

Student Performance Q&A: 2010 AP® Latin: Vergil Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2010 free-response questions for AP® Latin: Vergil were written by the Chief Reader, Mary Pendergraft of Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, N.C. 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 1

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. 124–130).

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 6.41 out of a possible 18 points (compared with 6.31 in 2009). About 30 percent of responses earned scores in the lower middle range (6–11). In general, students performed slightly better on this translation than on those in past exams. Students found the syntactical complexity of the passage rather difficult, however, and many were unfamiliar with some basic vocabulary items.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Some students had difficulty with the following elements:

- The initial indirect statement, especially in rendering the tenses of *misceri* (segment 3) and *emissam* (*esse*) (segment 4) accurately
- The perfect tense expressed by the words *sensit* (segment 5), *extulit* (segment 11) and *latuere* (segment 17)
- Properly translating nouns as either singular or plural — *unda* (segment 10) was often rendered as a plural, as was *ruina* (segment 16)
- Understanding some vocabulary — for example, confusing words, such as *pontem* instead of *pontum* (segment 3), and translating *refusa* (segment 7) as “mixed,” *graviter* (segment 8) as “greatly,” and *alto* (segment 9) as “on high”
- Recognizing *imis* (segment 6) and *summa* (segment 10) as superlatives

- Correctly translating proper names — for example, giving “Troy” for *Troas* (segment 15) or “Aenean” for *Aeneae* (segment 12)

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?

- Give students frequent practice with literal translation that is appropriate to the context of the passage.
- Encourage students to give accurate meanings of words 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.
- In the last few weeks before the exam, review passages that appear early on in the epic.

Question V2

What was the intent of this question?

The intent of this question was to assess students’ ability to craft a literal translation that accurately reflected the grammar and syntax of the text of Vergil’s *Aeneid* 4. 295–301.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 5.69 out of a possible 18 points (compared with 6.58 in 2009). Most scores fell in the low and middle ranges, with only 5 percent of responses earning 15 points or more.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Common student errors were inability to:

- translate perfect tense Latin verbs with appropriate past tense English verbs;
- translate accurately the tenses of infinitives in indirect discourse;
- employ in translation English nouns whose meanings are similar to those of the Latin nouns being translated;
- translate, whenever possible, singular Latin words with singular English words and plural Latin words with plural English words;
- translate each finite Latin verb with a finite English verb; and
- reflect in English translation the grammatical case of the Latin words being translated. In particular, students sometimes failed to reflect the agreement of Latin noun–adjective pairs in their English translations.

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?

- Train students to attempt the entire passage and to reflect every word in the Latin passage (including the enclitic *-que*) with at least one English word.

- Help students to be aware of the dangers posed by commonly confused Latin words (e.g., *dolor* versus *dolus*; *paro* versus *pareo*; *quis* versus *quid*).

Question V3

What was the intent of this question?

The intent of this question was to test students' ability to analyze Aeneas's reactions (often expressed in actions) to the loss of Creusa and what those reactions (and actions) revealed about his character.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 3.02 out of a possible 6 points, which was very close to the mean of 3 in 2009. Nearly two-thirds of the responses earned scores of 2, 3 or 4.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Some otherwise good essays were undermined by lack of Latin support. Some students did not remember to cite and translate Latin to support their statements; often they made significant points but failed to cite the Latin. Some students cited Latin throughout but did not answer the question. Students also sometimes constructed arguments around randomly chosen Latin words or cited large chunks of Latin and used only a word or phrase within that chunk, which wasted time; instead, students should either use ellipses or cite line numbers. It is also important that students read the passage carefully to understand it as a whole and not as unrelated sections.

Poor command of vocabulary often led astray students who were less well prepared. For example, *avia* was translated as "birds," *stat* as "immediately," *amens* as "loving" or "minds," *commendo* as "commend," *animo* as "ghost," and *forte pedem* as "brave [or strong] foot." Common errors of syntax included making *misero* modify *coniunx* or Creusa. Another common error was to take *crudelius* as modifying *urbe*.

Students should not rely on sound patterns, tone, metrics or figures of speech to construct their arguments but to support them. Some students, for example, argued that polysyndeton was evidence of distress, rapid planning, franticness or panic, or that "m" sounds connoted sorrow, calmness or desperation. Fewer students than in the past, however, relied on such argumentation.

