



Student Performance Q&A:

2007 AP® Chinese Language and Culture Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2007 free-response questions for AP® Chinese Language and Culture were written by the Chief Reader, Tao-chung Yao of the University of Hawaii, Manoa. 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.

Presentational Writing Task 1: Story Narration

What was the intent of this task?

This task evaluates writing in the presentational communicative mode by having students narrate a story to a friend, based on a series of four pictures. Students are given 15 minutes to write the narration, and the response receives a single, holistic score, according to how well it accomplishes the assigned task. The purpose of this question is to determine whether students can write a well-organized story with a clear progression of ideas (a beginning, middle, and end), including as many details as possible. It also gives them a chance to demonstrate their ability to use appropriate transitional elements and cohesive devices, as well as sophistication of sentence structure and vocabulary.

This year's pictures were about two people bicycling in the mountains. One loses his book bag in the woods, and the other helps him to find the bag by calling the cell phone in the bag.

How well did students perform on this task?

The mean score for the Standard Group* was 3.62 out of a possible 6 points. The mean score for the Total group was 4.41. Most of the students were able to complete the task satisfactorily.

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

What were common student errors or omissions?

1. Typographic errors.

Typographic errors were the most common problem in responses to this task (and to other writing tasks as well). These errors can be divided into two major categories:

- a. Incorrect character with the same pronunciation as the correct character.
The student typed the correct pronunciation but did not select the correct character: for example, in 錢合手機, 合 should be 和.
- b. Incorrect character because of incorrect spelling.
The student typed an incorrect pronunciation, resulting in an incorrect character: for example, 應為 should be 因為.

2. Incorrect word choice.

Incorrect choice of words was the second most common error and can also be divided into two categories:

- a. Students wanted to express something in Chinese but did not have the precise vocabulary, so they used an incorrect term: for example, in 蓝色的包子, 包子 should be 腰包.
- b. Students wanted to express something in Chinese but did not have the precise vocabulary, so they used an English word instead: for example, in “幸好有 cell phone,” “cell phone” should be 手机.

3. Incomplete responses.

The story was incomplete because of the student’s inability to formulate the story within the allocated time.

4. Grammatical errors.

There were many types of grammatical errors in the students’ responses. While it is impossible to list them all, a couple of examples follow.

Example 1: Word order

他们找了很长时间在路的旁边 should be 他们在路的旁边找了很长时间.

Example 2: Location expression

到山上里玩 should be 到山上玩.

5. Failure to organize and write paragraphs.

Students were supposed to write in paragraphs, but many were unable to do so. In many instances, the stories contained only loosely connected or fragmented sentences.

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?

1. Typographic errors (error type 1a mentioned above) can be eliminated if students take time to proofread every word in their stories and to make sure that the characters on the screen are all correct. To reduce the likelihood of using the incorrect characters (error type 1b), students should pay more attention to the tones. For instance, if a student knows the appropriate character but

cannot locate it when typing because he or she does not know the correct tone, the student can try to retype the word with a different tone to see if the correct character will appear on the screen. Students using Bopomofo, of course, need to know the tones to get the correct character. Students using Pinyin can also reduce the choices on the screen by adding the number (1, 2, 3, 4, or 5) that represents the tone.

2. There is no easy solution to address incorrect Chinese word choices (error type 2a). Students need to expand their vocabulary. Additionally, students might try circumlocution to minimize using English if they do not know the appropriate Chinese word (error type 2b). For instance, students can use whatever Chinese words they have learned to describe the “cell phone.”
3. Students need practice to respond to the stimulus within the time allotted (error type 3). A student can first write a basic story by using just one sentence to describe each of the four pictures—this should not take too long. The student can then add details to the story and try to connect the sentences into paragraphs using appropriate cohesive devices.
4. There is no easy shortcut to eliminate grammatical errors (error type 4). By double-checking each sentence after writing the story, students might notice grammatical errors and correct them. The best way for students to minimize grammatical mistakes is to practice writing frequently.
5. Students need to practice writing in paragraphs, not just in isolated sentences. Teachers should have students write in paragraphs with appropriate connectors.

Presentational Writing Task 2: Personal Letter

What was the intent of this task?

