



Student Performance Q&A:

2013 AP® Spanish Literature and Culture Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2013 free-response questions for AP® Spanish Literature and Culture were written by the Chief Reader, Hazel Gold of Emory University, Atlanta, GA. 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?

This question required students to read an excerpt from a work on the required reading list, identify the author and period of the text, and explain the development of a particular theme within the whole work from which it was taken. On this year's exam, the textual fragment was taken from the story "De lo que aconteció a un mancebo que casó con una mujer muy fuerte y muy brava," which appears in the *Libro del Conde Lucanor*. In addition to identifying the author and period of the text, students were required to explain the development of the theme of power relations (las relaciones de poder) in the story to which the cited fragment belongs.

How well did students perform on this question?

The four free-response questions on the exam constitute 50 percent of the total exam score (the multiple-choice section accounts for the remaining 50 percent). The two short-answer questions each count for 7.5 percent, while the essay questions each count for 17.5 percent. Each question receives two separate scores. The first, for the content of the analysis, counts for 70 percent of the essay's score; the second, for language, counts for 30 percent.

The mean score for content for the Standard Group* of students on Question 1 was 1.77 out of 3 possible points. For the Total Group, the mean score for content was 1.58.

The mean score for language for the Standard Group of students in Question 1 was 1.98 out of 3 possible points. The mean language score for the Total Group was 2.06.

Juan Manuel's story is included on the required reading list and students should be familiar with the text

* 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. However, decisions on cutoff scores are based on the Total Group.

itself as well as its context: a medieval *exemplum* in which the servant Patronio, in recounting stories to his master, counsels Conde Lucanor on the modes of conduct best suited to protect his interests and safeguard social decorum and political order. “*De lo que aconteció a un mancebo*” focuses on a young man who, to escape poverty, better his social status by “marrying up” to a wealthy but shrewish woman whom he then frightens into obedient submission through acts of unreasonable, escalating violence toward the animals in their household. Fearing the same fate, his wife promptly complies with all his subsequent demands, a strategy which works because he has presented himself as master from the outset. (A parallel attempt by the young man’s father-in-law to impose his authority by threatening violence is a failure because his wife already knows his character to be otherwise). “*De lo que aconteció a un mancebo*” exemplifies the highly didactic nature of the tales collected in *El Conde Lucanor*. Viewed as a response to a 14th-century social crisis, the frame-stories of the collection foreground power relations by providing narrative reenactments of cultural authority.

To receive maximum credit for their responses, students needed to identify correctly both the author of the excerpt from “*De lo que aconteció a un mancebo*” (Juan Manuel or Don Juan Manuel) and the period when it appeared (“*la España medieval*”; “*la Edad Media*”; “*1330s*”; “*el siglo XIV*”; or “*la época de la convivencia medieval*” were all acceptable answers that appeared on students’ exams). The strongest responses correctly made these identifications and used the passage cited on the exam as a point of departure for an effective explanation of the unfolding theme of power relations. The majority of these responses focused on the subordination of women to men characteristic of patriarchal society in the Middle Ages, as exemplified by the compliance of the previously ungovernable bride to her new husband. Other responses highlighted the power relations dynamic between parents and children, humans and animals, or between wealthy and poorer individuals; some insightful responses made the connection to the didactic nature of the relationship between the author and his readers. In less capable responses, students correctly identified either the author or the period and explained the development of the specified theme, although description and summary of the story were present or the use of textual evidence was not always clear. The weakest responses were unable to make the required identification of the author and the period; any attempt to explain the development of the theme of power relations was outweighed by their reliance on summary or paraphrasing of the story. In some instances, students demonstrated a lack of familiarity with the story or were unable to make the connection to its historical-cultural context.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Failing to identify correctly both the author and the period of the text.
- Paraphrasing or describing the story in lieu of explaining the development of the theme of power relations.
- Discussing ideas that are mentioned in the cited excerpt (marriage, family, mistreatment of animals, etc.) or offering personal opinions about these ideas, without focusing on the question or the story itself.
- Failing to address all elements of the question.
- Failing to include specific textual references to support the response or including as textual evidence examples that are unclear or irrelevant.
- Demonstrating poor organization or limited ability to write a focused response.

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?

The Text Explanation question appears on the AP[®] Spanish Literature and Culture Exam every year, and it always features a work that comes from the required reading list. The advantage for students is having an excerpt from the work in front of them while they consider, plan, and write their response. Practicing ways

to respond to the same type of prompt under the same conditions and constraints as those of the AP[®] Exam will help students to refine their skills and become better equipped to write an effective and organized treatment of the question.

