



Student Performance Q&A:

2012 AP® Chinese Language and Culture Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2012 free-response questions for AP® Chinese Language and Culture were written by the Chief Reader, T. Richard Chi of the University of Utah. 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: Story Narration

What was the intent of this task?

This task assessed writing in the presentational mode of communication by having students narrate a story to a friend. It comprised a series of four pictures that depicted a story. Students were allotted 15 minutes to write the narration. The purpose of the task was to determine whether students could write a well-organized story with a clear progression of ideas, including a beginning, a middle, and an end. The task also gave students an opportunity to demonstrate their command of sentence structure and vocabulary as well as their ability to use appropriate transitional elements and cohesive devices.

The story was about a father who went shopping with his young son, who wandered off in boredom and was later found by his father in another part of the store. The first picture showed the father looking through shirts hanging on a rack in the men's clothing section of the store while his son sat on the floor behind him looking bored. The second picture showed the father turning his head away from the shirts and looking surprised and puzzled because his son was nowhere to be found. In the third picture the father was talking to a female clerk, with a male clerk standing behind them, describing his missing son. The fourth picture showed the smiling father, with the female clerk standing slightly behind him, running toward his son, who was sitting on the floor by himself playing with a toy truck in the toy section of the store.

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 4.50. In general, students performed quite well on this task.

* The Standard Group does not include students who hear or speak Chinese at home or who have lived for more than one month 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?

Some students omitted information such as the following from their narrations:

- The child sitting on the floor looking bored
- The father looking for a shirt in the men's section of the store
- The father turning his head
- The male clerk standing behind the father when he was talking to the female clerk
- The head of the child in the bubble (representing the father's description of the child's appearance)

Common errors included the following:

- Leaving out details in the narration
- Adding information to the narration that was not present in the pictures
- Typographical errors caused by choosing incorrect homophonous words, such as 走道 for 走到, 又没有 for 有没有, 怒人 for 女人, 完具 for 玩具, and 一活儿 for 一会儿
- Not using 到 correctly as a verb or as a verb complement, for example, 他在 [instead of 到] 附近百货公司去了; 他看不看 instead of 看不到] 他的儿子
- Narrating the story predominantly in loosely connected sentences rather than writing a paragraph using cohesive discourse connectors

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 practice the following tasks in a consistent, deliberate, and sustained manner:

- Tell a complete story with a logical progression of ideas.
- Include all details found in the stimulus.
- Write paragraphs using cohesive markers.
- Become familiar with the scoring guidelines for the story narration task and use them to score stories they have written.
- Improve Chinese word-processing skills.
- Continue to learn vocabulary related to pre-advanced topics.
- Improve control of basic grammatical structures.
- Recognize and avoid interference from their native language.

Interpersonal Writing Task: E-Mail Response

What was the intent of this task?

This task assessed writing in the interpersonal mode of communication by having students write a response to an e-mail message received from a friend. Students were allotted 15 minutes to read the e-mail and write a response. Students had to comprehend the e-mail and then write a response that addressed all the questions posed in the e-mail.

In the e-mail Zhang Yulan asked for advice on gift giving. Yulan informed the recipient of the message that their mutual friend Xiaofang would soon leave Yulan's school to return to her home country and that her

classmates were considering two items as farewell gifts for the departing Xiaofang. Because the recipient of the message was Xiaofang's longtime friend and knew her best, Yulan asked which gift Xiaofang would like and why. Yulan also asked, out of curiosity, what would be an appropriate gift for a high school student where the recipient lived and asked for a description of such a gift.

How well did students perform on this task?

The mean score for the Standard Group was 3.48 out of a possible 6 points. The mean score for the Total Group was 4.72. Students generally performed well on this task.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Common errors and omissions including the following:

- Not responding to one or two of the three questions posed in the e-mail and thus not addressing all aspects of the prompt
- Straying from the topic and including irrelevant information in the response
- Choosing incorrect homophonous words, such as 受到 instead of 收到 or 已 instead of 衣
- Inappropriately using formal expressions (such as 此致敬礼) in an e-mail exchange between two friends
- Using incorrect grammar and vocabulary, such as 还是 instead of 还有; 找不到 instead of 不找到; or 不看见 instead of 看不见
- Not presenting a narration with a logical progression of ideas

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 design e-mail exchange activities that enable students to learn how to do the following:

- Address all aspects of the prompt.
- Use the e-mail response scoring guidelines to evaluate e-mail writing samples.
- Use the proper format and writing conventions for e-mail.
- Improve Chinese word-processing skills.
- Distinguish between correct and incorrect homophonous characters in context.