This task assesses writing in the presentational communicative mode by having students write a letter to a pen pal at a Chinese partner school. It consists of a single prompt, which identifies a topic and directs students to discuss the topic in general, as well as to select one aspect of that topic and to describe what they either like or dislike about the feature chosen, justifying their opinions with specific examples. Students are allotted 30 minutes to write the letter. The response receives a single, holistic score, based on how well it accomplishes the assigned task. This question’s intent is not only to see if students can produce a letter that addresses all the points mentioned in the prompt but also to discover if they can write a letter in Chinese according to the conventional Chinese letter format.

This year’s prompt asked about the communities in which the students live. They were asked to write about the community in general first, then to choose one particular aspect of the community and describe what they liked or disliked about this particular feature and also to justify their opinions with specific examples.

How well did students perform on this task?

The mean score for the Standard Group of 4.12 out of a possible 6 points was the highest among the four writing tasks on the AP Chinese Exam. The mean score for the Total Group was 4.62, which was the second highest among the four writing tasks on the exam (the highest was the e-mail response task). So while the Standard Group had the most success with the personal letter, the Total Group scored highest on the e-mail response task.

What were common student errors or omissions?

1. Lack of familiarity with Chinese letter format, resulting in one or more missing components. A formal Chinese letter normally has five components:

- a. salutation (name of the recipient)
- b. the main text, which typically starts with a greeting
- c. closing
- d. signature
- f. date (placed below the signature)

Most students did not write a closing or include the date at the end of their letters. It is customary to start the main body of the letter with a greeting—a simple 你好 is quite common. However, the phrase 你好 should be placed at the beginning of the main text, not together with the salutation as in the following example: 親愛的筆友你好:

2. Inappropriate register.

After the signature some students used expressions, such as 敬上, that are overly polite and too formal for letters between pen pals.

3. Failure to address all points in the prompt.

The prompt asked students to first write about the community in general, then choose one particular aspect of the community and describe what they like or dislike about this particular aspect, and finally to justify their opinions with specific examples. However, many students failed to give specific examples when describing the particular aspect of the community. Some students described only the community in general without discussing a specific aspect. Some students did not describe the community in general, but only talked about a specific aspect of it.

4. Typographic errors.

There were a variety of typographic errors in the letters. Some of the errors obscured the meaning of the words and required intense Reader effort. Examples of errors include 油鋸 (郵局); 追打得與 (最大的魚); and 比鼠葯 (必須要). Also, see the discussion and examples of typographic errors under Story Narration.

5. Grammatical mistakes.

There were a variety of grammatical errors in the letters. When a sentence contains both grammatical errors and typos, it can be very difficult to understand. For example, 我的傢對迷吃干(Michigan)湖很靜, should be 我的家離迷吃干(Michigan)湖很近. In the example above, the student uses 迷吃干 for Michigan, instead of the more commonly used transliterations of Michigan, such as 密西根 or 密執安. Had the student not included the English word “Michigan” in the letter, the above sentence would be incomprehensible.

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?

1. Teachers should work with students to write letters in Chinese using the conventional format. Additionally, teachers can remind students that the date in a Chinese letter is always placed at the end below the signature.
2. To minimize the error of using the inappropriate register, teachers can show students how to use different expressions when addressing people of different social status or persons with different relationships to the student. Polite expressions are normally used when writing to superiors, teachers, parents, strangers, etc. In these cases using 敬上 after one's signature would be appropriate. However, when writing to friends and peers, a simple 上 after the signature is sufficient.
3. Teachers should remind students to read the prompt very carefully and make sure that they address all parts of it.
4. Teachers can encourage students to get into the good habit of proofreading their letters when they finish writing. Careful proofreading will allow students to spot typographic errors and incorrect word choices, thus eliminating unnecessary mistakes.
5. Teachers should remind students to read through their completed letters carefully to ensure that all sentences flow smoothly. This step gives students the opportunity to notice problematic sentences and rewrite them.

Interpersonal Writing Task 1: E-Mail Response

What was the intent of this task?

This task assesses writing in the interpersonal communicative mode by having students write an e-mail message in response to one received from a friend. Students are allotted 15 minutes to write the response. The response receives a single, holistic score, based on how well it accomplishes the assigned task. Students must be able first to comprehend the e-mail and then to write an e-mail back, addressing all the questions raised in the incoming message.

In this year's e-mail response prompt, the friend tells the student that he or she has been invited to participate in two extracurricular activities. The friend asks the student which activity is better and also wants to know what experience the student has had in participating in extracurricular activities.

How well did students perform on this task?

The mean score for the Standard Group was 3.86 out of a possible 6 points, making this task the second highest scoring among the four writing tasks for the Standard Group, the highest being the personal letter. The mean score for the Total Group was 4.81, making this the highest scoring of the four writing tasks for the Total Group.

