoring their compositions according to the scoring guidelines, either in groups or in pairs. Samples from recent exams may be used to train students on the scale of expectations. Prompts that ask students to give arguments *and* counterarguments, as well as prompts that ask for a coherent narrative, provide students with especially good practice.

Directed Response

Students did well on these items and continued the trend of improved oral performances on the exam. Inspection of the total mean scores indicates that the overall performance on this year's directed responses section was highly comparable to those of 2002 and 2003, despite the changing of the scale from a maximum of five points per response to a maximum of six (see the following table). The Directed Response section of the exam continues to count as 12.5 percent of the total score.

Standard Group			
Year	2002	2003	2004
Points Possible	30	30	36
Mean Score	20.3	21.5	26.1

Total Group			
Year	2002	2003	2004
Points Possible	30	30	36
Mean Score	22.5	23.3	28.5

The next table gives the Standard Group's mean scores out of a possible six points for the 2004 individual prompts. From this table it is clear that the second prompt was overall the most challenging and the sixth was the easiest.

Standard Group	
DR #	Mean Score
1	4.2
2	3.6
3	4.5
4	4.6
5	4.4
6	4.8

Total Group	
DR #	Mean Score
1	4.6
2	4.2
3	4.9
4	4.9
5	4.8
6	5.1

Nummer 1. *Du hast am Sonntag Geburtstag. Was hast du denn vor?
(You have a birthday on Sunday. What are your plans?)*

What was the intent of this question?

The first prompt is intended to be a relatively simple task, designed to ease students into this part of the exam. Often a list is acceptable as an answer. In this case, students could have given a list of things they were planning to do for their birthday on Sunday.

How well did students perform on this question?

This question fulfilled its function of providing students with a low-stress start to the Directed Response section. Students performed well, but not as well as they might have had the question had more redundancy for the non-past time frame.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Many weaker students understood the question to be about a birthday in the past.

Nummer 2. *Wir können unseren Hund nicht auf die Reise mitnehmen. Was schlägst du vor?
(We can't take our dog along on the trip. What do you suggest?)*

What was the intent of this question?

This prompt provided students with an opportunity to suggest a solution.

How well did students perform on this question?

This prompt gave students a greater opportunity to elaborate than the first one did. Students who fully comprehended the question generally performed well. The strongest students were able to improvise a detailed suggestion, sometimes with a story about their own dog. Almost all were able to make some kind of suggestion.

What were common student errors or omissions?

This was the most difficult of all the prompts for students this year. The weaker students seemed to be confused by the number of persons involved in the scenario (I, we, you), and some attributed the dog to the wrong person. Others failed to understand the problem and gave a response about a dog rather than a solution.

Nummer 3. *Habe ich richtig verstanden? Du lebst nächstes Jahr im Ausland? Erzähl mal!
(Did I understand correctly? You are going to live abroad next year? Tell me about it!)*

What was the intent of this question?

This prompt gave students an opportunity to project into the future and show a little imagination about living somewhere else.

How well did students perform on this question?

Students rose to the challenge of this prompt, which the Development Committee felt was one of the most difficult. Most were prepared to respond to the request to narrate (*Erzähl mal!*), and this item provided Readers with interesting replies, which were often quite imaginative. Readers suggest that future exams should include a request to narrate. More advanced students generally seemed to show a better grasp of places and site-specific opportunities in Germany and Austria.

What were common errors or omissions?

The less advanced students sometimes misunderstood *Ausland* for *auf dem Land* and talked about peace and quiet, and so on.

Nummer 4. *Du bist gestern Abend so spät nach Hause gekommen. Wie hast du das deinen Eltern erklärt?*
(*You came home so late last night. How did you explain it to your parents?*)

What was the intent of this question?

As the fourth item in the sequence of directed responses, this prompt represented the Development Committee's best guess at the most challenging item. It offered students an opportunity to both give an excuse and to narrate in the past.

How well did students perform on this question?

Student performance was better than expected. Most were able to give a sensible answer. Few had any difficulty discussing excuses. The situation is perhaps a good model for a directed response because it touched on something that is quite close to the lives of most teenagers.

What were common errors or omissions?

The less advanced students sometimes failed to project into the past. Almost none failed to provide some kind of excuse, however.

Nummer 5. *Ich kann meine Schultasche nicht finden. Was haben wir denn gestern gemacht? Wo kann sie nur sein?*
(*I can't find my school bag. What did we do yesterday? Where can it be?*)

What was the intent of this question?

This prompt offered students an opportunity to narrate in the past and suggest a solution. The demands for vocabulary were not particularly rigorous and were fairly open-ended.

