



Student Performance Q&A: 2009 AP® Latin: Vergil Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2009 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 this question was to assess students' ability to translate as literally as possible a passage of Latin verse (*Aeneid* 1. 23–28).

How well did students perform on this question?

In general, students performed poorly on this translation. Students found the grammatical constructions rather difficult, and many were unfamiliar with some basic vocabulary items. The mean score was 6.31 out of a possible 18 points. The full range of scores was represented, but scores in the lower range (0–5) predominated; there were few scores in the top range (14–18).

What were common student errors or omissions?

Students had considerable difficulty with vocabulary. For example, students confused the meanings of essential words in the passage, such as *memoria* instead of *memor* (segment 3), *primo* or *primum* instead of *prima* (segment 5), *curis* or *carinis* for *caris* (segment 7), *excedo* or *exeo* for *excido* (segment 11), and *tenet* for *manet* (segment 12). *Invisum* (segment 17) was defined as “unseen” or “invisible.” Students also had difficulty with the pluperfect tense expressed in the verbs *exciderant* (segment 11) and *gesserat* (segment 5). Many students simply omitted *repostum* (segment 12), *-que* (segments 3, 10, and 15), *etiam* (segment 8), and/or *spretae* (segment 15). The relative pronoun *quod* (segment 6) also proved to be problematic, as students frequently mistook it for the conjunction “because.” *Causae* (segment 9) was frequently rendered as singular, while *iniuria* (segment 15) was perceived as neuter plural. Finally, proper names were often stumbling blocks for students: “Saturn” for *Saturnia* (segment 4), “Trojan” for *Troiam* (segment 6), and “Ganymedian” or “Ganymedes” for *Ganymedis* (segment 18).

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 give students frequent practice with literal translation that is appropriate to the context of the passage. Teachers should also train students to account for every word in the text and to practice distinguishing words that look alike. Students may need to be reminded to review their translations for accuracy and coherence. Finally, in the last few weeks before the exam, teachers should conduct a review of passages that appear early on in the epic.

Question V2 (Translation)

What was the intent of this question?

The intent of this question was to assess students' ability to craft a literal translation that accurately reflects the grammar and syntax of the text (*Aeneid* 10. 459–465).

How well did students perform on this question?

The full range of scores was represented, though not as many scores fell in the middle range as in the high and low ranges. Students generally performed either very well or very poorly on this question. The mean score was 6.58 out of a possible 18 points.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Common omissions were *ita*, *sub*, and *advena*. There were many common vocabulary words that students mistook for other common vocabulary words: *adisti* for a form of *adsum*, *moriantia* for *morantia*, *patris* for *patria*, *aethera* for *aura*, *fatur* for *fata*, *hospitium* for *hostium*, *inanes* for *immanes*, *victorem* for *victoriam*, and *cruenta* for *crudelis*. Grammatical errors included not sufficiently rendering jussive subjunctives (e.g., *cernat*, *adsis*, *ferant*), translating *Audiit* as present tense, and not rendering *coeptis ingentibus* as plural. Many students were unclear regarding how *semineci sibi* fit into the sentence. The *-que* in line 5 was frequently misplaced, causing students to translate as though *magnum* were modifying *iuvenem*.

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?

Selections from Book 10 should receive as much attention as selections from the earlier books do. Teachers should encourage students to slow down while translating, reminding students to pay careful attention to the case of substantives and to the number of both nouns and verbs. Teachers should also clearly indicate what constitutes an appropriate translation of a Latin subjunctive into English. Students must make sure they translate all the words in the passage.

Question V3 (Long Essay)

What was the intent of this question?

The intent of this question was to test students' ability to analyze Aeneas' arguments used to justify both his departure from Carthage (*Aeneid* 4. 337–350) and his request to visit his father in the underworld (*Aeneid* 6. 110–122). Students were required to support their arguments with accurate Latin citations from **throughout** the passages.

How well did students perform on this question?

Although a full range of scores was achieved, scores of 6 were rare and scores of 3 and 4 predominated. The mean score was 3 out of a possible 6 points. The number of low scores was disappointing.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Familiarity with both passages caused many students to respond to the question with generalizations or with answers from memory. A common grammatical error was the translation of only a small part of the contrary-to-fact condition in lines 4–8 of the first passage; this caused students to misconstrue the analysis. Poor command of vocabulary made it difficult for students to understand some important sentences and support their arguments correctly. The imperative *miserere* in the second passage was often mistaken for an adjective, “miserable” or “wretched.” Errors in verb tenses and moods sometimes led students to misconstrue the meaning of the text.

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 students to focus on the passage supplied in the question rather than on extraneous material. Literary devices should be used in a discussion only as additional support. Students should review important proper nouns and adjectives in order to avoid misunderstandings of names mentioned in the exam passages.

