

## **Student Performance Q&A: 2005 AP® Latin: Vergil Free-Response Questions**

The following comments on the 2005 free-response questions for AP® Latin: Vergil were written by the Chief Reader, John Sarkissian of Youngstown State University in Ohio. 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.

### **V1 (Translation)**

#### ***What was the intent of this question?***

This question measured students' ability to translate literally by asking them to translate as literally as possible lines 201–207 of Book 2 of the *Aeneid*.

#### ***How well did students perform on this question?***

Readers used the full range of scores. Most students received credit for segments 1 (*Laocoon . . . mactabat*), 5 (*taurum ingentem*), 7 (*a Tenedo*), 13 (*ad litora*), and 16 (*inter fluctus*). The mean score was 4.43 out of a possible 9 points.

#### ***What were common student errors or omissions?***

Incorrect meanings were the most common errors. Readers found these examples in the following segments.

- *Segment 2.* Students rendered *ductus* as “leader” or “was leading” instead of as a perfect passive participle.
- *Segment 3.* Students rendered *sacerdos* as “sacred” instead of “priest.”
- *Segment 4.* Students rendered *sollemnes* as “grave, sole, only” instead of “ceremonial, sacred.” They rendered *aras* as “breeze, air, sky, shores” instead of “altar(s).”
- *Segment 6.* Students rendered *angues* as “anguish” instead of “snakes.”

- *Segment 8.* Students rendered *alta* as “altars” instead of “the deep, sea.”
- *Segment 12.* Students rendered *pariter* as “quickly” instead of “together.”
- *Segment 17.* Students rendered *iubae* as “orders, commands, youth,” or any body part of a snake instead of “crests.”

Readers found other errors in the following segments.

- *Segment 4.* Students translated *sollemnes* adverbially or as modifying *taurum* instead of *aras*.
- *Segment 6.* Students failed to construe *angues* with *gemini*.
- *Segment 8.* Students translated *tranquilla* adverbially or as modifying *Tenedos* instead of *alta*.
- *Segment 9.* Students sometimes translated *horresco referens* as a supine “horrible to relate” instead of “relating [it], I shudder.”
- *Segment 11.* Students sometimes translated *incumbunt* as a generic verb of motion “come, approach, swim.” They did not account for *pelago*, perhaps because of the prepositional phrase *per alta*.

***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 should emphasize the importance of the instruction “translate . . . as literally as possible” and impress upon their students that they not render main verbs as participles, that they be sure to translate present participles as *-ing* forms, and that they be precise with regard to the agreement of adjectives and nouns. One way to help students understand the scoring guidelines is to have them score their own translations by segments.

## **V2 (Translation)**

***What was the intent of this question?***

This question measured students’ ability to translate literally by asking them to translate as literally as possible lines 930–936 of Book 12 of the *Aeneid*.

***How well did students perform on this question?***

Readers used the full range of scores, but the majority fell in the 1–4 range. Most students received credit for segments 1 (*ille . . . inquit*), 2 (*humilis supplex*), 12 (*talis . . . genitor*), and 18 (*vicisti*). A very large number of students did not attempt to translate the passage. The mean score was 3.03 out of a possible 9 points.

***What were common student errors or omissions?***

An exceedingly common error throughout the passage was the omission of conjunctions, for example, *-que* in *dextramque precantem* (segment 3), *et* in *fuit et . . . tibi . . . Anchises* (11), *et* in *et*

*me . . . redde meis* (15), and *seu in seu . . . mavis* (16). Several students had difficulty with participles: *precantem* (3), *protendens* (4), and *spoliatum* (17). Students had difficulty translating the two deponent imperatives *utere* (7) and *miserere* (13). Vocabulary problems included *senectae*, which students translated as an adjective modifying *Dauni* instead of as a noun “old age” (14), and *mavis* (16). Finally, in segment 17, students either mistranslated *lumine* (“light, life”) or failed to construe it as an ablative with *spoliatum*.

***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 must make every effort to finish the syllabus. Some students seemed to be attempting to translate this passage at sight, and others did not offer any translation at all.

### **V3 (Long Essay)**

***What was the intent of this question?***

This question tested specifically students’ understanding of the characterization of Aeneas as shown in *Aeneid* 1.92–101 and 1.198–209 by asking whether this characterization diminished or increased sympathy for him. The question also tested students’ ability to analyze a Latin passage by requiring them to support their arguments with Latin citations from throughout the passage.

***How well did students perform on this question?***

Readers used the full range of scores, with the vast majority clustered in the 3–4 range. Students who recognized both passages were able to write at least adequate essays. Very few students failed to identify at least one passage, but a surprising number failed to recognize the first passage. The mean score was 3.34 out of a possible 6 points.

***What were common student errors or omissions?***

Failure to recognize passage A was the most common error; some students thought Aeneas was still in Troy witnessing the deaths of his friends. Many students had difficulty making the connection between the characterization of Aeneas and the increase or decrease of sympathy for him, particularly in the first passage. In some less sophisticated essays students argued only that sympathy for Aeneas is increased because his friends had died or because he was going to have to face Scylla and the Cyclops. Too many students summarized the plot of Book 1 or talked in very general terms about Aeneas and Turnus, Dido, or the proto-Augustan hero without connecting their statements with the passages in question.