What were common student errors or omissions?

1. Failure to address all parts of the prompt.

The most common error was that many students did not read the e-mail carefully and respond to both of the questions raised in it. Students were asked to advise the friend about which extracurricular activity he or she should choose. They were also prompted to talk about their own experiences of participating in extracurricular activities. While most of the students answered the first question and offered their suggestions, many failed to answer the second question and talk about their own experiences of participating in extracurricular activities.

2. Typographic errors.

As in other writing tasks, there were many typographic errors in the e-mail responses: for example, 因该 instead of 应该, 音源 instead of 音乐. Also, see the discussion and examples of typographic errors under Story Narration.

3. Errors in grammar and usage.

Grammar and usage errors were also abundant in the e-mail responses. For example, 網球的運動量給舞蹈多 should be 網球的運動量比舞蹈多, and 我往往打网球 should be 我常常打网球.

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?

1. Teachers should remind students to read the e-mail prompt carefully to identify and then address all of the questions raised.
2. Teachers need to remind students to proofread their completed responses to eliminate as many typographic errors as possible.
3. Teachers can have students practice checking their responses carefully to find and correct grammatical errors.

Interpersonal Writing Task 2: Relay Telephone Message

What was the intent of this task?

This task assesses writing in the interpersonal communicative mode by having students write an e-mail message to relay a voice message left for a friend. It consists of a voice message, which the student hears twice, and directs the student to type an e-mail relaying the message and its important details. Students are allotted five minutes to write the e-mail message. The response receives a single, holistic score, based on how well it accomplishes the assigned task. Students are expected to include as much information as possible, especially the essential components of the voice message.

This year's phone message was about five tickets for a Beijing opera performance two days hence. The tickets were given to the caller, Liu Jianmin, by his uncle. The caller and his girlfriend are both going. He invites the intended recipient of the phone message, Xiao Fang, and her boyfriend to go

with them. The caller also asks Xiao Fang to invite her brother to come along, because he likes Beijing opera. The theater is near the caller's home—only a 10-minute walk—so they will meet at 7 p.m. at the caller's home two days later. The caller asks Xiao Fang to call him that night. Students, after listening to the phone message, were asked to write an e-mail to Xiao Fang summarizing the phone message.

How well did students perform on this task?

The mean score for the Standard Group was 2.91 out of a possible 6 points. The mean score for the Total Group was 3.42. This task was the most difficult on the exam for both the Standard and Total Groups. One reason for the lower scores is that many students failed to include all of the necessary information in the response.

What were common student errors or omissions?

1. Failure to address all parts of the prompt.

The most common error is that many students did not include all the necessary information in the e-mail that relays the phone message. The message should tell Xiao Fang who called and why he called. It should also tell Xiao Fang when and where the Beijing opera will be performed, who she should invite, and what to do after receiving the message. Many students did not say who called and/or did not ask Xiao Fang to call Liu Jianmin.

2. Lack of task comprehension.

Some students did not understand the nature of the task. They thought that the phone message was directed to them, so they answered the message instead of relaying it.

3. Typographic errors.

As in other writing tasks, typos were a common problem in the relay telephone message responses. Some typographic errors obscured the meaning of the sentence. For example, 明天晚上七点钟在他家减免 should be 明天晚上七点钟在他家见面, and 他说他的簌簌送给他五张的紧急票 should be 他说他的叔叔送给他五张的京剧票. Also, see the discussion and examples of typographic errors under Story Narration.

4. Grammatical errors.

As in other tasks, there were many grammatical errors in relay telephone message responses.

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?

1. Students are allowed to take notes when listening to the phone message, which is played twice. If students can understand the phone message and take extensive notes without missing any essential information, they should be able to accurately relay the message by consulting the notes. However, note-taking may require special training, so it is desirable for teachers to practice note-taking and summarizing a message in class.
2. Teachers should be sure that students are clear on how to respond to this task, reminding them that relaying a message is not the same as answering a message.

3. To minimize typos, it is always a good idea for students to check the characters after typing the e-mail.
4. The best way to improve grammar is through practice. Teachers can have students practice reading their completed e-mails to identify and correct mistakes.

Interpersonal Speaking Task: Conversation

What was the intent of this task?

