



Student Performance Q&A: 2007 AP[®] German Language Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2007 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.

Part A-1: Writing (Paragraph Completion)

What was the intent of this question?

This part of the examination is designed to elicit precise and accurate responses. Students are expected to demonstrate that they understand the text passage by inserting a correct German word or words in a blank. The word choices offer students the opportunity to display a breadth of vocabulary, sensitivity to structure and idiom, and precision of spelling and capitalization, all within the context of the passage.

When creating passages, the German Development Committee often uses authentic materials, slightly modified. This year's exam featured a brochure-like text about the north German city of Hamburg. The vocabulary and idioms required to fill in the blanks were mostly of relatively high frequency.

How well did students perform on this question?

All data used throughout this report are for the Standard Group only.* Compared with the same section on previous exams, the selection for the 2007 paragraph completions yielded a slightly lower score than last year. The table on the next page gives 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 cutoff scores are based on the Standard Group.

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Possible points	20	20	20	20	20	20
Mean score	11.39	12.59	9.29	10.88	8.55	8.43

Exam Readers generally found the section to be well designed, a fair and reasonable yet challenging approach to this type of exercise, with scores reflecting students' abilities. Several Readers voiced concern over the number of blanks that could be answered correctly only if students had been taught and acquired advanced-level tenses and structures. Others were concerned that the passage contained several cultural items that could lead to confusion if students were not familiar with them. A few were uneasy about the relative strictness in the choices we agreed to accept. The overall consensus, however, was that the AP German Language Exam can and should assess certain items at a relatively high level, because the better students will continue in most cases at an intermediate-level language course when they begin their university studies. At that stage, control and knowledge of these kinds of structures is to be expected. The lower scores therefore were seen as a result of including some lower-frequency expressions, vocabulary, and tenses. The Readers overall did not perceive this as unfair or problematic.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Capitalization or lack of capitalization, especially at the beginning of a sentence was the most common cause for lost points, followed by a lack of appropriate verb tense. Problems on individual questions were as follows:

Item	Correct Answers	Common Errors
1	<i>die</i> , modifier + <i>die</i> (e.g., <i>wohl</i>), <i>die</i> + modifier (e.g., <i>wohl</i>), <i>als</i> <i>die als</i>	Incorrect item
2	<i>als</i>	Inappropriate item
3	<i>Obwohl</i> , <i>Obgleich</i> , <i>Obschon</i> , <i>Auch wenn</i> , <i>Trotzdem</i> , <i>Wenngleich</i>	Incorrect item No capitalization
4	<i>der</i>	Inappropriate item
5	<i>gibt</i>	Inappropriate item
6	<i>haben</i> , <i>hatten</i>	Inappropriate verb (tense)
7	<i>Auch</i> , <i>Sogar</i> , <i>Selbst</i> , <i>Vor allem</i> , <i>Und auch</i> , <i>Und</i>	Incorrect item No capitalization
8	<i>Jahre</i>	Inappropriate item
9	<i>begonnen</i> , <i>angefangen</i> , <i>gestartet</i> , <i>beendet</i> , <i>unterbrochen</i> , <i>abgebrochen</i>	Incorrect verb (Accepted answers that did not necessarily correspond to the actual fact that the Beatles started their career in Hamburg, because this was not clear from the text, and students cannot be expected to know this.)
10	<i>wurde</i> , <i>hat man</i> , <i>hatte man</i>	Inappropriate verb
11	<i>Stadt</i> , <i>Hansestadt</i> , <i>Handelsstadt</i> , <i>Hafenstadt</i> , <i>Metropole</i> , <i>Musikstadt</i> , <i>Großstadt</i> , <i>Weltstadt</i>	Inappropriate noun