Teachers can further help by encouraging students to set aside time to read the question carefully and then to read or skim the cited passage, keeping the question in mind. Teachers can suggest that students underline or circle important parts of the question—in this case, the identification of the author and the period and the theme of power relations. This type of exercise trains students to remember to fully address the question. Teaching them to take a few minutes to outline their responses and to reserve some time for proofreading, editing, and correcting elements of their work is another valuable practice.

Throughout the AP[®] Spanish Literature and Culture course, teachers can help their students by:

- Involving the class in small-group work or, in a pre-writing phase, having students share their thoughts concerning a particular text’s development of a specified theme;
- Focusing on the themes and sub-themes that structure the course curriculum framework;
- Bringing in relevant information on the historical and cultural context surrounding texts on the reading list;
- Encouraging students to practice writing responses (as differentiated from essays);
- Making peer review among students part of the editing process.

Question 2

What was the intent of this question?

This question required students to read an excerpt from a work on the required reading list and study an image of a work of art (e.g., painting, photograph, sculpture, drawing) related by theme to the text. Students were asked to compare how a particular theme is represented in both the text and the image, and then to connect that theme to the genre, period, or movement of the text. On this year’s exam, the text was Jorge Luis Borges’ essay *Borges y yo*. The image reproduced on the exam was *Dalí de espaldas pintando a Gala*, a painting by Salvador Dalí. Students were required to compare the representation of the duality of existence (*la dualidad del ser*) in both works in relation to metafiction.

How well did students perform on this question?

For the Standard Group the mean content score on Question 2 was 1.63 out of 3 possible points. The mean content score for the Total Group was 1.48.

The mean language score for the Standard Group was 2.04 out of 3 possible points. The mean language score for the Total Group was a nearly identical 2.07.

The theme of the duality of existence is the central concern of both the written text and the art work in this question. In *Borges y yo*, Borges presents a meditation on the frontiers between the writer and his other, that is, his public, literary persona versus his private self. By the conclusion of his text these frontiers have been erased as the speaker (character) becomes conscious of his author and confesses his inability to distinguish between the two as creator and creation, also noting that at a certain point the interpretation of his writing no longer belongs to him as author, but rather to his readers (“*el lenguaje o la tradición*”). In a tone that is both ironic and philosophical, Borges lays bare the tools and resources of the writer and his writing—in essence, arguing that the relationship between “Borges” and “yo” is one of co-dependence. In *Dalí de espaldas pintando a Gala*, the viewer is confronted with the image of a painter in the process of

painting a painting of his wife while looking in a mirror at her and his own reflection. As much as Velázquez had inserted himself into *Las meninas*, Dalí constructs himself through the act of including himself in his own painting. Indeed, Dalí affirms himself as the subject by virtue of the painting's very title, comparable to the way in which Borges inserts his name into the title of his essay. The connection of both the essay and the art work to the technique of metafiction is explicit. Borges and Dalí emphasize the role of art, through mimesis, to create a reality which is ultimately a fiction. The former does so by questioning assumptions about the status of the writer and self-consciously flaunting the artificial conventions of literature in a text that purports to be real; the latter accomplishes this by narcissistically introducing his own mirror-image into his painting's frame.

The strongest student responses on Question 2 effectively and explicitly compared the theme of the duality of existence in both works and related them to the concept of metafiction. They discussed the textual *desdoblamiento* in the essay of Borges as subject and object, writer on the public stage and private individual, and they compared this to the two representations of Dalí—the “real” one depicted from behind and the frontal reflection in the mirror—in the art work. They supported their commentary with specific textual/visual references to metafiction. For instance, they highlighted the self-reflexive stance of both works; the confusion of narrative levels in *Borges y yo* and the analogous use of the painting within a painting in Dalí; and the questioning of the distinction between fiction and reality that occurs when each work self-consciously draws attention to its status as an artifact. Their answers were well-developed and presented their ideas in a cohesive and logical manner. Less capable responses were organized but, in comparing the theme of the duality of existence, relied heavily on the description of the elements of both works; similarly, although they related this theme to metafiction description again outweighed comparison in their discussion. In some cases, these students clearly understood the metafictional aspects of Borges's text, but struggled to apply the concept of metafiction to a work of visual art. The weakest responses to this question attempted to compare the highlighted theme in both works and to relate it to metafiction, but were incomplete and lacked sufficient textual evidence to support the students' arguments. They may have addressed the theme in only one of the two works and their responses showed a lack of organization.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Inability to deal with the theme of the duality of existence in each work.
- Paraphrasing or summarizing Borges's text or describing Dalí's painting in lieu of comparing the theme.
- Failing to make an explicit comparison of the theme in both works.
- Providing insufficient examples from the two works to support the required comparison.
- Failing to relate the theme in both works to the technique of metafiction.
- General or vague responses that suggested students were not familiar with metafiction as a literary or artistic technique.
- Superfluous and erroneous statements.
- Poor organization or limited ability to write a focused response.