This task evaluates speaking in the interpersonal communicative mode by having students respond as part of a simulated conversation. It comprises a statement identifying an interlocutor and conversation topic, followed by six questions. Students are allotted 20 seconds to speak at each turn in the conversation. Each of the six responses receives a holistic score, based on how well it accomplishes the assigned task; all six scores count equally in calculating the total score. Students need to speak clearly with good pronunciation and also to make sure that the answer addresses the prompt directly and in a culturally appropriate manner.

This year's conversation took place between a host parent, Li Ming, and the student, who played the role of an exchange student who had just arrived at the Beijing Airport.

How well did students perform on this task?

The mean score for the Standard Group was 21.39 out of a possible 36 points. The mean score for the Total Group was 27.51.

What were common student errors or omissions?

1. Inefficient use of response time.

Even though the exam directions clearly state that students should respond to the question as fully and as appropriately as possible, many students did not use the allotted time efficiently. Many students responded minimally without utilizing the whole 20 seconds. Others tried to say too much, resulting in responses that were cut off in the middle of a sentence.

2. Difficulty formulating a response.

Many students seemed to have a hard time constructing their responses. Answers contained long pauses, as students tried to figure out what to say next. This often resulted in incomplete and/or disjointed sentences.

3. Inappropriate register.

Students should have used polite expressions whenever possible, as the host parent has a higher social status. Many students failed to use the appropriate register. For example, it is improper for the student to address the host parent directly by name (Li Ming). It is also inappropriate for a student to tell the host parent that he or she is hungry so they should eat right away.

4. Failure to comprehend the question.

It appears that many students failed to answer a question because they did not understand it. Some students responded with an irrelevant reply to the question, and others said “I don’t know.”

5. Pronunciation errors.

Many students pronounced words using incorrect tones or sounds: for example, 多謝你的管教 instead of 多謝你的關照; 很高興你綁我 instead of 很高興你幫我; and 互愛文動 instead of 戶外運動.

6. Grammatical errors.

A wide range of grammatical errors were heard in the responses: for example, 學的時間有一兩年在學校裏 instead of 在學校裏學了一兩年; 問他們在北京什麼好東西 instead of 問他們北京有什麼好東西.

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?

1. Students may need practice to use the 20-second response time fully. Teachers can time students’ answers as they do this exercise in class.

2. It is not easy to answer a question without preparation, and students need practice to develop this skill. Teachers can work with students to answer questions spontaneously when they do not have much time to formulate their thoughts.

3. Learning about culturally appropriate behavior should be an integral part of language learning. Teachers should instruct students to be socially and culturally appropriate, considering social status, age, and relationship, when speaking to a Chinese person.

4. Listening is an important part of this interpersonal speaking task. However, since it is a simulated conversation, the student does not have a chance to ask the other party to repeat or to clarify a word or a sentence. The solution here is to strengthen students’ listening comprehension by giving them more practice with listening activities.

5. Teachers should remind students to pay attention to correct pronunciation and tones and to speak clearly so that listeners can understand them.

6. Teachers should correct students’ grammatical mistakes whenever possible.

Presentational Speaking Task 1: Cultural Presentation

What was the intent of this task?

This task evaluates speaking in the presentational communicative mode by having students make a presentation on a cultural topic to a Chinese class. It consists of a single prompt, which identifies a cultural topic and directs students to select an example of that topic, describe it, and explain its significance. Students are allotted four minutes to prepare the presentation and two minutes to

deliver it. The response receives a single, holistic score, based on how well it accomplishes the assigned task; in addition to language skills, the score reflects the cultural knowledge exhibited in the response.

This year's task asked students to choose one Chinese social custom (such as giving or receiving gifts, meeting someone for the first time, or being a guest in someone's home). Students had to be able to describe the social custom and also explain its significance.

How well did students perform on this task?

The mean score for the Standard Group was 3.34 out of a possible 6 points. The mean score for the Total Group was 4.23.

What were common student errors or omissions?

1. Not following the instructions in the prompt.

Although the prompt clearly states that students are supposed to explain a Chinese social custom, many students ignored the term "Chinese" and explained a social custom in general terms. For example, some students talked about what one should do when meeting a person for the first time, without mentioning anything specifically about Chinese social customs.

2. Misunderstanding the prompt.

Some students did not understand the English prompt well. For example, one student thought that "social custom" meant "social status" and gave a presentation comparing the social status of men and women in China.

