



## Student Performance Q&A: 2008 AP® Latin: Vergil Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2008 free-response questions for AP® Latin: Vergil were written by the Chief Reader, Mary Pendergraft of Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. 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. 429–434).

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

Generally speaking, students performed poorly on this translation. Most of the problems were related to vocabulary, but students also found the grammatical constructions in the middle two lines very difficult. The full range of scores was represented, but scores in the lower range predominated. The mean score was 4.94 out of a possible 18 points.

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

Students confused the meanings of important words in the passage with those of other Latin words (e.g., *manus* or *murus* instead of *munus* [segment 2]; *furentes* instead of *ferentes* [segment 7]; *os*, *ora*, or *aurum* instead of *oro* [segment 8]; *coniunx* instead of *coniugium* [segment 9]; a form of *curo* for *careat* [segment 11]; and a form of *duco* for *doceat* [segment 16]). In many cases, these single mistranslations then led students to lose the context of the passage and thus mistranslate the next phrase or sentence. Students also had difficulty identifying and translating *det* and *exspectet* (segment 3) as present subjunctives and frequently rendered them as future indicatives. Many students did not see the grammatical structure of lines 3 and 4 of the passage (segments 8–13). Since they often missed *oro* (segment 8) as the governing verb of these lines, they subsequently translated *careat* (segment 11) and *relinquat* (segment 13) as future indicatives. Some students also

saw *furori* (segment 15) as an ablative or genitive singular rather than a dative and *dolere* (segment 18) as an ablative singular noun rather than an infinitive verb. Finally, most students failed to translate *-que . . . -que* (segment 6) as “both . . . and,” struggled with the meaning of *prodidit* (segment 10), and overlooked the *-que* in segment 15. In many of the better translations, these were the most common errors that prevented a student from receiving a perfect score.

***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 encourage students to translate word-for-word and not stray too far from the basic meaning of a Latin word. Students should also work on the meaning of core vocabulary words and on distinguishing between similar-looking Latin words. Students should avoid summarizing the passage. Special attention should be paid to conjunctions and the syntactical articulation of passages. Finally, teachers should remind students to review their translations for accuracy and coherence.

## **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* 12. 791–796).

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

On the whole students did very well on the question. In fact, an unusually large number of students attempted the V2 passage before V1. The full range of scores was represented. Of course, there were a number of scores of 0 and off-task answers, but most of the students who attempted the passage were able to earn some points for it. The passage had three fairly easy segments that helped even many weak students. Conversely, a few difficult segments prevented good students from attaining a perfect score. The mean score was 7.15 out of a possible 18 points.

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

Students had difficulty with *rex omnipotentis Olympi* (segment 2) because of the transferred epithet (commonly translated as “omnipotent king of Olympus”). The confusion with singulars and plurals (e.g., *pugnas* [segment 4] and *nubibus* [segment 17]) was very common. The most frequently missed segment was *Quid denique restat?* (segment 8). This was because of vocabulary problems (*denique* and *restat*) and the tense of *restat*, which was commonly translated as a future. *Indigetem* (segment 9) also caused trouble despite the allowance of a wide semantic field for the word; students frequently interpreted it as “indignant,” “unworthy,” “worthy,” “distinguished,” or “indigent.” Students frequently omitted or misapplied *ipsa* (segment 10). *Fateris* (segment 11) caused difficulty because of semantic and morphological slips; students frequently translated it as a noun (“brothers” or “fates”) or mistranslated it as a different verb (commonly confused as *fio* or *for*). Indirect discourse through segments 12 and 13 also gave students trouble.

***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 literal translation despite its awkwardness in English. Also, stress should be placed on the importance of participles and conjunctions.

### **Question V3 (Long Essay)**

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

This question allowed students to demonstrate their ability to analyze the Latin passage by discussing both the views of the Trojans on the day that they brought the horse into Troy and of Aeneas as he looks back on that day (*Aeneid* 2. 234–253). Students were required to support 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 general context of the excerpt and to write essays that scored at least in the 3–4 range, with more scores of 4 and higher than scores of 3 and lower. The full range of scores was represented, with somewhat fewer scores of 0 and off-task answers than in prior years. The mean score was 3.19 out of a possible 6 points.