12	<i>am, an dem, den</i>	Incorrect item
13	<i>eines</i> (+ adjectives)	Inappropriate item
14	<i>zum</i>	Inappropriate item
15	<i>Nachdem, Als, Sobald, Da, Weil, Bevor</i> , combination (e.g., <i>Noch bevor</i>), <i>Doch sobald, Bis</i>	Inappropriate item No capitalization
16	<i>kennen, schätzen</i>	Inappropriate verb
17	<i>war, schien, gewesen ist, gewesen war</i>	Inappropriate verb (tense)
18	<i>nach, in die Stadt</i>	Inappropriate preposition
19	<i>(unmittelbaren) Nähe, Reihe</i>	Inappropriate item
20	<i>seine, die, Brahms', des Musikers</i>	Inappropriate item

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 who afford students more practice in this form of exercise should expect better results on the paragraph completion questions, because one factor in student performance is familiarity with the task at hand. Teachers will *not* profit by devising cloze passages that test particular points of grammar and vocabulary. This task is an overall evaluation of language recognition and usage. Each paragraph completion will contain a variety of items. For teachers, what is most important is to provide extensive practice with this format. A reasonable strategy is for teachers to simply remove every eighth or ninth word, regardless of its form, and the next week do another similar exercise. All forms of language acquisition will consequently lead to better scores on paragraph completion.

Part A-2: Writing (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 students to demonstrate a broad range of vocabulary and structure. For higher scores, students are expected to write a solid answer that demonstrates sustained control of structural features of German. High-scoring compositions normally employ complex sentences, linked by cohesive discourse strategies and a broad range of vocabulary.

The 2007 question asked students to talk about how life has changed over the past one hundred years. They were also asked to compare their lives today with life one hundred years ago, to state if life is better or worse today, and to support their answers with examples. The exact wording was as follows:

In den letzten 100 Jahren hat sich das Leben sehr verändert. Vergleichen Sie das tägliche Leben heute mit dem Leben vor 100 Jahren. Ist das Leben heute besser oder schlechter als früher? Geben Sie Beispiele und begründen Sie.

The prompt contained language that was understood by almost all students, even the weaker ones. Consequently, the scores reflect what they did with what they knew. Students drew on topics often discussed in the classroom, such as technology, communication, family, transportation, gender issues, and the environment. The topic let students decide which direction to take and gave them the opportunity to use a wide range of vocabulary.

How well did students perform on this question?

The question for 2007 elicited compositions evaluated lower than compositions in 2006 and higher than in 2005. See the table below.

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Possible points	9	9	9	9	9	9
Mean score	6.22	5.60	6.32	5.16	6.00	5.31

Students related easily to the context of the question, and there were very few performances that simply missed the mark. Exam Readers were in general positive about the question, reporting that students were able to respond readily to the task demanded by the prompt, and felt that it made consistent scoring easier. The Readers' perception was that the students were at the same performance level as last year's students. The slightly lower outcome therefore might be attributed to the wording of the criteria for a score of 9 in the scoring guidelines.

What were common student errors or omissions?

This year a noticeable difficulty emerged from the task: many students seem to have learned to compare and contrast very early on in their language training but only with concrete items (example: Mr. X is taller than Mr. Y. This book is older than my book). Contrasting and comparing on the more abstract level, it seems, is not practiced much and led to some interesting language production.

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 classroom strategy in preparation for the composition is to conduct frequent timed in-class writing sessions, evaluated according to the same standards that are used at the Reading. The scoring guidelines are available on AP Central®. To ensure that all potential AP students are familiar with the assessment scale, many teachers sometimes involve students in scoring according to these guidelines, either in groups or pairs. Samples from recent exams may be used to train students on the range of expectations. Especially good practice results from prompts that ask the students to give arguments *and* counterarguments, prompts that ask for a coherent narrative, and prompts that lead to comparisons. Because contrasting and comparing is often done in college-level writing, teachers might want to include exercises and writing tasks that practice this skill (Vorteile/Nachteile composition topics).