Sometimes grammatical errors contributed to students’ problems. For example, in the first passage some students cited *talia voce* (line 3) as “he spoke with such a voice” and then digressed at length about speeches and hyperbole, adding nothing to the question of sympathy. Very few students understood the infinitive of exclamation, and so they could not use the sentence containing *potuisse* (7) as a meaningful citation. In the second passage the failure to recognize the future *dabit* (2) and the perfect tense *accestis* (4) led students to put events in the wrong sequence.

An unfortunate and unexpected phenomenon was that some students answered the long essay question that appeared on this exam some 10 years ago, writing about Aeneas as a hero without

any reference to the matter of sympathy. Another problem was the number of students who discussed anaphora (*O* in both passages and *ubi* in the first passage or *per* in the second) without showing how this figure affected sympathy or characterization.

***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 should advise students to take full advantage of the reading period to go over the question several times in order to understand completely the requirements of the prompt. A concise and relevant introductory sentence stating the student's point of view is preferable to a digressive paragraph. After they have completed their essays, students should review them to ensure that Latin citations have been included, properly cited, and translated or paraphrased. Teachers should have their students practice identifying passages in context with attention to the speaker, addressee, and specific situation. Students should be advised not to try to compensate for their inability to handle the Latin by commenting on figures of speech and meter, or by retelling the plot of the entire epic. They should be encouraged to cite line numbers and use ellipses (. . .) rather than spending time writing out lengthy Latin passages. Conversely, vague citations like "in lines 1–10" are not convincing. The combination of Latin and English (e.g., "Aeneas *premit* the *dolorem* deep in his *corde*") without translation is not acceptable, except in the most sophisticated essays, where additional comments make it clear that the student understands the Latin.

#### **V4 (Short Essay)**

***What was the intent of this question?***

This question tested students' understanding of the Sibyl's address to Aeneas in *Aeneid* 6.83–94 by asking them to discuss the effect on the reader of the references to the past, present, and future in this speech. The question also tested students' ability to analyze a Latin passage by requiring them to support their arguments with Latin citations from throughout the passage.

***How well did students perform on this question?***

Readers awarded a generous number of scores of 2 and 3, but there were more scores of 4 and 5. Almost all of the students recognized *bella, horrida bella* (line 4) and *alius . . . Achilles* (7), though many had trouble with the rest of the phrase (especially *partus*). Many students were able to cite and construe enough Latin to formulate some sort of argument. An encouraging trend was that there were fewer cases than in previous years of students trying to construct major arguments by translating isolated words of Latin. The mean score was 3.28 out of a possible 6 points.

***What were common student errors or omissions?***

The common misunderstanding that the Sibyl is prophesying that Aeneas himself will be the founder of Rome led students in unproductive directions. Another common mistake was to interpret lines 11 and 12 as referring to Dido, not Helen; few students were actually able to develop this interpretation into a reasonably convincing argument. As anticipated, many students discussed fear and foreboding, but other students constructed good essays in which they argued that the effect on the reader is to elicit sympathy and pity for Aeneas and the Trojans. Others argued that the passage is supposed to help the reader follow the story of the *Aeneid*, an approach that did not work especially well unless the students discussed the pivotal nature of Book 6 as the

turning point in the epic. Some argued unsuccessfully that the passage has the effect of making the Sibyl credible because she knows the past and therefore must be accurate about the future. Another unsuccessful strategy was solely to discuss and emphasize verb tenses, to the exclusion of careful analysis of content. Students sometimes spent too much time on the initial and concluding paragraphs of their response to the detriment of constructing an analytical essay with sufficient discussion of the Latin text.

***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 need to discuss with students the full historical context and details of intricate passages like this one. Students should be encouraged to read the entire question carefully and to make sure they know what tasks it asks of them. They also need to remember that they are asked to cite Latin from “throughout the passage.” The best essays took a significant amount of the Latin text and clearly explained why it was cited in reference to a systematic argument.

## **V5 (Short Essay [Whole *Aeneid*])**

***What was the intent of this question?***

This question assessed students’ control of the *Aeneid* as a whole by asking them to discuss the *pietas* or lack of *pietas* displayed by certain characters.

***How well did students perform on this question?***

Readers used the full range of scores, but the majority of students wrote adequate or limited essays, earning scores of 3 or 4. Although a significant number of students were not adequately prepared to provide more than a superficial discussion of *pietas* and their chosen characters, there were many excellent essays with extremely full discussions. Of the choices presented, Anchises was by far the favorite, while Helenus and the boxers were seldom discussed. This was fortunate because most of those who chose Anchises were able to show fine examples of his *pietas*, while those who chose the others had more difficulty. The mean score was 3.33 out of a possible 6 points.

***What were common student errors or omissions?***

Students often failed to provide accurate details to illustrate the *pietas* of the characters they chose, because many did not have a clear recollection of the events involving their characters. One result of this was that the discussion was often uneven, with much more emphasis on one character than on the other. To complicate the problem, many students did not understand the concept of *pietas*, thinking that it was any random positive or negative quality.

***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 well aware of the entire content of the *Aeneid*. Teachers should focus on student recognition of all significant characters, themes, events, and passages throughout the epic. Suggested methods for preparation include practice essays, group review packets, and class discussion.