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 must have a good command of Latin in order to do well on the essay. Impress on students the importance of providing proper Latin citations from throughout the passage.
- Encourage students to focus on the question rather than on extraneous material. Students commonly discussed irrelevant topics too extensively (e.g., Stoicism, the fall of Troy itself, Aeneas's journey to Italy). All such topics should be introduced only as support for an argument based on the passage.
- Give students opportunities to practice citing and translating Latin to support the points made in their essays.

- Remind students to use the exam’s reading period to read through the passage and plan an essay. Students should not rely on general memory of a passage; instead they should refer specifically to the passage at hand.
- Stress the importance of answering the question rather than writing an essay based on a preconceived idea garnered from classroom discussion. For example, students sometimes conflated this passage with the scene in which the ghost of Creusa appeared or thought Aeneas’s rearming was to fight for Troy’s survival.

Question V4

What was the intent of this question?

The intent of this question was to test students’ ability to analyze the portrayal of three characters in *Aeneid* 10. 420–428: Pallas, Halaesus and Lausus.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 2.60 out of a possible 6 points (compared with 2.47 in 2009). Although a full range of scores was given, students’ lack of familiarity with the passage produced very weak essays overall. Almost a third of the essays were scored 1 or below.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Although this was not a translation exercise, students’ inability to identify even high-frequency vocabulary and to recognize noun/adjective agreement impaired their ability to answer the question.

Frequent vocabulary errors included *petit* as “petite,” *precatas* as “cautious,” and a variety of mistranslations of *ferro*, *libro*, *textit* and *sinit*.

Frequent errors of agreement included *Arcadio* with *infelix*, *infelix* with *pectus*, *duri* with *pectus* (although this error did not generally hurt the quality of the essay), *ingens* with *belli*, and *perterrita* with *Lausus* (students translated *perterrita* both actively and passively as well).

Confusion of cases/forms occurred frequently with *ferro*, *libro*, *telo* and the Greek accusative *Imaona*.

Students lacked familiarity with this passage, which resulted in generally confused answers. Although Father Tiber is named in the passage, many students identified the god to whom Pallas prays as another deity (or said that Pallas prayed to his own father). Characters were sometimes identified as female, and students were unable to determine who killed whom, or which characters were on which side of the fighting. The fact that *quercus* was glossed led many students to imaginative interpretations of why an oak tree was mentioned in the passage (e.g., a character was as strong as an oak tree, or a character had a weapon made of oak).

Some students misinterpreted the question, comparing characters instead of explaining how they were portrayed. Often this led to grouping them as “good guys” and “bad guys,” or strong warriors and weak warriors.

Many students did not say enough about Halaesus, although there was nearly as much to be said about him as the other two characters.

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?

- Be sure to cover the entire syllabus. A disproportionate number of students seemed completely unfamiliar with this passage from Book 10.
- Teach students to analyze the entire passage and to avoid basing their answer on the interpretation of a single word or phrase or a figure of speech.
- Teach students to focus their answers on the passage given; information from other passages may be a helpful supplement but does not compensate for failure to answer the question.
- Be sure that students understand the Roman context of the epic.
- Have students practice properly citing Latin, including writing out the Latin or citing line numbers, making sure that the entire relevant Latin passage is cited.
- Remind students that personal opinions, particularly based on modern experience, do not constitute analysis of the *Aeneid*.

Question V5

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 showing or withholding mercy, and how Vergil demonstrates whether or not this is appropriate in context. Students discussed two pairs of characters from a list of six.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 3.61 out of a possible 6 points (compared with 3.24 in 2009). Although a full range of scores was awarded, over half fell in the 4–5 range.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Generally, because three of the six pairs under consideration were drawn from the Latin syllabus, which most students have read closely, students recognized a set of characters from each list and could speak confidently to the issue of mercy with adequate accuracy and detail. However, some students neglected to address whether Vergil portrays each act of showing or withholding mercy as appropriate or not in its context.

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?

- Give students regular practice answering free-response questions as a part of their AP Latin: Vergil course, paying close attention to the specifics of a given question and responding in a fixed amount of time.
- Remind students to read each question carefully; by doing so, in the case of this year's question on the entire *Aeneid*, students would have understood that the question had two parts: (1) discuss two scenarios in which one character either shows mercy to another or withholds it from another, and (2) discuss whether Vergil portrays this act as appropriate in

each situation. Essays that earned scores of 5 or 6 made a strong connection between the display or denial of mercy and the appropriateness of it.

- Make sure that students support the points made in their essays with cogent details from the relevant scenes in the text.
- Instruct students to maintain focus on the given question and avoid delving into tangential topics that are not directly germane to the question and to the *Aeneid*.