



Student Performance Q&A: 2005 AP® German Language Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2005 free-response questions for AP® German Language were written by the Chief Reader, Wiebke Strehl 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.

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 inserting a correct German word or words in a blank. In developing passages, the German 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 the student 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?

This year's paragraph-completion section yielded a higher mean score than in 2004; however, the 2005 mean score was somewhat lower compared to the mean scores for 2002 and 2003. The following two tables show the Standard Group* and Total 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 the Standard Group.

Standard Group				
Year	2002	2003	2004	2005
Possible Points	20	20	20	20
Mean Score	11.39	12.59	9.29	10.88

Total Group				
Year	2002	2003	2004	2005
Possible Points	20	20	20	20
Mean Score	12.91	13.65	10.74	11.98

Readers felt that the section took a reasonable approach to this type of exercise and that the variety of aspects tested was good. Scores reflected students' abilities.

What were common student errors or omissions?

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

Item	Correct Answers	Common Errors
1	<i>D/dir, euch, Euch, der Familie, D/deiner Familie, „Name“, den Kindern, D/deinen (+adj.), Kindern (+ other possible, correct combinations)</i>	Inappropriate item
2	<i>an, für</i>	Wrong preposition
3	<i>fährst, unterwegs bist, radelst, reist, viel unternimmst, (herum)fährst, (herum)radelst</i>	Incorrect verb forms
4	<i>helfen, etwas raten, einen Rat geben, beistehen, aushelfen, behilflich sein, Beistand leisten, ein Fahrrad kaufen</i>	Incorrect verb forms
5	<i>einen, diesen, meinen (einen + appropriate adjective)</i>	Inappropriate item
6	<i>als</i>	Inappropriate item
7	<i>außer, abgesehen von, mit Ausnahme von</i>	Inappropriate item
8	<i>der, meiner, uns(e)rer</i>	Inappropriate item
9	<i>kaputt, verbeult, verbogen, zerstört, außer Betrieb, hin, unbrauchbar, unbenutzbar, ruiniert, im Eimer, nutzlos, demoliert</i>	Incorrect adjective
10	<i>gefährlich, riskant, gewagt, unsicher, problematisch, risikoreich, schwer</i>	Inappropriate item
11	<i>soll, sollte, solle, kann, könnte, könne, muss, muß, müsste, müßte, müsse, darf, dürfte, dürfe</i>	Incorrect verb forms
12	<i>auf</i>	Incorrect preposition
13	<i>zu, viel zu, furchtbar, schrecklich, tierisch, ungemain, unglaublich, sagenhaft, unfass/Bbar, unvorstellbar, sehr, so, unerhört, unheimlich, entsetzlich, verflucht, echt, total, ziemlich, wirklich (+ other possible, correct combinations)</i>	Inappropriate adverb

14	<i>zahlen, bezahlen, ausgeben, berappen, hinlegen, hinblättern, aufbringen, blechen, abdrücken, locker machen, lohnen</i>	Inappropriate verb forms
15	<i>fährt, kommt, kehrt, erscheint, hier (an)hält, vorbeikommt, pünktlich ist</i>	Incorrect verb forms
16	<i>wenn, weil, falls</i>	Incorrect conjunction
17	<i>meinen, den</i>	Case errors
18	<i>Bruder, Stiefbruder, Halbbruder</i>	Incorrect nouns
19	<i>ihr, ihnen, meinen Eltern, d/Deiner Schwester (Halb- und Stief), meiner Mutter, allen, den beiden, diesen beiden, es, ja, mal, kurz, einfach, bitte, das, besser, doch</i>	No pattern
20	<i>ruf(e), sprich</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?

Since one factor in student performance is familiarity with the task at hand, teachers who offer their students more practice with this form of exercise should expect better results on the paragraph-completion section of the exam. Teachers do not profit from devising cloze passages that test only particular points of grammar and vocabulary. What is more important is that they provide students with extensive practice with the type of question shown here. A reasonable strategy is simply to remove every eighth or ninth word in a passage, regardless of its form, and the following week do another similar exercise. All forms of language acquisition lead to better scores on this section of the exam.

Composition

What was the intent of this 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, 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.

The 2005 question asked students to take a position on the question of school uniforms and also to give counterarguments. The exact wording of the question was, *In vielen Schulen sind Schuluniformen Pflicht. Sind Sie dafür oder dagegen? Begründen Sie Ihre Meinung, und diskutieren Sie auch Gegenargumente dazu.*

How well did students perform on this question?

