



Student Performance Q&A: 2005 AP® French Literature Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2005 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 students have read and discussed in class during the year. The questions this year focused on Baudelaire's well-known poem "Correspondances." Subquestion 1 asked students to provide commentary on the various connections or parallels (*correspondances*) that appear in the poem. Subquestion 2 directed students to explain how the structure of the poem enables the development of Baudelaire's ideas.

How well did students perform on this question?

While Baudelaire's "Correspondances" is a lush, evocative poem, it may seem obscure to students who have not unlocked the meaning of certain key images (e.g., the forest as a temple). The poem on last year's exam, "Heureux qui, comme Ulysse," appears straightforward by comparison. Most students were able to interpret the *correspondances* at a basic level (subquestion 1), but relatively few were able to use the poem's structure to elucidate Baudelaire's *meaning* (subquestion 2). As a result, the scoring guidelines allowed for full credit if a student produced a good analysis that dealt only with the structure of the poem.

With this scoring adjustment, students did very well. The Standard Group's* content mean score

* 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 cut-off scores are based on the Total Group.

on the two *analyse* questions was 5.76 out of a possible 10 points; the Total Group's content mean score was 5.79 out of a possible 10 points. The language mean score for the Standard Group was 3.33 out of a possible 5 points; the language mean score for the Total Group was 3.45 out of a possible 5 points. The total *analyse* mean score was 9.09 for the Standard Group and 9.24 for the Total Group, both out of a possible 15 points.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Student essays in response to subquestion 1 (*Quelles correspondances Baudelaire établit-il dans ce poème?*) sometimes substituted only a list of *correspondances* for the required literary analysis. In general, clarity of expression and depth of analysis were noticeably more rare than needless repetition of literary devices.

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?

Often, if students paid closer attention to the instructions, they would earn a higher score. Students need to learn to recognize the various components of a question, to interpret the assigned task, and to organize their discussion. Their analysis should make pertinent and persuasive use of examples from the literary text at hand. Students should be familiar with the analytical terms that are used for both poetry (e.g., *strophe*, *rime*, *tercet*) and prose (e.g., *récit*, *monologue intérieur*, *intrigue*, *point de vue*), although they should be reminded that the simple naming of terms does not constitute an analysis of the text.

Question 2: *Essai*

What was the intent of this question?

The literary *essai* allows students to show how well they can write critically about a literary work they have read and discussed in class. This year the question asked students to assess the importance of fate or destiny in either *Candide* or *La Guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu*.

How well did students perform on this question?

This year's question was a good one, inspiring lengthy discussions of the works and allowing exam Readers to make use of all of the scores on the 9-point scale. The question's focus on the theme of fate or destiny prompted a considerable majority of the students to write about *La Guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu* rather than *Candide*. The satirical dimension of *Candide*, where a series of calamities debunks a form of philosophical optimism, was perhaps underappreciated.

The content mean score was relatively high: 5.36 for the Standard Group and 5.42 for the Total Group, both out of a possible 9 points. The language mean score was similarly good: 3.4 for the Standard Group and 3.54 for the Total Group, both out of a possible 5 points. The total essay mean score was 8.75 for the Standard Group and 8.95 for the Total Group, both out of a possible 14 points.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Not all of the students understood that *fatalité* and *destin* are essentially synonymous; some mistook *fatalité* to mean death. Plot summary in lieu of analysis (*Analysez l'importance de la fatalité ou du destin dans . . .*) is an eternal mistake.

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?

Instruct students to not merely *identify* a literary feature of a work but to *explain* its function, its use, its effect in the text. Teach the principles of a well-organized essay. Show students how to select examples from the text to support their interpretation and arguments.