



## **Student Performance Q&A: 2009 AP® Spanish Language Free-Response Questions**

The following comments on the 2009 free-response questions for AP® Spanish Language were written by the Chief Reader, Gwyn E. Campbell of Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia. 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.

### **Part A: Interpersonal Writing**

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

This question measured students' ability to create an informal communication with proper register and to respond appropriately to all four parts of the prompt. They had 10 minutes to read the prompt and to write a response that was at least 60 words long. The response was an e-mail to a friend in another city, and students were asked to imagine that soon they would be moving to that same city. In the e-mail, they had to do four things: greet the friend, explain the reason that the family is moving, express their sentiments about the change of schools, and express happiness at being able to see the friend again. The response was scored on effective task completion/topic development and language use, equally considered.

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

The mean score for the Total Group, 3.34 out of a possible 5 points, was fractionally lower than the mean score of 3.37 received by this group in 2008. The mean score of 2.93 for the Standard Group\* was slightly lower than this group's mean score of 3.02 in 2008.

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

Writing an electronic message to a friend required the use of a vocabulary that was of relatively high frequency, and the majority of the samples showed that students were able to accomplish this task. The prompt lent itself to a variety of structures and tenses, even in a message of such short length.

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

Although the four elements of the task were clearly indicated in the prompt, common errors included the omission of one or more. These omissions were usually either an explanation of why the family was moving or an expression of an opinion about changing schools. A number of students seemed to be confused about who was moving. Some students did not discern that this move was going to occur in the future.

***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?***

Throughout the year, teachers should simulate this question by creating a variety of interpersonal writing tasks for classroom work and homework. Regular practice with this type of question should include tasks that use different registers, require a variety of verb tenses beyond the present tense, elicit vocabulary beyond that of the prompt, and encourage editing for consistency. Students should have plenty of opportunities to practice responding under the same time constraints and conditions they will experience during the actual exam.

## **Part A: Presentational Writing**

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

This question asked students to understand, organize, synthesize, and integrate three different sources in a cohesive response to a specific prompt about the impact of climate change on the animals of several countries of the world. Students were told to use information from all the sources to support their ideas in this sample of their written work. The instructions, in both English and Spanish, asked them to identify the sources as they used them in their answers. Students were also advised to avoid simply summarizing the sources individually.

The three sources included both print and audio material. The first source was an article, “Inviernos tibios le quitan el sueño a los osos europeos,” that appeared in the electronic journal *La Jornada*; the second source was also an article, “El cambio climático reduce la migración de las aves a otros continentes,” from the electronic journal *Tendencias 21*. The third source was an audio file from the Web site internet ABC, “La mancha roja en la costa española la provocó el cambio climático.”

Students had 7 minutes to read the printed material, and they listened to the audio selection for approximately 3 minutes. They were instructed to take 5 minutes to plan their responses and then 40 minutes to write an essay of about 200 words. Students were scored on effective task completion, topic development, and language use, equally considered.

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

The mean score for the Total Group was 2.81 out of a possible 5 points, which was slightly lower than the mean score of 2.88 for this same group on the previous year’s exam. As was the case with the Total Group, the Standard Group’s mean score of 2.62 was somewhat lower than the mean score of 2.86 received by the Standard Group in 2008.

The combined mean score for the writing portion (interpersonal and presentational) of the exam was 6.15 out of a possible 10 points for the Total Group, while the combined mean score for the Standard Group was 5.55. In 2008 the combined mean score for the Total Group was 18.39 out of a possible 30 points; the mean score for the Standard Group was 17. Part A of the 2009 exam consisted of two components (interpersonal writing and presentational writing) with 5 possible points for each. The 2008 exam included a third component, paragraph completion, with 20 possible points. This difference in possible points (30 in 2008 and just 10 in 2009) makes an exact comparison between the combined mean scores for part A of the 2008 and 2009 exams impossible.

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

A common student error when answering this question was the extensive use of prior knowledge on global warming, both in general and specific terms. In many cases, students used what they already knew instead of the specific information and viewpoints provided in the two print sources and one audio source. For instance, many students' prior knowledge about global warming has led them to believe that it has a negative effect on our planet; yet the three sources presented a neutral perspective on climate change and its effect on the groups of animals addressed in the sources. As a result, the most common student errors were misinterpreting the three sources and using the resulting misinformation in the essay or stating that climate change has a negative effect on the animals, without substantiating that claim with information from one or more of the sources.

From the perspective of task completion, another common error was an apparent heavy over-reliance on the two printed sources. Many students provided minimal, if any, reference to the one audio source. When citing or referring to the sources, many students simply copied from the print sources, making it more difficult to determine whether the language was the student's or that of the sources. In such cases it can be more difficult to assess a student's ability to summarize and/or synthesize the material in the sources. Additionally, many students did not organize their essay well.

The language required to answer the prompt was of reasonably high frequency. Nonetheless, many essays were hampered by insufficient vocabulary, errors in grammar, and/or problems with the conventions of the written language.

***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 will benefit from practice with as many authentic sources as possible. In particular, continual practice with a variety of audio sources is an excellent idea because it addresses an area of difficulty for many students. In these practice sessions, teachers can help students focus on understanding the gist or essence of an audio source while taking brief notes. Of course, this suggestion is not limited to practice with audio sources alone; routine practice with print sources is important as well. Throughout the year it is a good idea to give students presentational writing assignments that include two print sources and one audio source and to conduct the exercise under the time constraints and conditions students will experience during the actual exam.

Teachers can help students by providing examples of ways in which to make references to print and audio materials. Students can be further assisted by discussions on and examples of the differences between summary and synthesis. It is always helpful to work with students on general

essay-writing skills or procedures, such as the prewriting or organizational steps required for producing a good writing sample and the importance of editing their first draft and proofreading the finished essay.