Part B: Speaking (Directed Responses)

In this section, students listen to six questions in German, responding in German after each one. Discussion of the individual prompts follows the tables below. Overall, students did well on these items. Inspection of the mean totals indicates that the performance on directed responses was slightly higher than last year and in 2005 (note that the scoring scale changed in 2004).

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Total possible points	30	30	36	36	36	36
Total mean score	20.29	21.53	26.13	23.61	23.67	23.81

Mean scores for the individual prompts in 2007 and recent years are given in the table below. The maximum score for each response was 6. From this table, it is clear that the fourth prompt was overall the most challenging and that the fifth was the easiest.

Directed Response	Mean 2004 Score	Mean 2005 Score	Mean 2006 Score	Mean 2007 Score
1	4.21	4.50	4.10	3.99
2	3.63	3.89	3.93	3.95
3	4.53	3.98	3.65	3.93
4	4.55	4.08	3.92	3.78
5	4.44	3.51	4.17	4.21
6	4.76	3.64	3.91	3.95

1. *Morgen muss ich auf zwei kleine Kinder aufpassen, und ich habe keine Ahnung was ich machen soll. Hast du vielleicht ein paar gute Ideen?* (Tomorrow I have to babysit two small children, and I have no idea what to do with them. Do you have any good ideas?)

What was the intent of this question?

The first prompt is intended to be a relatively simple task and is designed to ease students into this part of the examination. Often a list is acceptable as an answer. In this case, the typical expected answer was a list of ideas, such as going to the park, coloring, and watching movies.

How well did students perform on this question?

The prompt fulfilled its function of providing students with a low-stress start to the section, and they performed well. The question turned out to be the second-easiest one.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Some weaker students thought that they themselves were the babysitters, which often made the answer not clearly a response to the question and therefore lowered their score.

2. *Ich habe gehört, dass du letzten Sommer gearbeitet hast. Erzähl mir davon! (I heard you had a job last summer. Tell me about that!)*

What was the intent of this question?

This prompt was designed to elicit details about a summer job, with the expectation that students would use a past tense.

How well did students perform on this question?

This prompt provided a greater opportunity to elaborate than the first one. Almost all students understood the question in general and performed well. The strongest were able to describe details about their job. Most students successfully used a past tense.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Students overall had no problem understanding and answering this prompt.

3. *Ich kann meine Schlüssel schon wieder nicht finden und meine Eltern sind noch nicht zu Hause. Was soll ich tun? (I can't find my keys again, and my parents are not home yet. What shall I do?)*

What was the intent of this question?

The prompt intended for students to solve a problem and make suggestions. The hope was that they would address both parts of the problem (no keys and parents not home). This also gave them a chance to answer using the subjunctive.

How well did students perform on this question?

This question was more challenging than the first two, but most students could come up with an appropriate answer. The framework of this question was more complex than the first two—locked out and no one home—which gave the better students a chance to address both issues.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Weaker students had problems with the complexity of the question. The hesitation that arose out of this often led to very short answers, hence lowering their scores.

4. *Was soll ich nur machen? Ich habe meine ganzen Sportsachen heute Morgen zu Hause vergessen und heute Nachmittag um 3 ist unser Endspiel im Fußball. (What shall I do? I forgot my soccer outfit at home, and at 3 p.m. we have our play-offs.)*

What was the intent of this question?

Very much like the immediately preceding question, but designed to be the most challenging one, this prompt provided an opportunity for students to solve a complex problem and to use the subjunctive.

How well did students perform on this question?

Statistically, the mean score showed this to be the most challenging question. Even the weaker students seemed to understand the question but had difficulties in finding vocabulary to deal with this problem. The expressions needed to solve the problem (mainly names for the clothes and cleats) are not commonly taught.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Most students devised a solution. The weakest gave very simple ideas, such as go back home or call your parents on your cell phone. Readers felt that the phrasing and content of the question might have confused some of the weaker students. The situation mixes German and American high school culture, which might have attributed to its difficulty.