Interpersonal Speaking Task: Conversation

What was the intent of this task?

This task assessed speaking in the interpersonal mode of communication by having students respond to a series of questions in a simulated conversation. The task comprised a statement identifying an interlocutor and conversation topic followed by six questions. Students were allotted 20 seconds to speak at each turn in the conversation. All six scores counted equally in calculating the total score. Students needed to speak clearly with good pronunciation and make sure that each of their answers addressed the prompt directly and was culturally appropriate.

In the conversation, students spoke with Li Tong, a new Chinese friend who had recently moved to the student's hometown, about leisure activities.

How well did students perform on this task?

The mean score for the Standard Group was 21.58 out of a possible 36 points. The mean score for the Total Group was 28.45. Students generally performed very well on this task.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Common errors included the following:

- Not using the appropriate register according to the situation
- Being unable to give a complete response within the allotted 20 seconds
- Not addressing all aspects of the prompt, for example, not responding to the question “why”
- Not including elaboration in the response
- Using incorrect grammar and vocabulary, for example, confusing 天气 with 空气, 十多年 with 十年多, 活动 with 运动; using the classifier 个 incorrectly, as in 十个年; and using incorrect word order, as in 下雪很多 instead of 下很多雪

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 design activities to enable students to do the following:

- Practice answering a question within 20 seconds.
- Recognize the importance of — and learn to use — proper register.
- Practice directly addressing *all* aspects of the prompt and giving a complete response.
- Include elaboration and all relevant details in the response.
- Understand and use the conversation scoring guidelines to formulate excellent responses and to evaluate sample responses.
- Listen to the question carefully and recognize what information it is asking for.
- Expect a follow-up “why” or “how” question.
- Use simple, cohesive connectors needed for narrations involving a sequence of events, such as 先, 然后, 就, 到时候, 之后, and 最后.

In addition, teachers should tell students to take the exam seriously and not make jokes when answering the questions.

Presentational Speaking Task: Cultural Presentation

What was the intent of this task?

This task assessed speaking in the presentational mode of communication by having students make a presentation on a specific Chinese cultural topic to a Chinese class. It comprised a single prompt, which identified the cultural topic and asked students to select an example of that topic, describe it, and explain its significance. Students were allotted 4 minutes to prepare the presentation and 2 minutes to deliver it. In addition to language skills, the task assessed students’ cultural knowledge as presented in their responses.

Students were asked to choose one traditional Chinese concept or value — such as respect for elders and teachers, *guanxi* (personal relationships), saving face, modesty, or social harmony — and explain its significance.

How well did students perform on this task?

The mean score for the Standard Group was 3.32 out of a possible 6 points. The mean score for the Total Group was 4.46. The task of choosing, describing, and discussing the significance of one traditional Chinese concept or value turned out to be quite a challenge for many students.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Some students could not come up with an appropriate concept. Many others chose the concept of respecting elders but were not able to describe it in a way that was clear and comprehensive enough to demonstrate a full understanding of this traditional value system. A great number of students either forgot to or were unable to discuss the significance of the chosen traditional concept. It was obvious that these students lacked both the cultural knowledge and the language skills to fully complete this 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 consider the following suggestions:

- Select a wide range of Chinese cultural topics, both historical and contemporary, related to important persons, societal relationships, popular culture, global issues, and so forth with which students at the pre-advanced level should be familiar.
- Require students to do their own research on some of these topics. Students should find and organize the information and present it orally in a coherent and logical progression of ideas.
- Focus on teaching discourse connectors needed for paragraph-level language presentation.
- Provide ample opportunity for students to describe, narrate, elaborate, and explain, and always encourage students to include as much relevant, detailed information as appropriate.
- Remind students that they must address *all* aspects of the prompt and not forget to discuss the *significance* of the chosen cultural topic.