



Student Performance Q&A:

2007 AP® Latin: Vergil Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2007 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.

Question V1 (Translation)

What was the intent of this question?

The intent of the question was to assess students' ability to translate as literally as possible a passage of Latin verse (*Aeneid* 4. 68-73).

How well did students perform on this question?

A majority of students recognized the excerpt. The middle portion caused the most difficulty; students met with more success translating the beginning and end of the passage. The full range of scores was represented, but scores in the lower range predominated. The mean score was 3.18 out of a possible 9 points.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Students often translated too freely, using incorrect or inappropriate English derivatives. They had difficulty finding context-appropriate senses of words (e.g., *cerva* [segment 6], *pastor* [segment 9], *agens* [segment 11], *saltus* [segment 16], and *harundo* [segment 18]). Other errors included singular for plural (e.g., *nemora* [segment 10], *silvas* [segment 16], and *saltus* [segment 16]); perfect as present (*fixit* [segment 9] and *liquit* [segment 12]); present as perfect or future (*peragrat* [segment 14] and *haeret* [segment 17]); mistakes involving dependency of modifiers (e.g., construing *coniecta* with something other than *sagitta* [segment 7] and *incautam* with something other than *quam* [segment 8]).

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 scan verse passages in order to identify the ablative singular of first-declension nouns. Special attention should be paid to conjunctions and the syntactical articulation of passages. Students should be reminded to review their translations for accuracy, completeness, and appropriateness to the context.

Question V2 (Translation)

What was the intent of this question?

The question evaluated students' ability to translate as literally as possible a passage of Latin verse (*Aeneid* 6. 847-853).

How well did students perform on this question?

Students found the selection challenging, and it appeared to be unfamiliar to many. Some students understood the sense of the passage but did not translate literally enough. The full range of scores was represented, although scores in the lower half of the range predominated. The mean score was 2.85 out of a possible 9 points.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Debellare (segment 18) was often construed in terms not strong enough to convey the utter destruction implied by the verb: for example, merely "to fight against." Easily confused words often presented a problem for students (e.g., *aera* [segment 3] as *aer*; *vultus* [segment 5] as *vulnus*; *marmore* [segment 6] as *mare* or *murmur*; *paci* [segment 16] as *pauci*; *superbos* [segment 18] as *superi*). Other common errors included future as present (*excudent* [segment 1], *ducent* [segment 5], *describent* [segment 9], and *dicent* [segment 10]); infinitive as imperatives (*regere* [segment 12], *imponere* [segment 16], *parcere* [segment 17], and *debellare* [segment 18]); comparative as positive (*mollius* [segment 2] and *melius* [segment 7]); mistakes involving vocabulary in context (e.g., *orabunt* [segment 7] as "beg" or "pray" and/or *causas* as "causes," which renderings are inappropriate in the context of this passage).

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 correct rendering of tense and mood and the value of recognizing which conjugation verbs belong to (third-conjugation future tenses look like second-conjugation present tenses, for example). Regular review of vocabulary can be very beneficial to students.

Question V3 (Long Essay)

What was the intent of this question?

This question allowed students to demonstrate their ability to analyze Latin passages by comparing and contrasting the characterization of Juno at the beginning and at the end of the *Aeneid* (1. 36-52 and 12. 818-828) and by supporting their arguments with accurate Latin citations from throughout both passages.

How well did students perform on this question?

Most students were able to identify the general context of the two excerpts and to write essays at least in the 3–4 range. The full range of scores was represented. The mean score was 3.28 out of a possible 6 points.

What were common student errors or omissions?

A major problem for students was proper citation of the Latin, including citation of Latin without translation or paraphrase; inclusion of Latin words or phrases in the context of English sentences with no clear demonstration that the student understood the Latin; the citation of individual words out of context; lack of any reference to the Latin text; or citation of Latin from limited portions of the text rather than from throughout the passages as required. A number of students either misidentified speakers, addressees, or characters in one or both of the passages or depended on their general knowledge of Juno's role in the story rather than the specific content of the passages. A number of essays were significantly compromised either by excessive focus on stylistic analysis (figures of speech, diction, punctuation) to the detriment of their arguments or by the limitation of their analyses to a single contrast.

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 be sure to cover the entire Vergil syllabus. They should impress on students the importance of proper Latin citation from throughout the passages and encourage them to focus on the passages supplied in the question, omitting, for the most part, extraneous material. Students should have practice answering all types of essay questions, as many of these students seemed not to know how to construct a compare/contrast essay.

Question V4 (Short Essay)

What was the intent of this question?

The purpose of the question was for students to display their ability to analyze a Latin passage by discussing what Priam's last speech (*Aeneid* 2. 533-545) reveals about both Priam and Pyrrhus and by supporting their arguments with accurate Latin citations from throughout the passage.

How well did students perform on this question?

Most students were able to identify the context of this passage and write essays in the 3–4 range. The full range of scores was represented. The mean score was 2.92 out of a possible 6 points.

What were common student errors or omissions?

In some cases, the students' familiarity with the plot led them away from a close analysis of the selection. On occasion, mistranslation of Latin had an adverse effect on essays: for example, many students, misreading lines 12–13, indicated that these lines described Pyrrhus killing Priam, whereas others, understanding *nec* (line 2) with *irae* instead of with *pepercit*, spoke of Priam's composure in the face of death. A significant number of students did not properly cite the Latin, give line numbers, or otherwise indicate from where in the passage they were drawing their responses. Many did not cite Latin from throughout the passage, and a significant number had difficulty discussing *both* Priam and Pyrrhus.

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 provide frequent opportunities for students to practice grounding their interpretations in the Latin text, rather than in the broader context of the story. Also, teachers should impress on their students the importance of citing Latin from throughout the passage.

Question V5 (Entire *Aeneid*)

What was the intent of this question?

This question was designed to gauge students' control of the *Aeneid* as a whole by discussing how two particular episodes from the work contribute to an overall understanding of Trojan suffering. They were asked to choose one episode from each of two lists of three.

How well did students perform on this question?

Many students showed a good knowledge of the episodes, although some recalled individual details inaccurately or failed to develop specific details to support their responses. Although the majority of students recognized that the individual episodes contributed to the suffering of the Trojans, few developed their response to analyze *how* those episodes contributed to a deeper understanding of that suffering. The full range of scores was represented, but the majority of students wrote only adequate or limited essays. The mean score was 2.77 out of a possible 6 points.

What were common student errors or omissions?

A common problem was the lack of specific details to support answers. Lack of analysis or a lack of discerning discussion prevented potentially strong essays from achieving higher scores.

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 impress on students that in the context of essay questions, “discuss” implies analysis; students should pay close attention to the wording of the question. Suggested methods for preparation include practice essays that involve different prompts (e.g., “discuss,” “compare and contrast,” “analyze”). Teachers should make clear to their students that in answering the global *Aeneid* questions, they must provide some specific details relevant to the question. Lengthy synopses of the *Aeneid* are not expected and often prove counterproductive. Students are encouraged to use their reading period wisely to come to an understanding of what the question requires and to outline a suitable response.