



Student Performance Q&A: 2003 AP[®] Latin: Vergil Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2003 free-response questions for AP[®] Latin: Vergil were written by the Chief Reader, Shelley Haley of Hamilton College in Clinton, New York. 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.

V 1

What was the intent of this question?

This question asked students to provide a literal translation of lines 160–166 from Book 4 of the *Aeneid*.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for this question was 4.56 out of a possible nine points. Students performed reasonably well on a fairly straightforward, well-known passage from Book 4. Although the full range of scores was used, scores of 0 and 1 were rare and nearly 30 percent of the students earned scores of 5 or 6.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- *Segment 3*: Students did not translate *misceri* as a passive infinitive.
- *Segment 5*: Students did not recognize *insequitur* as a deponent verb.
- *Segment 6*: Students failed to translate *commixta grandine* as an ablative.
- *Segment 10*: Students translated *petiere* as an infinitive.
- *Segment 12*: Students did not have *diversa* modifying *tecta*.

Students also exhibited vocabulary problems with *passim*, accepted with Segments 7 or 8, and with *amnes* in Segment 14, sometimes reading *omnes* for the latter. Students did not translate the historical present consistently in Segments 2, 5, 14, and 18.

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 should receive constant practice in translating selections literally. Readers need to be convinced students know Latin grammar and syntax. While *commixta grandine nimbus* may be correctly translated in the classroom as “a cloud mixed with hail,” for example, this is not an acceptable *literal* translation on the AP Exam.

Many students lost points for careless errors: singulars translated as plurals, past tenses for present tenses, and misplaced modifiers. Some students omitted words or phrases from their translations. Students should be encouraged to read their translations for sense once they have finished them.

Many students added additional meanings in parentheses or brackets or with slashes. This is a bad practice because the students' meaning may become unclear.

V 2

What was the intent of this question?

This question asked students to produce a literal translation of a seven-line passage from Book 12 of the *Aeneid*.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for this question was 3.78 out of a possible nine points. Scores fell in the entire range possible but tended to cluster in the middle to lower range. There were few off-task answers.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- *Segment 1*: Students seemed unfamiliar with the impersonal passive, many confused *ventum* with *ventus*, and *supremum* was often translated incorrectly.
- *Segment 7*: Students often confused *luctu* with *lux*, *lucus*, or *lusus*; they confused *hymenaeos* with nymphs or virgins.
- *Segment 8*: Students often translated *temptare* as “to tempt.”
- *Segment 9*: Students confused *orsus* with the verb *orior*, rendered it in an incorrect tense, or rendered it as a past participle.
- *Segment 13*: Students often mistook *quidem quia* for a relative pronoun or, in many cases, translated only one of the two words; *quidem* was often rendered as *quidam*.
- *Segment 14*: Students often confused *ista* for *ipsa*, and *tua* was omitted; *voluntas* was construed as a plural or rendered as a verb form of *volvere* or *volare*, and a number of responses translated it as a “volunteer.”
- *Segment 17*: Students frequently omitted *et...et*.
- *Final segment*: Students seemed unclear of the tense of *reliqui* and confused *invita* with *invitare* or *invisa*.

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 are encouraged to spend more time with vocabulary that is less common or easily confused. They should work with recognizing random passages and encourage students to be careful with verb tenses. Students also need to watch for notes that are given to them at the end of the passage that may help them in their translation.

What was the intent of this question?

This question asked students to write an essay contrasting analytically the way in which Aeneas and Creusa respond to the disruption in their lives caused by the Trojan War, referring specifically to the Latin throughout a 26-line passage from Book 2 of the *Aeneid*.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for this question was 3.39 out of a possible six points. For students who recognized the passage and were comfortable with the Latin, the question posed no problem and allowed them to demonstrate their abilities fully. On the other hand, students who struggled with the Latin were able to draw some inferences from the passage and displayed an ability to write an essay that adequately or somewhat superficially discussed the material. Unfortunately, some students did not recognize the passage and struggled to determine the meaning of individual words or even the identity of Creusa. Readers found relatively few off-task or omitted responses, and the full range of scores was awarded; half of the students earned scores of 3 or 4. Students did a very good job of citing the Latin or making clear to readers to what Latin in the passage they were referring. Teachers should be commended for this improvement over previous years and are encouraged to continue reminding their students how to cite Latin text to support their arguments.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Readers found the following common errors:

- attributing Creusa’s speech to Aeneas;
- attributing role reversal to the two characters, such as misunderstanding Creusa to be confused and panicked and Aeneas as calm and collected (gender stereotypes may have been responsible for this error); and
- needless repetition of the story of Book 2 (or even the entire *Aeneid*) to the detriment of discussing the passage.

Readers also found common misuse of the following vocabulary:

- *maestus* (line 2) misapplied to Creusa,
- *ingeminans* (line 3) incorrectly construed as from *ingemo* instead of *ingemino*,
- *nota* (line 6) not recognized as ablative,
- *obstipui* (line 7) misconstrued as if from *obsto* instead of *obstipesco*,
- *magna deum genetrix* (line 21) was often thought to mean Juno or Jupiter or Venus, and
- *lacrimantem* (line 23) was sometimes misattributed to Creusa.

