



Student Performance Q&A: 2002 AP[®] Spanish Literature Free-Response Questions

The following comments are provided by the Chief Reader regarding the 2002 free-response questions for AP Spanish Literature. *They are intended to assist AP readers as they develop training sessions to help teachers better prepare their students for the AP Exams.* They give an overview of each question and its performance, 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 included. Readers are encouraged to use their expertise to create strategies for teachers to improve student performance in specific areas.

Question 1. Poetry Analysis

What was intended by the question?

This question assesses the student's ability to understand and write about a poem they have not seen before, "No inútilmente" by José Ángel Valente. Students were asked to analyze the debate implicit in the poem about the capacity of poetic language to transform human existence. They were to include in their discussion a study of poetic technique as it applies to the poem.

How well did students perform?

Student performance was similar to that on past poetry questions. Some students, however, interpreted the instructions to analyze the debate very literally and discussed it only as an act or a structural device in the poem without addressing its substance. The scoring guidelines were modified to accommodate this ambiguity in the question.

What were common errors or omissions?

- Superficial commentary on the formal aspects of the poem, with a tendency to identify or list them without analyzing their role in the poem.
- Poor organization.
- Lack of an introduction or thesis statement.
- Discussion of the poem without focusing on the question.
- The poem was misread or not understood.

Based on your experience at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that could improve the performance of their students on the exam?

- When studying poetic devices, make sure that students understand their role in poetry. Analyze specific poems in order to study how they are enhanced by particular devices.
- Tell students to focus on the question when analyzing the poem. They do not need to comment on every aspect of the poem, only those that pertain to the question.
- Practice writing analytic essays about poetry. Organizing these essays is more difficult than for Questions 2 and 3, and students will benefit from the practice.
- Provide a large variety of poetic examples for analysis.
- Study with students some of the sample poetry essays posted on AP Central.
- Provide students with specific vocabulary for writing about literature.
- Help students prepare to write well-developed and well-organized essays by: teaching them how to make an outline of their ideas; practicing a list of expressions that they can use to link ideas, sentences and paragraphs; stressing the use of subordinate clauses in order to avoid simplistic sentences and excessive repetition; and practicing the writing of thesis statements that are not merely repetitions of the question.

Question 2. Single Author

What was intended by the question?

Students were to write an essay about how human beings fail in their attempt to understand the universe, basing their response in at least two stories by Jorge Luis Borges.

How well did students perform?

This was the most difficult of the three free-response questions. Students who had read widely in Borges and understood the word “fracasar” did well, but others had difficulty dealing with the question.

What were common errors or omissions?

- Some students did not understand “fracasar” and therefore had trouble responding to the question.
- A number of students had read only a few works by Borges and found it difficult to make them fit the question.
- Not linking the response closely to the question.
- Discussion of failure, but not necessarily failure to understand the universe. However, the scoring guidelines did recognize analyses that centered on Borges’ use of his characters’ personal experiences to symbolize or synthesize the individual’s failed attempts to deal with reality as presented by the author.
- Inclusion of plot summary. Literature essays should contain little or no plot summary. Characteristically, the essays that earn the highest scores consist almost totally of analysis.

- Lack of a thesis statement or a clear introduction.
- A conclusion that merely repeats the introduction.
- Poor organization.

Based on your experience at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that could improve the performance of their students on the exam?

- Have students read more of Borges' works.
- Stress the importance of answering the question in the essay, not just talking about two of the author's works.
- Implement the suggestions for Question 1 about essay writing in general.

Question 3. Excerpt from Author

What was intended by the question?

Students were to use two of Unamuno's works to show how the quote, a passage from one of the author's plays, is representative of Unamuno's themes.

How well did students perform?

The excerpt contained commentary on fundamental aspects of Unamuno's work and thought, and many students were able to write a good analysis.

What were common errors or omissions?

- Insufficient focus on the excerpt.
- Failure to link the ideas in the quote to the analysis of the works.
- Excessive plot summary and description.
- Poor organization.

Based on your experience at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that could improve the performance of their students on the exam?

- Have students practice jotting down brief notes on the main ideas of the quote.
- Stress the need to focus on analysis, not plot summary.
- Encourage students to make an outline. When questions have a quote from the author or a critical text, structuring the answer is usually more complex than for other types of questions.
- Commentary in the essay should be specific, not simply general references to works read.

- Do some brainstorming with several questions from old exams in order to help students develop a method of deciding which works to use in their response. Although the reading list will be different for the 2003 exam, students will still need to have a technique for remembering what works they have read and determining which are most applicable for the question at hand.
- Select additional representative passages and have students write an outline in class of the main ideas they would develop in an essay using several works of a particular author.
- Implement the suggestions for Question 1 about essay writing in general.

Note: Teachers whose students will take the new AP Spanish Literature Exam in 2003 should make sure that they read all the works on the reading list and that they are familiar with the new types of free-response questions (find examples on AP Central and in the *AP Spanish Course Description*).