This year's question elicited compositions that, as the tables show, Readers evaluated somewhat lower than the compositions from recent years.

Standard Group				
Year	2002	2003	2004	2005
Possible Points	9	9	9	9
Mean Score	6.22	5.60	6.32	5.16

Total Group				
Year	2002	2003	2004	2005
Possible Points	9	9	9	9
Mean Score	6.70	6.16	6.76	5.64

Students related easily to the context of the question, and Readers saw very few performances that simply missed the mark. The prompt contained language that almost all of the students understood, even the weaker ones. Consequently, the scores reflected what students did with what they knew. Since the topic was related to school and clothing, students possessed sufficient vocabulary to discuss the issue.

The Standard Group's total mean score for writing (the paragraph-completion and composition sections) on the 2005 exam was 16.04 out of a possible 29 points; the Total Group's mean score was 17.62.

What were common student errors or omissions?

The most common error was the failure to discuss the counterarguments in detail or at length.

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 strategy for preparing students for the composition section of the exam is to conduct frequent, timed, in-class writing sessions that are evaluated according to the same standards used at the AP Reading. Scoring guidelines for all parts of the German Language Exam are available on AP Central® (<http://apcentral.collegeboard.com>). To ensure that all AP students are familiar with the assessment scale, many teachers periodically involve students, either in groups or in pairs, in the scoring of their compositions according to the guidelines. Actual student responses and scoring commentaries are also available on AP Central and can be used to enhance students' understanding of the scoring scale. Prompts that ask students to give arguments and counterarguments, as well as prompts that ask for a coherent narrative, provide students with exceptionally good practice.

Directed Responses

Students did well on these items, though inspection of the mean scores indicates that their overall performance on this section was somewhat lower than it has been in previous years. (Note that in 2004, the maximum score attainable per response went from 5 to 6 points.)

Standard Group				
Year	2002	2003	2004	2005
Possible Points	30	30	36	36
Mean Score	20.29	21.53	26.13	23.61

Total Group				
Year	2002	2003	2004	2005
Possible Points	30	30	36	36
Mean Score	22.54	23.31	28.46	26.04

The next two tables show the mean scores for the 2005 individual prompts along with those from the previous year. From these tables it is clear that the fifth prompt in the 2005 exam was overall the most challenging and the first was the easiest. The maximum score a student could receive for a response was 6.

Standard Group			Total Group		
Directed Response	2004 Mean Scores	2005 Mean Scores	Directed Response	2004 Mean Scores	2005 Mean Scores
Nr. 1	4.21	4.50	Nr. 1	4.61	4.79
Nr. 2	3.63	3.89	Nr. 2	4.19	4.33
Nr. 3	4.53	3.98	Nr. 3	4.89	4.39
Nr. 4	4.55	4.08	Nr. 4	4.90	4.46
Nr. 5	4.44	3.51	Nr. 5	4.83	3.97
Nr. 6	4.76	3.64	Nr. 6	5.05	4.11

Nummer 1. *Sag mal! Was machst du normalerweise nach der Schule?*
(Say, what do you usually do after school?)

What was the intent of this question?

The Development Committee intended the first prompt 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 the activities they do every day.

How well did students perform on this question?

This prompt fulfilled its function of providing students with a low-stress start to the section, and they performed well.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Some of the weaker students did not understand *normalerweise* and talked about something they were doing that day.

Nummer 2. *So ein herrliches Wetter heute! Wollen wir nicht etwas unternehmen? Ich möchte etwas draußen machen. Was schlägst du vor?
(What great weather today. Don't we want to do something? I would like to do something outside. What do you suggest?)*

What was the intent of this question?

This prompt gave students an opportunity to suggest at least one outside activity, and it offered the more advanced students an opportunity to use more advanced structures like the subjunctive.

How well did students perform on this question?

This prompt provided students with a greater opportunity to elaborate than the first prompt did. Students who fully comprehended the question performed well in general. This was the third most difficult of all the items for students. The weaker students seemed to be confused; the strongest students were able to improvise a detailed suggestion.

What were common student errors or omissions?

For many students the word *herrlich* (a low-frequency word) caused problems and led to the question being misunderstood. Many students thought it meant “horrible” and then suggested indoor activities. Use of the word *unternehmen* made this a fairly difficult item for students.

Nummer 3. *Mensch, wir haben gestern eine halbe Stunde auf dich gewartet. Wo warst du denn?
(Man, we waited for you for half an hour yesterday. Where were you?)*

What was the intent of this question?