Frequently misunderstood words were *demere* (line 8), *pelle* (line 17), and *serva* (line 22). An unfortunate shortcoming was to omit discussion or citation of lines 1–7 and/or lines 23–26. Readers noted a welcome decline in the frequency of arguments that were solely dependent on figures of speech, aspects of meter, or word choice.

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 should be encouraged to take care in reading the Latin of the passage to ensure they correctly understand the language of the extracts from the passage they wish to cite. Readers regard two factors as crucial to successful performance on the long essay: 1) effective use of the 15-minute reading period and the suggested 45-minute response period in setting up to write an excellent, well-organized response and 2) a clear understanding that the essays require students to analyze, or interpret, aspects of the passage rather than merely describe what the passage says. To prepare for this type of question, students should be given practice essay questions regularly, with feedback informing them of how to improve the interpretive process.

Part of the rationale for this practice is effective time management. Teachers and students should recognize that the long essay counts for a heavily weighted proportion of the free-response section and thus the entire exam; therefore, the long essay should be accorded the appropriate degree of time and attention. The 45-minute question time block should allow students the time to prepare their response and outline, block issues for discussion, select their illustrative passages, and organize an essay with a clear, direct thesis statement. Readers feel that students, by managing their time properly, can produce essays that more thoroughly address all the available material in the passage(s). Although readers do not advocate that students should necessarily write longer essays, they do note that the 45-minute essay—unless the student has taken the time to craft a very focused and concise essay—should probably not be of comparable length to the short essays. This is especially true if full coverage that is faithful to the “throughout” rubric of the exam is to be properly addressed.

Lastly, though explicit connections to the larger issues of the meaning and impact of the *Aeneid* as a whole are often characteristic of the best student essays and are a desideratum, students should think of adding comments that are extraneous to the passage only after they have gone fully through the details of the passage before them. General themes from the rest of the *Aeneid* might be used as a “hook” to begin the essay, but students should be certain that they are dealing first and foremost with the passage on which the question is based. They should not add too many details under the assumption that they need to convey the context of the passage to readers who are familiar with the question, the passage, and the work as a whole.

V 4

What was the intent of this question?

This question asked students to identify the emotions Aeneas feels as he looks at the mural on the Carthaginian temple and to discuss why the mural provoked these several emotions. The best answers identified and discussed *both* Aeneas’s sorrow or grief at seeing scenes and dead heroes of the Trojan War (lines 7–10 and 15–16) *and* the hope and sense of security that Aeneas derives from the sympathetic portrayal of Trojan suffering in the mural (ll. 10–14 and 1–3). Students were expected to identify more than one emotion, using nouns like “grief” or “hope,” but readers accepted verbal characterizations like “weeping,” provided students made clear what emotional state they expressed (e.g., whether the tears expressed grief or joy).

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for this question was 3.15 out of a possible six points. Most students performed in the 3- to 4-point range, with a good number earning scores of 2 and even 1. There were relatively few scores of 5 and 6.

What were common student errors or omissions?

The most common error was for students to see only Aeneas's grief or sorrow and to fail to catch the confidence and hope the mural gives him. Many students limited their answers by focusing on less prominent emotions, such as pride (cf. *fama vulgata*), anger (based on *saevum*, l. 9), or surprise or wonderment (*miratur*, l. 7, or his question addressed to Achates in lines 10–11). Some seemed to think that qualities of character, such as leadership or piety, qualified as emotions. Only the best students were able to perceive Aeneas's belief that the broad human sympathy he attributes to the Carthaginians (*hic etiam*, l. 12, and *sunt lacrimae rerum*, l. 13) provides grounds for his confidence in this new place. Many failed to recognize that lines 1–3 give a preview of the relief from fear and the hope for safety the mural arouses in Aeneas. These students missed the implication of *namque* ff. (l. 4), thinking that Aeneas, at first hopeful, becomes sad when he hits upon the mural. Familiarity with the story seems to have led many to try to give an account of the passage without reading the Latin closely.

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?

To grasp the subtlety and paradox of this question requires students to catch all the cues to meaning, causality, and temporal relationships in the Latin. Teachers should help students look for inferential words like *namque*. Students need coaching in clarifying exactly what the question is asking. Teachers should train them to address all parts of a passage when writing an essay and to support their assertions with liberal, accurate, and relevant citations of the Latin.

V 5

What was the intent of this question?

This question asked students to identify and discuss the disguise or deception of two characters from the *Aeneid*, including the purpose of each deception and its effects on the plot. They were asked to choose a character from each of two lists.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for this question was 3.41 out of a possible six points. The full range of scores was represented. In general, however, students were better able to discuss the deceptions of the characters from Column A (Cupid or Sinon) than from Column B (Iris, Allecto, or Juturna). This seems to reflect the greater familiarity of the first half of the poem.

What were common student errors or omissions?

The weaker responses lacked detail about the disguise itself and relied on broad plot summary. In the case of Cupid, students often said that Juno, or Juno and Venus, instigated the disguise to delay Aeneas. In the case of Iris, students often discussed her appearance at the end of Book 4, which is not a disguise or a deception. In the case of Allecto, few students knew the actual disguise, and many conflated her appearance to Amata (not in disguise) with that to Turnus; or they said that she had appeared in the form of a snake. Students often misconstrued the question as referring to the function of Allecto in the second half of the *Aeneid*, rather than her disguise or deception; or they treated the visit to Amata as a deception.

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?

Review the plot and major characters thoroughly. Make sure students read the question carefully.