5. *Ich habe gehört, dass du im nächsten Sommer eine interessante Reise machen wirst. Wohin geht's denn? Erzähl mal!* (I hear you are going on an interesting trip next summer. Where are you going? Tell me about it!)

What was the intent of this question?

The prompt offered the chance to talk about an upcoming experience. The question was easily understood by most students.

How well did students perform on this question?

This was overall the easiest question.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Even if students understood only part of the question—the part about the trip or going somewhere next summer—they could answer. The weaker students most often did not address the part of the question asking them to tell about the trip and to go beyond just listing countries and attractions.

6. *Na klar weiß ich, dass deine Party morgen ist. Womit kann ich dir denn noch helfen?* (Sure, I know that you have your party tomorrow. How can I help you?)

What was the intent of this question?

The intent of the final item is to give the students a positive conclusion to the speaking section. The expected response to this question was a list of things one does to lend a hand: go shopping, help clean the house, and so forth.

How well did students perform on this question?

Overall, students performed as well on this prompt as they did on the first one.

What were common student errors or omissions?

This item caused a few problems for those students who misunderstood who was asking for help (the “how can I help you?” part).

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 if they make certain that their students have achieved mechanical mastery of the actual equipment that will be used during the exam; if they maximize practice with this form of the exercise in the classroom and lab; and if they foster familiarity with the standards of assessment used at the Reading (available on AP Central). The essence of the task—a spontaneous oral response to an aural prompt—can be employed in a variety of classroom settings. Even practice with the entire AP class has some advantages, as students must cope with the pressure to perform in a short time, and as some may gain confidence by hearing others respond successfully (“Oh, I can do that, too!”). Creative teachers may also find ways to practice in small groups and pairs, with and without the application of recording systems.

Part B: Speaking (Picture Sequence)

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 depicted in the drawings after a two-minute period of reflection during which they are allowed to take notes. This presupposes an ability to name objects in the pictures, describe activities illustrated, and use cohesive discourse strategies to form a narrative.

The vocabulary needed to narrate the 2007 sequence was almost all of relatively high frequency and allowed students to show how they could deal with structure, fumbling for obscure and uncommon vocabulary only once or twice, which offered the opportunity for circumlocution. It was a good picture sequence, owing to the complication in the middle part, where the better students had a chance to shine. Picture 2 also contained details that let the students take the story in several different directions, as it is not completely obvious from the picture what caused the girl to fall off her bicycle.

How well did students perform on this question?

The story was mostly well understood and generated acceptable responses. Students in 2007 performed better than students in 2005 and 2006.

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Possible points	6	6	6	6	6	6
Mean score	3.99	3.66	4.17	3.53	3.44	3.60

Pictures 2 and 3 sometimes made it hard for students to create a rich narrative, because the vocabulary required to talk about the girl falling off her bike and getting her paper wet is of low frequency. Only the really well-trained and strong students could display advanced vocabulary and structures. But once past this stumbling point, most students continued without too much hesitation.

What were common student errors or omissions?

There were some problems with vocabulary resources, although students could almost always find appropriate words to express the content of pictures 1 and 3–6. Students who had mastered the art of circumlocution got a chance to show what they could do. The weaker students often used up too much time trying to narrate what happened in pictures 2 and 3 and could not get back on track to finish the sequence, thus lowering their scores. Very few students dramatized the picture series. There is, nevertheless, constant improvement in this regard, as AP teachers continue to encourage their students to narrate and to avoid an overuse of direct speech when telling the pictured story.

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-response section, familiarity with the equipment used during the exam will contribute to students' confidence in this exercise. Most important is the students' actual experience producing oral narratives of the prescribed length. Frequency of practice and familiarity with the scoring guidelines will pay large benefits. Additionally, I recommend that teachers devote specific attention to lexical items and grammatical markers that lend cohesion to narratives.