This prompt provided students with an opportunity to use the past tense.

How well did students perform on this question?

Students were prepared to respond to this kind of prompt that gets an excuse as a response. Many began their response with an apology. Most students handled the item well.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Less-advanced students sometimes did not use past tense forms, even though the response structure they chose required it. Others were able to mark the tense, though not always accurately.

Nummer 4. *Du kaufst dir ein Motorrad? Bist du wahnsinnig?! Warum willst du denn Motorrad fahren?
(What? You're going to buy a motorcycle? Are you crazy?! Why do you want to ride a motorcycle?)*

What was the intent of this question?

This prompt encouraged students to use their imaginations when answering.

How well did students perform on this question?

This turned out to be the second easiest question for students, and performance was better than expected. Most students were able to give a good answer, and few had any difficulty discussing their reasons.

What were common student errors or omissions?

The least advanced students sometimes did not understand *Motorrad* or thought it was a *Fahrrad*. Although some did not seem to have learned *wahnsinnig*, most could gather its meaning from the context.

Nummer 5. *Ich habe gehört, du siehst nicht mehr fern. Stimmt das? Erzähl mal!*
(*I hear you don't watch TV anymore. Is that right? Tell me about it!*)

What was the intent of this question?

This prompt offered students an opportunity to talk about an unusual situation.

How well did students perform on this question?

This was overall the hardest prompt due to the way it was phrased. It separated the weaker students, who did not understand the question, from the better students.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Weaker students often failed to understand *fernsehen* and interpreted it as “not being able to see far” or “not being able to see at all”; some thought the speaker implied that the student “does not want to see them” anymore.

Nummer 6. *Nächste Woche haben wir den letzten Schultag. Was musst du noch für die Abschlussparty vorbereiten?*
(*Next week we have our last day of school. What do you still have to prepare for the graduation party?*)

What was the intent of this question?

The intent of this final prompt was to give students a positive conclusion to the directed-responses section. They were supposed to list the things that still need to be done for the party.

How well did students perform on this question?

This question was not as easy as the committee had thought it would be. In fact, it was the second hardest question.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Students appeared not to understand the concept of having to prepare for a graduation party. In the United States many students consider their prom, which is held a long time before the last day of school, to be their *Abschlussparty*, so the timing of the party may have confused them. Students also frequently misunderstood the word *vorbereiten*.

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 best performances from their students if they:

- give students the opportunity to achieve mechanical mastery of the actual equipment that will be used during the exam;
- maximize students' practice time with the form of the exercise in the classroom and lab; and
- foster students' familiarity with the standards of assessment (the scoring guidelines) used at the AP Reading. As mentioned above, the guidelines are available on AP Central.

The essence of the exercise, a spontaneous oral response to an aural prompt, can be used 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 (as they must when taking the AP Exam), and some may gain confidence from hearing the responses of others ("Oh, I can do that!"). Creative teachers may also find ways to practice in small groups and pairs, with and without the use of recording systems.

Picture Series

What was the intent of this question?

This section is designed to elicit a narration by the student using six pictures. Unlike the directed responses, in which spontaneous creativity is sometimes required to come up with answers to the questions 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.

How well did students perform on this question?

The story, while not dynamic, was mostly well understood and generated acceptable responses. Students, however, did not perform as well as they have in previous years.

	Standard Group			
Year	2002	2003	2004	2005
Possible Points	6	6	6	6
Mean Score	3.99	3.66	4.17	3.53

Total Group				
Year	2002	2003	2004	2005
Possible Points	6	6	6	6
Mean Score	4.43	4.13	4.57	3.98

The Standard Group's total mean score for speaking (the direct responses and picture series) on the 2005 exam was 27.14 out of a possible 42 points; the Total Group's mean score was 30.02.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Readers saw few problems with students' vocabulary. Students could almost always find appropriate words to express the content of the pictures. Even those with less vocabulary could tell a simple story. The least coherent recordings offered Readers no help in connecting individual utterances into a sensible narrative. The lack of time adverbs, gender agreement across picture frames, and logical connectors were characteristic of those performances with the lowest scores.

Students who dramatized the pictures series generally gave a less impressive performance than those who narrated it. There is continued improvement in this regard, however, as AP German 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-responses section, familiarity with the equipment used during the exam contributes to students' confidence with 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 pay large benefits. Additionally, teachers should give specific attention to lexical items and grammatical markers that lend cohesion to narratives.