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?

As with all questions on the AP® Spanish Literature and Culture Exam, a successful response to the Text and Art Comparison begins with a careful reading of the question itself and continues with an answer that fully treats the specified theme—in this case, the duality of existence—and its relation to a particular

period, genre, movement, or technique—here, metafiction—with supporting textual and visual references. The best responses contain specific examples to support the students’ ideas, and the ideas are presented in a coherent, logical progression.

Teachers need to remind students of the importance of reading all the works on the required reading list, because the textual passage reproduced on the exam for Question 2 is invariably taken from one of these works. In addition, teachers can help their students achieve good scores on their responses by:

- Viewing a wide variety of additional visual images—paintings, photographs, drawings, sculptures—with students and giving them in-class practice in writing responses that compare these art works to written texts chosen from the required reading list;
- Familiarizing and reviewing with students the features of periods, genres, movements, and techniques that are included in the curricular framework of the AP® Spanish Literature and Culture course;
- Helping students learn to stay focused on the topic by routinely pointing out content in their responses that is superfluous or irrelevant to the question;
- Teaching students to distinguish comparison from mere description or paraphrasing;
- Teaching students how to develop and properly support their ideas, and to do so in organized fashion.

Question 3

What was the intent of this question?

This question required students to read an excerpt from a work on the required reading list (or the whole work, in the case of a short poem) and then analyze how the text represents the characteristics of a particular genre, as well as a particular historical, cultural, or social context, commenting on relevant literary devices in the text and citing examples from the text that support their analysis. On this year’s exam, the excerpt was taken from Sabine Ulibarri’s *Mi caballo mago*. Students were asked to analyze how the textual fragment represents the characteristics of prose poetry (*poesía en prosa*) and the cultural context of 20th-century rural New Mexico.

How well did students perform on this question?

For the Standard Group, the mean content score was 2.28 out of 5 possible points. The mean content score for the Total Group was 1.94.

The mean language score for the Standard Group on Question 3 was 3.12 out of 5 possible points. For the Total Group, the mean language score was 3.02.

Sabine Ulibarri’s *Mi caballo mago* relates the story of young man’s maturation as he comes to understand his own power. At the outset of the story, the young narrator believes that he will become a man by capturing the mysterious Mago and thus demonstrate his ascendant authority within his community; as the story progresses, he comes to doubt the value of these aspirations and, in the denouement, he actually celebrates the horse’s escape. The true value of a man, he learns, lies in accepting the loss or destruction of one’s dreams. Ulibarri presents the quasi-mythical Mago as a symbol of individual and collective freedom, and stresses the fascination he evokes in the narrator and the entire *pueblo*. The narrator’s experiences and feelings exemplify certain values associated with the story’s setting in a small town (Tierra Amarilla) in the rural Southwest in the early decades of the 20th century: the prominence of nature; the emphasis on asserting one’s virility; the importance of fantasy in an otherwise hardscrabble existence

characterized by physical labor. One of the defining characteristics of *Mi caballo mago* is the lyrical mode of presentation of the narrative, which relies on numerous features of prose poetry to create an atmosphere of wonder and myth.