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

A common problem was vocabulary; poor command of vocabulary made it difficult for students to understand what transpired in the passage, to discuss the Trojans' perceptions, and to support their arguments from the text. Students mistook, for example, *canunt* (line 6) for *currunt* and *dolos* (line 19) for *dolor* or *donum*. Frequently, they mistranslated *Accingunt* (line 2) as “gather,” *gaudent* (line 6) as “praise,” *incluta* (line 8) as “enclosed” or “unconquered,” *divum* (line 8) as “rich” or “O gods,” and *caeci* (line 11) as “death” (*caedes*). *Funem* (line 6) was translated as “death” or “gift,” or even not translated at all. A good number of students misidentified the *Dardanides* or the *Teucra* as the Greeks.

***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 the importance of providing proper Latin citations from throughout the passage and encourage them to focus on the passage supplied in the question rather than on extraneous material. For example, in place of citing and translating or paraphrasing the Latin from lines 13–14 of the passage, a number of students explained the relationship between Cassandra and Apollo that led to her being cursed. Students should also not focus excessively on stylistic analysis, metrics, the symbolism of figures of speech, alliteration and assonance (e.g., the “mournful” O or M), and the like, without making clear how such analysis contributes to their answer and/or without accurately translating or paraphrasing the Latin they are discussing.

Students should be guided on how to build an argument from more than isolated words and phrases. They should be advised not to develop ideas that, while generally important, lie outside the scope of the question (e.g., the character traits of Aeneas; *pietas*). Lastly, students should be instructed to make sure that they answer all parts of a question and restrict their answer to what the question has asked.

### **Question V4 (Short Essay)**

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

The purpose of this question was for students to display their ability to analyze a Latin passage by discussing the request(s) and promises that Aeneas makes to the Sybil of Cumae (*Aeneid* 6. 65–76). Students were required to support their arguments with accurate Latin citations from throughout the passage.

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

Students were easily able to identify the passage. The straightforward nature of the prompt and the students' familiarity with the themes of Book 6 and of this scene in particular helped most students generate some discussion of the passage in context. In most cases, students did attempt to cite the Latin directly and integrate it into their discussion. In contrast to what has been seen in previous years, Readers did *not* observe a tendency toward broad paraphrasing of the passage without appropriate citation. The mean score was 2.85 out of a possible 6 points.

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

Generally, students effectively cited and interpreted the first six lines of the selection. However, many translated *considerere* (line 3) as “consider,” which often led to the misunderstanding that Aeneas requested that the hardships of the Trojans be “considered.” Also, many students seemed to forget that *errantesque* (line 4) should be understood as . . . *et errantes*, not *errantes* . . . *et*.

The latter half of the passage presented more difficulty. Lack of command of important words in the passage often led students to hazard inaccurate conjectures about the sense. The meaning of *penetralia* (line 7) was often simply guessed at. *Lectos* (line 9) was sometimes understood to mean “couches” or “books.” *Sacrabo* (line 9) was very often translated as “sacrifice.” This last mistake led many students to conclude that Aeneas was going to sacrifice some of his men. Lines 10–12 were frequently omitted or misinterpreted as a request for the Sybil to stop the winds from tossing about the Trojans.

#### ***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 continue to instruct students on the proper use and integration of citations into responses, which was a strength of the essays this year. Students should continue to work on organizing their essays effectively, instead of simply engaging in a line-by-line analysis. It should be kept in mind that essays are to contain some analysis, though perhaps this year's prompt lent itself to more descriptive responses with its use of the word “discuss.” Students who earned a score of 5 or 6 used the Latin to engage in analysis. Students who did not score as well based their

essays on translations of a very small part of the passage or on individual words taken out of context. Because of the frequent mistake involving *errantesque* (line 4), it should be emphasized that the enclitic *-que* should be understood to precede the word it is attached to.

### **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 characters from the work demonstrate the ancient concept of hospitality.

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

Many students showed a good knowledge of characters' actions, although some students recalled individual details inaccurately or failed to relate specific details to hospitality. Often students recognized the characters but failed to describe how each illustrated the concept of hospitality through his or her actions. The full range of scores was represented, but the majority of students wrote only adequate or limited essays. The mean score was 3.31 out of a possible 6 points.

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

A common problem was the lack of specific details or the inclusion of irrelevant details. Not infrequently, students misidentified characters or confused their actions with those of a related character (e.g., Andromache and Helenus). 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 upon students the need to pay close attention to the wording of the question. They are also encouraged to discuss large themes and minor characters from the *Aeneid* with their students throughout the year. Teachers should make clear that in writing the global essay, students must provide specific details that indicate they have read the entire epic carefully. 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.