3. Giving inaccurate cultural information.

One of the examples given in the prompt is "meeting someone for the first time." One student said that when you meet people in China for the first time, you tell them your name and then ask their name(s); next you ask if they have eaten and if not, then you treat them to a meal. This student confuses an old way of greeting someone that one already knows with what should be said when a person meets someone for the first time. Also, it is not true that Chinese people would interpret "I have not eaten yet" as a signal for one to invite the other person to eat.

4. Organizational problems.

Many students did not provide a well-organized answer. Sentences were fragmented and loosely connected.

5. Poor pronunciation and grammatical errors.

As in responses to the other tasks, the answers in the cultural presentation task contained many pronunciation and grammatical errors.

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?

1. Teachers should stress the importance of reading the prompt carefully. Even if the language in the response is beautiful, an answer that does not respond directly to the prompt cannot be considered good. Since the task is called “Cultural Presentation” and the prompt instructs students to choose a “Chinese social custom,” students should know that they are supposed to talk about Chinese culture, not just discuss a custom in general terms.
2. Although students taking the AP Chinese Exam are presumed to have sufficient English proficiency to understand exam instructions, students with apparently poor English skills also take the exam. The best way to help nonnative English speakers is to ask them to read the English prompt carefully so they will not misinterpret it.
3. When teaching AP classes, teachers must ensure that they do not give students any inaccurate or outdated cultural information. Also, it is desirable to ask students to practice making cultural presentations in class often.
4. Students require much practice to deliver good oral presentations. Teachers should give students ample opportunities to make oral presentations in class.
5. Teachers should always correct pronunciation and grammatical mistakes, even in advanced language classes.

Presentational Speaking Task 2: Event Plan

What was the intent of this task?

This task assesses speaking in the presentational communicative mode by having students present a plan for an upcoming event to a Chinese class. It consists of a single prompt, which identifies an event and directs students to describe the advantages and disadvantages of different options and to explain what they would do and why. They are given four minutes to prepare the presentation and two minutes to deliver it. The response receives a single, holistic score, based on how well it accomplishes the assigned task; in addition to language skills, the score reflects the cultural knowledge exhibited in the response. The intent of the task is to see if students can assemble information that is pertinent to the prompt and organize the information in a logical manner, then present the plan orally with good pronunciation and appropriate and correct sentence structures. Those sentences should be logically linked, with appropriate connectors.

This year’s task asked students to plan a Chinese New Year assembly at their school. In the presentation, students needed to explain the advantages and disadvantages of different options and also to describe what they would do and why.

How well did students perform on this task?

The mean score for the Standard Group was 3.14 out of a possible 6 points. The mean score for the Total Group was 3.98.

What were common student errors or omissions?

1. Failure to respond to the prompt completely.

The prompt clearly states that students need to explain the advantages and disadvantages of different options and also explain what they would do and why. Many students, however, only talked about the advantages of doing certain things, not disadvantages. Also, many students did not explain why they decided to do certain things. For example, a student said repeatedly that it is important to eat “jiaozi” (dumplings) during Chinese New Year but did not explain why it is important to have “jiaozi.”

2. Lack of comprehension of the prompt.

The prompt asked students to plan a Chinese New Year assembly at their school, not to describe a Chinese New Year’s party. But many students only described the Chinese New Year that they have experienced without saying how they would plan a Chinese New Year assembly.

3. Lack of understanding of Chinese New Year and Chinese festivals.

Some students did not have a clear understanding of Chinese New Year and other Chinese festivals. For example, one student confused Chinese New Year with the Moon Festival and said that he planned to have moon cakes for the assembly.

4. Pronunciation and grammatical mistakes.

As in answers to the other tasks, the event plan responses contained many pronunciation and grammatical errors.

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?

1. For the event plan task, students are asked to describe how they would plan a particular event. In their responses students should give several options and then explain the advantages and disadvantages of those options. Teachers should familiarize students with the exam format (for this and all free-response tasks) so that students will know that they are supposed to talk about both advantages and disadvantages for the event plan.

2. Teachers should remind students to carefully read and directly address all aspects of the prompt.

3. Chinese culture is an important part of the AP Chinese Language and Culture curriculum. Teachers should introduce important but common Chinese cultural information in class, as well as test the students’ knowledge about Chinese culture.

4. It is difficult to pinpoint what kind of errors were most common because different students made different mistakes. New students will be taking the AP Chinese Exam each year, so mistakes that appear in the answers will also be different every year. Nonetheless, teachers should help students to realize what errors they have made so that they can avoid making the same mistakes again and again. Students can gradually reduce their mistakes and learn to produce answers with minimal errors.