## **Part B: Interpersonal Speaking**

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

The intent of this task was to assess students' interpersonal communication skills. The task elicited responses based on a recorded, simulated conversation and an outline that asked students to perform different linguistic tasks throughout the conversation. Instructions in both English and Spanish told students that they had 30 seconds to read the outline of the conversation. They then listened to a recorded message and had 1 minute to reread the outline that indicated five responses that they were to give, as fully and appropriately as possible.

This year's simulated conversation was an invitation from Rafael to join him and his cousins for dinner at a downtown restaurant, La Vaca Loca. Prompts included comments about menu items, directions to the restaurant, and a recommendation for an activity the next day. Responses were scored on task completion, topic development, and language use, equally considered.

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

The mean score for the Total Group was 3.88 out of a possible 5 points, which was somewhat higher than the mean score of 3.68 received by this group in 2008. The mean score for the Standard Group was 3.10, which was significantly higher than this group's mean score of 2.81 in 2008.

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

The task of accepting a friend's invitation to a restaurant is a common one for students, and so the language required to complete the simulated conversation was of relatively high frequency. The majority of the samples indicated that students could respond to the prompts and accomplish the task. Students were able to speak using proper vocabulary, but the task did not necessarily elicit a rich range of vocabulary. The situation required the use of informal social references and register. The prompt reflected a variety of verb tenses but predominately the present, the future, and the present subjunctive.

The third prompt required students to address three ideas. This seemed to present a problem for some students because many did not address all three. When responding to the subsequent prompt, many students misinterpreted the verb *quedar* and responded with mention of a length of time rather than inquiring about the restaurant's location.

Common errors included misuse of the verbs *gustar* and *quedar*, confusing *ser* [*vegetariano/a*] and *estar* [location], problems with consistency in the proper register, and recycling the vocabulary of the prompts.

***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?***

Throughout the year teachers should simulate this task by creating similar telephone conversations and practicing them often in class under the same time constraints and conditions students will experience during the actual exam. This will familiarize students with the format of the exam, and it will help them learn how to give the topic full and thorough development.

Students, teachers, and proctors should all be familiar with the operation of the equipment and with the examination protocol prior to the actual exam so that students' responses are recorded properly. This includes marking the permission box on the CD very carefully so as not to damage the CD or recording. As the master CD clearly states, once students begin to record their responses, their machines should not be turned off until indicated. Doing so could result in a student being suspected of a security violation. It is also important that students be able to record without distractions.

Schools should consult the *AP Coordinator's Manual* and the *AP Examination Instructions* book several months prior to the administration of the exam to ensure that students' responses will be recorded properly and therefore scored accurately.

## **Part B: Presentational Speaking**

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

The second part of the speaking portion of the exam was an interpretive and presentational task. Students were asked to give a 2-minute presentation in a formal academic setting, integrating the following skills: reading, listening, and speaking. As indicated in the instructions in both English and Spanish, students had 5 minutes to read the printed article and then were told to take notes while listening to the audio source. They had 2 minutes to prepare their responses and 2 minutes to record their answers.

This year's prompt asked students to compare the differences and similarities presented in two sources that discussed the Spanish language. The printed source was the transcription of an interview with the president of the Academia Argentina de la Lengua, recorded on BBC Mundo; the audio file, "Español, lengua metiza," was also from BBC Mundo. Responses were scored on effective task completion, topic development, and language use, equally considered.

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

The mean score for the Total Group was 2.79 out of a possible 5 points, which was significantly lower than this group's mean score of 3.57 in 2008. The mean score for the Standard Group, 2.73, was also lower than the 3.18 it received on this question in 2008 and is almost the same as the mean score for the Total Group this year.

The overall combined mean scores for the speaking portion (interpersonal and presentational) of the exam were 6.66 out of a possible 10 points for the Total Group and 5.82 for the Standard Group. In 2008 the combined mean score for the Total Group was 7.25 and 5.99 for the Standard Group.

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

The content of the two sources provided similarities and differences in a sophisticated manner that was not always evident to the students. Thus, many students tended to summarize the information presented by the sources rather than compare and/or contrast their content. Students also tended to rely on the print article more than the auditory source. Organization and cohesiveness played a major role in this part of the exam. Students first needed to formulate some thesis in order to best respond to the prompt. They then needed to be able to refer to and integrate both sources for the development of relevant and thorough speech samples. Many students had difficulty with the sources and were unable to do this.

Some students read directly from the printed source; others had labored or halting expression and/or poor pronunciation. In some cases, lack of control of the language undermined their ability to develop the topic and complete the task. Conversely, command of the language did not enable some students to reach the high scoring range if they only partially addressed the task.

***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 help students learn synthesizing skills and techniques for comparing and contrasting without reliance on direct quotations. Teachers need to reemphasize reading for meaning and work with students on their ability to reproduce information verbally and in their own words. Teachers should also give students opportunities to do presentational speaking so that students are aware of the proper register required for a formal presentation. In addition, social and/or cultural references must be defined so that students will be aware of both in the written article and the audio selection.

During the course of the year, simulation of the testing environment will familiarize students with the format of the exam. Past experience has indicated that simulation helps students achieve higher scores. Students, teachers, and proctors should be familiar with the operation of the equipment and the examination protocol prior to the actual exam.

Throughout the course, teachers should provide opportunities for students to hear and read authentic sources representing all Spanish-speaking countries. These sources may include films, documentaries, speeches, interviews, and online newspapers and magazines, among others. Teachers should also familiarize themselves with the resources available to them on AP Central®.