Question V4 (Short Essay)

What was the intent of this question?

Students were asked to analyze the ways in which Vergil conveys Turnus' desperation after failing to hit Aeneas with a rock, as described in *Aeneid* 12. 903–918.

How well did students perform on this question?

Most of the Exam Readers felt students struggled with this short essay question more than they had with the other short essay questions on previously administered AP Exams. Although the full range of scores was awarded, there were few scores of 5 and 6; most of the scores were in the 2–4 range. The mean score was 2.47 out of a possible 6 points.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Many students failed to answer the question. Instead, they focused on Turnus' physical weakness and fear and assumed that these qualities constituted his desperation. Students should not use punctuation as a basis for analysis. Vergil did not use commas or semicolons!

Although the prompt urged students to quote from throughout the passage, Readers found that many otherwise good essays covered only two-thirds of the passage, skipping either the simile or the sections before or after the simile. When Latin is cited, it must be translated or closely paraphrased.

Students' time would be well spent honing their vocabulary and grammar skills. Students regularly confused *immane*, translating it as "immovable" or "weak"; *aegri* as "fields"; *avidos* as "birds"; *currus* as "courses," "curses," or "running"; and *viam* as "life." Other confused pairs included *currentem / cursus*, *viri / vires*, and *vi / viam*.

Simple noun–adjective agreement caused significant problems for many students. Basic case uses were seemingly ignored, particularly in the simile where almost all the words were variously assigned as subjects, objects, and so on. For example, Turnus was inaccurately described as "empty" or "useless," even though these were neuter adjectives (and *inane* was, in fact, functioning as a substantive).

Subject–verb agreement, especially within the simile, caused misinterpretation about the scope of the simile. Students thought that Turnus was drowsy, falling asleep, or actually asleep on the battlefield. They did not notice the first-person plural in *videmur* and *succidimus*, thus missing much of the point of the simile.

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 familiar with the more widely used devices and know the differences between simile and metaphor, for instance. If students are going to use scansion in their analysis, they need to be more careful with the scansion itself, and they need to be more circumspect in their claims that it reflects the action in or mood of the passage.

Students need to know where a simile begins and ends. They frequently seemed to ignore *velut . . . sic*, or they confused *velut* with a form of *velle*. Students should also be taught not to rely heavily on sound devices, such as alliteration or assonance. Furthermore, there is no special meaning to any given letter of the alphabet (e.g., *v* does not indicate heartbreak or defeat).

Students should avoid reading too much into (or relying too much on) rhetorical figures. For example, polysyndeton and anaphora do not by themselves clearly convey Turnus' terror. If students wish to focus on such devices, they need to show how the devices specifically add to Vergil's depiction of Turnus' desperation. Too many students focused very heavily on anaphora, alliteration, and polysyndeton as their primary material for analysis.

Teachers need to cover the entire syllabus. A number of students were clearly unfamiliar with the Book 12 passage. It is recommended that both teachers and students take advantage of the materials that are available on AP Central®.

Question V5 (Entire *Aeneid*)

What was the intent of this question?

This question, based on a reading of the entire *Aeneid* in translation, assessed students' ability to discuss the theme of the destructive power of excessive desire for material possessions, as illustrated by two characters drawn from a list of six.

How well did students perform on this question?

While a full range of scores was awarded, many scores fell in the 3–4 range. The mean score was 3.24 out of a possible 6 points.

What were common student errors or omissions?

The characters posed difficulties for students. Many confused the Pygmalion of Vergil with the Pygmalion mentioned in Ovid or confused the characters on the list with characters having similar names (e.g., Polydorus with Palinurus or Polyphemus). When discussing Pygmalion, many students failed to mention that he ultimately did not get the treasure for which he murdered Sychaeus.

While the question specifically addressed “excessive desire for material possessions,” many students, perhaps because they did not read the question carefully, instead discussed the desire for power, or jealousy over power, without tying in the notion that power might convey material goods. Such essays were generally off-track.

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?

Although the syllabus contains selected Latin passages from selected books in the *Aeneid*, students must read the entire *Aeneid* in English. Teachers should spend some time discussing the minor characters that fall outside the assigned Latin readings on the syllabus.

Students should read the question carefully; by doing so, in the case of this year's question on the entire *Aeneid*, they would have understood that the question had two parts: (1) discuss an episode in which the character displays excessive desire for material possessions *and* (2) discuss the destructive power of that desire. After reading the question, students should have spent time planning their essay and developing a thesis or focus for it. The best essays in this group were well organized and made a clear argument that was supported by appropriate details from the stories of each character. Essays that earned scores of 5 or 6 made a strong connection between the characters' desire for material possessions and the implications of that desire.