



Student Performance Q&A: 2007 AP[®] French Literature Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2007 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 that the students have read and discussed in class during the year. This year's questions dealt with Camara Laye's autobiographical novel, *L'Enfant noir*. Subquestion 1 asked students to analyze the passage with respect to features such as verb tenses, personal pronouns, point of view, and directness of discourse. Subquestion 2 required them to identify two major themes in the novel and to comment on their importance in the quoted passage.

How well did students perform on this question?

Despite its exotic setting, Laye's engaging novel treats classic themes such as family ties, coming of age, and the pursuit of a personal identity. The author's writing style also has a classic aspect and is very accessible. Students who had read the novel thoughtfully found much to say in response to the two subquestions. The 2007 Standard Group* earned a mean score of 6.0 out of a possible 10 points for the *analyse* content. This is significantly higher than the 2006 score of 5.52 for the Standard Group. The 2007 students also displayed somewhat stronger writing skills, with a mean language score of 3.42 (out of 5 points), as opposed to the mean score of 3.24 for the Standard Group in 2006. Scores for the Total Group in 2007 were 6.2 and 3.63, respectively. The combined content and language mean score was 9.42 out of a possible 15 points for the Standard Group and 9.83 out of 15 for the Total Group.

* 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 cutoff scores are based on the Total Group.

What were common student errors or omissions?

In typical years such as 2007, some students give the appearance of not having learned enough literary and analytical terms with which to write incisively. Vagueness can be a problem; students must learn how to treat causal relations so as to bring out the *significance* of their observations. The opportunity to be astute is often missed.

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?

- Have students practice making effective use of literary and analytical terms.
- Cover the required texts in full, with no recourse to summaries.
- Go over the differences between mere assertion and analysis/explanation/demonstration.
- Familiarize students with the scoring criteria (available on the AP French Literature Exam Page on AP Central®).

Question 2: *Essai*

What was the intent of this question?

The literary essay allowed students to demonstrate their knowledge of the texts and the level of their analytical skills. Students could choose either *Candide* or *La Guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu* and discuss two female characters with respect to their roles and importance in the works.

How well did students perform on this question?

With multiple choices and areas to cover, most students were able to produce a fair amount of worthwhile commentary. For the Standard Group, the mean score was 5.28 out of 9 points for content, and 3.34 out of 5 for language (8.62 out of 14, combined); for the Total Group, the scores were 5.33 and 3.54 points, respectively (8.87 out of 14, combined).

What were common student errors or omissions?

Most students appeared to be well prepared for the 2007 essay question on either *Candide* or *La Guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu*. The weaker students had problems expressing themselves in French, and their commentary stayed too close to the obvious, thus remaining less insightful than the work of stronger students.

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?

There is no simple formula for teaching insightfulness. But it is often the case that perceptive observations explore literary material where there are apparent contradictions, paradoxes, or surprises that, with further reflection, seem inevitable. Complex characters who appear to be abandoning self-interest may in fact be cultivating it, but on another plane. Behind various inconsistencies a subtle pattern may emerge.