How well did students perform on this question?

Students performed well. Some spent more time narrating about yesterday; some spent more time thinking about the bag. The prompt's relatively greater length did not really disturb students. Indeed, some evidently used the extra few seconds to begin formulating their response.

What were common errors or omissions?

The weaker students often failed to respond to one part of the question; that is, they either talked only about yesterday or they talked only about the bag.

Nummer 6. *Du, das Wetter sieht nicht so gut aus. Ich weiß, dass du nicht gerne ins Kino gehst, aber ich will auch nicht zu Hause bleiben. Was sollen wir machen?
(Say, the weather doesn't look so good. I know that you don't like to go to the movies, but I don't want to stay home either. What should we do?)*

What was the intent of this question?

This final prompt was intended to give students a positive conclusion to this section of the exam. It encouraged them to list possibilities for plans, assuming bad weather and excluding the movies.

How well did students perform on this question?

Student performance on this item was the best of all. Often they made an imaginative list; sometimes they disagreed with the premise about not liking the movies. The relatively greater length of the item presented no difficulties. Indeed, greater length may allow for greater redundancy and therefore generate fewer instances of miscomprehension.

What were common errors or omissions?

No pattern was observed.

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 can expect excellence performances from their students if (1) their students have achieved mechanical mastery of the actual equipment that will be used for the exam, (2) the teachers maximize practice with the form of the exercise in the classroom and lab, and (3) the teachers foster familiarity with the standards of assessment (i.e., the scoring guidelines) used at the Reading. The essence of the exercise—a spontaneous oral response to an aural prompt—can be employed in a variety of classroom settings. Even practice with the entire class has some advantages, since students must cope with the pressure to perform in a short time and some may gain confidence by hearing others (“Oh, I can do that!”). Creative teachers may also find ways to have students practice in small groups and pairs, with and without the application of recording systems. Scoring guidelines for this task are available at AP Central.

Picture Series

What was the intent of this question?

This section is designed to elicit a narration from students by using six pictures. Unlike the directed responses, in which spontaneous creativity is sometimes required to come up with answers to the questions that are posed, this section requires students to tell the story after a period of reflection. The facts of the story are given. 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 sequence on this year’s exam was almost all relatively high frequency and allowed students to show how they could deal with structure without fumbling for obscure words. There was a marked contrast in the amount of detail in Pictures 1 and 2, which were filled with details of tangential value (e.g., a fisherman, swans, birds under the café tables, flowers on the tables, etc.) and Pictures 3 through 6, which were comparatively lean. This reflected the Development Committee’s desire to give students plenty to talk about at the outset but then relatively less detail in the later pictures so that they would stick to narrating rather than become sidetracked by tangential material.

How well did students perform on this question?

The story, while not dynamic, was well understood and generated good responses. Students in 2004 performed somewhat better than in previous years, as shown by the following table.

Standard Group			
Year	2002	2003	2004
Points Possible	6	6	6
Mean Score	4.0	3.7	4.2

Total Group			
Year	2002	2003	2004
Points Possible	6	6	6
Mean Score	4.4	4.1	4.6

The richness of familiar detail in the initial pictures allowed students to easily begin their narration. The narrative presented by the pictures was self-evident, and almost all students were able to get started on the task.

The 2004 Standard Group’s total mean score for the Directed Response and Picture Series sections was 30.3 out of a possible 42 points; the Total Group’s total mean score was 33.0.

What were common errors or omissions?

There were few problems with vocabulary resources; the principal exception was finding a word for “keys” and “lock up.” Students could almost always find appropriate resources to express the content of the pictures. For those with less vocabulary, describing the crucial event of leaving the keys in the café was an exercise in circumlocution. Making do when one does not have all the words is an important skill in the project of second language acquisition, and many rose to the challenge in creative ways.

The least coherent productions offered Readers no help in connecting individual utterances into a sensible narrative. The lack of time adverbs, of gender agreement across picture frames, and of logical connectors was characteristic of performances with the lowest scores.

Students who dramatized the picture series generally gave a less impressive performance than those who narrated. There is continued improvement in this regard, as teachers continue to encourage their students to narrate and avoid an overuse of direct speech for the picture series. Naming the characters did not seem to help students narrate, but the names some of them chose provided Readers with moments of levity.

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?

As in the Directed Response section, familiarity with the equipment used during the exam will contribute to the students' confidence in this exercise. Most important is the students' actual experience with producing oral narratives of the prescribed length. Frequency of practice and familiarity with the scoring guidelines will pay large benefits. Additionally, I recommend teachers give specific attention to lexical items and grammatical markers that lend cohesion to narratives.