



## **Student Performance Q&A:**

### **2008 AP® German Language Free-Response Questions**

The following comments on the 2008 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.

**Note:** All data used in this report are based on the Standard Group\* only. Total Group and Alternate exam data are not included.

#### **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 demonstrate that they understand the text passage by inserting a correct German word or words in a blank. The word deletions for testing purposes allow students to demonstrate a breadth of vocabulary, sensitivity to structure and idiom, and precision of spelling and capitalization, all within the context of the passage.

In creating passages, the German Language Development Committee often uses authentic materials, slightly modified. The 2008 exam featured a letter written by a female student to her parents. In the letter she talks about her classes, her new roommates, and an upcoming visit home. The vocabulary and idioms required to fill in the blanks were mostly of relatively high frequency.

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\* The Standard Group does not include students who speak German at home or who have lived for more than one month in a country where German is the native language. Decisions on cutoff scores are based on the Standard Group.

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

The selection for the 2008 paragraph-completion section yielded a higher mean score than the means for the previous two years. The following table shows the mean scores for recent years.

	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>
Possible Points	20	20	20	20	20
Mean Score	9.29	10.88	8.55	8.43	9.47

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. The overall consensus was that the AP German Language Exam can and should assess certain items at a relatively high level, because better students will continue in an intermediate-level language course (in most cases) when they begin their university studies. At that stage, control and knowledge of these kinds of structures are to be expected. The lower scores therefore were seen as a result of including some lower-frequency expressions, vocabulary, and tenses.

### ***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. Correct answers and common errors are shown below. (Note that other grammatically and lexically correct words were also accepted, even if they did not appear in this list.)

<b>Item</b>	<b>Correct Answers</b>	<b>Common Errors</b>
1	auf, über	Incorrect preposition
2	Leid, leid	Inappropriate item
3	beantwortet, gemailt, geemilt, geschrieben, geschickt, gesandt, gesendet, verfasst, zurückgeschickt, zurückgeschrieben	Incorrect verb or verb form
4	Aufgaben, Aufsätze, Essays, Arbeiten, Dinge, Hausaufgaben, Hausarbeiten, Projekte, Referate, Seminararbeiten, Sachen, Übungen	Inappropriate item
5	mit	Inappropriate preposition
6	Ihr, ihr	Inappropriate pronoun
7	der, dieser, einer, eu(e)rer, meiner, uns(e)rer	Incorrect item
8	noch	Inappropriate item
9	Arbeit, Anstellung, Arbeitsstelle, Beschäftigung, Stelle, Teilzeitarbeit, Teilzeitbeschäftigung, Teilzeitstelle	Incorrect noun
10	nach	Inappropriate item

11	der, welcher	Inappropriate item
12	mich, uns, alle, uns alle, Bettina, sie, manchmal, oft, schon, eigentlich, immer	Incorrect item
13	studiert, lehrt, macht, mag, unterrichtet, beschäftigt sich mit, interessiert sich für; + <i>Imperfekt</i>	Inappropriate verb
14	wir	Inappropriate pronoun
15	Wochenende, Jahr, Semester	Inappropriate item
16	der, von	Inappropriate verb
17	weil, da, dass, daß	Inappropriate conjunction
18	will, möchte, werde, wollte	Inappropriate verb
19	dagegen	Inappropriate item
20	damit, so dass, sodass, so daß, sodaß	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 give students more work with this form of exercise should expect better results on the paragraph-completion questions, because one factor in student performance is familiarity with the task. 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, and the paragraph-completion section will always contain a variety of items. What is most important is making sure that students have extensive experience with this format. A reasonable strategy is for teachers to remove every eighth or ninth word, regardless of its form, from a passage and then have students supply the missing word(s) in German; students should do a similar exercise each week. All forms of language acquisition will lead to better scores on the paragraph-completion section.

## **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 need to show 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 2008 question asked students to discuss the increasing role of fitness in today’s world. Students were also asked to address at least three of the following subtopics:

- Fitness in the student’s personal life
- The role that fitness plays as an industry
- Advantages of fitness as a trend
- Disadvantages of fitness as a trend

The prompt contained language that was understood by almost all test-takers, even the weaker ones. Consequently the scores reflect what students did with what they knew. Students drew on topics often discussed in the classroom, such as sports, exercise, and the business of exercise. The subtopics helped them to organize their compositions. Readers gave the question high marks for producing organized and interesting compositions. All felt that it could be scored accurately and fairly.

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

As the following table shows, the question for 2008 elicited compositions that earned higher scores than the compositions in 2007 but lower scores than the compositions in 2006.

	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>
Possible Points	9	9	9	9	9
Mean Score	6.32	5.16	6.00	5.31	5.62

Students related easily to the context of the question, and there were very few performances that simply missed the mark. Readers reported that students were able to relate readily to the task demanded by the prompt, which made consistent scoring easier. The Readers' perception was that this year's students were at the same performance level as last year's. The slightly higher outcome therefore might be attributed to the accessibility of the question.

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

The most challenging parts of the question were the third and fourth subtopics. Students could easily relate to the question about fitness in their lives and fitness as an industry, but they had a harder time talking about advantages and disadvantages of fitness as a trend. This became the part where the better students could show their linguistic abilities.

***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. Student samples from recent exams (also available on AP Central) may be used to train students on the range of expectations. It will be especially helpful to use prompts that ask 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 develop this skill (Vorteile/Nachteile composition topics).

## Part B: Speaking (Directed Responses)

In this section students listen to six prompts in German, responding in German after each one. Discussion of the individual prompts follows the tables below. Students did well on these items. Inspection of the mean totals in the chart below indicates that the overall performance on directed responses was higher this year than in the last three years.

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Total Possible Points	36	36	36	36	36
Total Mean Score	26.13	23.61	23.67	23.81	25.76

Mean scores for the individual prompts in 2008 are given in the following table, along with those from previous years. The maximum score for each response was 6. From this table it is clear that the fifth prompt was overall the most challenging and that the second was the easiest.

Directed Response	Mean 2004 Score	Mean 2005 Score	Mean 2006 Score	Mean 2007 Score	Mean 2008 Score
1	4.21	4.50	4.10	3.99	4.56
2	3.63	3.89	3.93	3.95	4.60
3	4.53	3.98	3.65	3.93	4.38
4	4.55	4.08	3.92	3.78	4.30
5	4.44	3.51	4.17	4.21	3.76
6	4.76	3.64	3.91	3.95	4.18

### ***1. Lass uns doch heute Abend ausgehen! Was wollen wir machen? (Let us go out tonight! What should we do?)***

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

The first prompt is intended to be a relatively simple task, designed to ease students into this part of the exam. Often a list is acceptable as an answer. In this case, the typical expected response was a list of ideas, such as going to the movies or out for dinner.

#### ***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 prompt turned out to be the second easiest after prompt 2.

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

Some weaker students ignored the fact that the prompt indicated the evening as the time for the planned activities, and they came up with things that are usually done during the day.

**2. Mein Lieblingsfach dieses Jahr war Mathe. Der Lehrer war einfach spitze! Welches Fach hat dir am besten gefallen? (My favorite subject this year was math. The teacher was just great! Which subject did you like best?)**

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

This prompt was designed to elicit expressions of preference, comparison of subjects, and/or explanations of why (or why not) math was the favorite subject. The prompt gave students the opportunity to demonstrate command of the past tense.

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

This prompt provided a greater opportunity to elaborate than the first prompt. Almost all students understood the prompt and performed well.

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

Students overall had no problem understanding and answering this prompt. A favorite subject is something that students discuss in the German classroom in different settings—they talk about it when they learn about the German school system, when they learn to talk about likes and dislikes, and when they learn to express preferences. This turned out to be the easiest of the six prompts.

**3. Camping?! Ich würde lieber im Hotel übernachten. Warum sollen wir denn campen? (Camping?! I would prefer to stay in a hotel! Why should we go camping?)**

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

This prompt was intended to elicit an explanation, reasons, justifications, or elaboration on why camping is better than staying in a hotel. Students had to come up with reasons and give explanations for their preferences. The prompt gave students the opportunity to use different modal verbs and show off some lower-frequency vocabulary.

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

Most students felt this prompt was more challenging than the first two prompts, but most could come up with an appropriate answer. Fewer came up with more complex answers. The prompt turned out to be the third easiest.

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

Weaker students had problems with the complexity of the prompt. Hesitations due to lack of vocabulary often led to very short answers, lowering scores slightly.

**4. Du, der Bus für unseren Schulausflug ist schon ohne uns abgefahren, und ich hab mein Handy nicht dabei! Was machen wir nun? (Hey, the bus for the class trip left without us and I don't have my cell with me! What should we do now?)**

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

Designed to be even more challenging than the previous prompt, this prompt provided an opportunity for students to solve a complex problem. Students had to address two situations: the bus has left without them, and the speaker has forgotten her cell phone.

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

Statistically, this prompt was the third hardest for students. Even the weaker students seemed to understand the prompt, though they had difficulties in finding vocabulary to solve the problem or could not linguistically handle who had forgotten the cell phone.

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

Most students came up with 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 prompt might have confused some of the weaker students. The situation mixes German and American high school culture (trips are generally not part of a German school experience), which might have attributed to its difficulty.

**5. Also—Sie wollen hier bei uns im Restaurant arbeiten. Warum sollten wir Ihnen diese Stelle geben? (So—you want to work in our restaurant. Why should we give the job to you?)**

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

For this prompt, students were supposed to take the role of a job seeker and talk about the positive personal characteristics that would make them perfect for the job. They were expected to speak persuasively as they discussed previous experiences and personal strengths.

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

This was the hardest of the six prompts due to several factors. Many students apparently have never been in a situation like this and did not know how to properly respond in the role of a job seeker. Others simply did not have the vocabulary to describe personal qualities.

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

Many students struggled with this prompt. Some did not understand it at all, and the ones who did had problems answering due to lack of vocabulary and the inability to project themselves into the scene. (The Readers and the Chief Reader decided not to deduct points for responses with incorrect register because this is not necessarily taught by all teachers.)

**6. Stell dir vor, du hättest ein paar Wünsche frei. Was würdest du dir denn wünschen?  
(Imagine, you were granted a few wishes. What would you wish for?)**

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

The intent of the final item is to give students a positive conclusion to the section. Students were expected to mention one or more things that they wished for, such as money, good health, a new car, etc.

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

Overall, students did almost as well on this prompt as they did on the first, which was supposed to give them a low-stress start to the task. However, this prompt also turned out to be the second hardest, which was surprising because it seemed so simple.

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

The problem in responding to this prompt seemed to be in its phrasing. The prompt itself is stated in the subjunctive, so many students tried to answer in this mood—many of them failed. Another problem was that many students wanted to wish for glorious and impressive things, like world peace and the cure for a disease, but could not handle this linguistically.

***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 the best performances from their students if they make certain that students have achieved mechanical mastery of the actual equipment that will be used during the exam; if they ensure that students have plenty of opportunities to work on direct responses in the classroom and lab; and if they foster familiarity with the standards of assessment used at the Reading. The essence of the task—a spontaneous oral response to an aural prompt—can be employed in a variety of classroom settings. Even working with the entire AP class has some advantages, as students must cope with the pressure to perform in a short time, and 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.

***Overall Observation***

On this year’s directed-response section, any student with control of the present tense could answer all of the prompts. Even though prompt 5 used the formal form of address, the Readers opted to be lenient in the scoring when students ignored the question of register. If register is part of language and we want to evaluate how well students have developed control of it, then more classroom time needs to be spent on developing this ability.

## Part B: Speaking (Picture Sequence)

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

This section is designed to elicit a narration by the student of a story presented in six pictures. Unlike the directed responses, in which spontaneous creativity is sometimes required to quickly come up with answers to the questions posed, this section affords students a two-minute period of reflection, during which they are allowed to take notes, before they are given two minutes to record their narration. The basic outline of the story is given by the pictures. The task presupposes an ability to name objects in the pictures, describe activities depicted, and use cohesive discourse strategies to form a narrative.

The vocabulary needed to narrate the 2008 sequence was of relatively high frequency and allowed students to show how they could deal with language structures without fumbling for obscure and uncommon vocabulary. There was only one clear opportunity for circumlocution (students did not know what to call the checkout belt). Readers felt that it was a good picture sequence because the challenge of describing the checkout belt helped to distinguish between weaker and stronger students, while picture number two contained details that let weaker students show some knowledge by describing items in the grocery store.

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

The story was well understood and generated good responses. Students in 2008 performed better than students from 2004 through 2007.

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Possible Points	6	6	6	6	6
Mean Score	4.17	3.53	3.44	3.60	4.19

Pictures two and three sometimes made it hard for students to create a rich narrative because the pictures did not show very much action. The overall picture sequence proved to be easy to score, however, and Readers felt they had no problem being consistent in their scoring.

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

Readers saw very few problems with vocabulary resources. Students could almost always find appropriate vocabulary to express the content of the pictures. The language for the situation that was depicted—a forgotten wallet—is used in the classroom. Due to high-frequency vocabulary and the depiction of fairly common situations, scores were higher this year than in the past.

Weaker students often used up too much time trying to describe what they saw in pictures two, three, and four. Very few students dramatized the picture series. There is, nevertheless, continued improvement in this regard, as AP teachers encourage their students to narrate and to avoid an overuse of direct speech when telling the 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 with this exercise. Most important is the students' actual experience with producing oral narratives of the prescribed length. Frequent work on this exercise 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.