In the strongest responses to Question 3, students thoroughly analyzed how Ulibarrí's text represents prose poetry as well as the cultural context of early 20th-century rural New Mexico. They analyzed a variety of poetic devices and language in the excerpt, including apostrophe, personification, internal rhyme and assonance, parallelisms, repetition, and asyndeton; the use of short sentences that often mirror the horse's movements; chromatism and the predominance of sensorial images. In analyzing the cultural context of the story they analyzed elements including the emphasis on horsemanship; the role of the outdoors and the natural environment in an agricultural community; the emphasis on the affirmation of masculinity and the implicit violence this entails. Some of the most insightful essays discussed the narrator's pursuit of epic adventure in attempting to control the legendary, untamed Mago and his role as a conqueror of the animal's spirit, relating this to the *conquistadores* who historically subjugated this region of the New World. These students produced essays characterized by an explicit thesis statement, a coherent structure, and a cohesive and logical progression of ideas, and their analysis was well-developed and supported by discussion of appropriate textual examples that were integrated throughout. In the responses of less capable students, the attempted analysis of prose poetry and the given cultural context was outweighed by reliance on description (of literary techniques and of features of the context), and the examples they supplied were not always clear or relevant. The least successful responses tended toward incompleteness and inaccuracy. Students identified some rhetorical, stylistic, or structural features of *Mi caballo mago*, but were unable to explain their relevance to either the genre of prose poetry or the rural New Mexican context; alternatively, they may have demonstrated an inadequate understanding of the text and/or its context. Often, their answers contained errors of interpretation that detracted from the overall quality of the response, and their ability to produce an analytical essay was compromised by an overwhelming reliance on textual paraphrase or summary, an absence of supporting textual examples, a lack of organization, and the absence of a thesis statement.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Paraphrasing or summarizing the cited excerpt instead of textual analysis.
- Failing to refer specifically to the cited excerpt.
- Failing to discuss the cultural context of 20th-century rural New Mexico; or merely restating the context without identifying any of its features.
- Failing to discuss the characteristics of prose poetry; or merely citing examples of poetic language or listing/defining poetic devices in Ulibarrí's prose without explaining why these literary devices are relevant to the content of the story.
- Demonstrating an inadequate understanding of the cited excerpt or the story, or both.
- Providing insufficient examples from the cited excerpt to support the analysis.
- Offering general or vague responses that suggested an unfamiliarity with Ulibarrí's story and its context.
- Making superfluous and/or erroneous statements.
- Relying on a prepared overview of *Mi caballo mago* with limited connection to the question.
- Poor organization or limited ability to write a well-developed essay.

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?

In addition to the suggestions given above to help students better prepare for and perform on the Single Text Analysis question, teachers might also:

- Give students questions based on a number of texts on the required reading list, in order to provide them with the experience of doing this type of analysis; and at some point or points during the year, have students answer this type of question under conditions and time constraints that are similar to those of the AP[®] Spanish Literature and Culture Exam;
- Work regularly with students on literary vocabulary and the features associated with different genres and sub-genres that are listed in the curricular framework (remembering that this list is not exhaustive);
- Emphasize the connection of texts to their historical and cultural contexts;
- Encourage students to highlight or circle important words or concepts in the questions;
- Teach students how to write effective thesis statements and conclusions;
- Teach students how to develop and properly support their ideas when analyzing
- Help students develop and practice a list of vocabulary, expressions, and transitional phrases so that they will learn how to link sentences and paragraphs while integrating comments of an analytical nature, as opposed to writing anecdotal commentaries;
- Encourage students to write more than one draft of an essay;
- Give students in-class writing practice with all aspects of essay composition: pre-writing, outlining, writing, editing, and proofreading;
- Ask students to act as editors of their *own* essays, an exercise that can help them recognize problems in their work and refine their essay-writing skills.

Because the Single Text Analysis question can be based on any work on the reading list, it is essential that students read each work completely. Teachers can further assist students by showing them how to do a close reading of all the works, including consideration of vocabulary and linguistic and stylistic features, regardless of the genre.

Question 4

What was the intent of this question?

This question required students to read two excerpts related by theme: one from a work on the required reading list, the other from a work not on the list. (The whole work may be included in the case of a short poem.) Students were asked to analyze the effect of literary devices that the authors use in the texts to develop a particular theme. In the essay, students were required to compare the presentation of the theme in the two texts and to cite examples from both texts that support their analysis. On this year's exam, the two texts included a fragment of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's poem *Hombres necios que acusáis*, which appears on the required reading list, and Marcia Belisarda's poem *Décimas escritas muy de priessa, en respuesta de otras en que ponderaban la mudanza de las mujeres*, which is not on the list. Students were asked to analyze the effect of the literary devices used by the authors of both poems to develop the theme of relations between men and women (*las relaciones entre los hombres y las mujeres*) and to compare the presentation of the theme in both poems.

How well did students perform on this question?

For the Standard Group, the mean content score was 2.91 out of 5 possible points. The mean content score for the Total Group was 2.60.

The mean language score for the Standard Group on this question was 3.38 out of 5 possible points. For the Total Group, the mean language score was 3.44.

Both *Hombres necios* and *Décimas escritas muy de priessa* express the poets' dissatisfaction over the treatment of women by men. Directly invoking male readers via the use of apostrophe, both Sor Juana and Marcia Belisarda in their compositions critique a patriarchal culture that upholds a double standard whereby men accuse women of moral failings of which they themselves have been the cause ("*sois la occasion / de lo mismo que culpáis*") or are guilty of the selfsame defects for which they disparage women ("*no desonoréis / con título de inconstantes / las mujeres [...] se hallaría / en él mentir cada día / y en mudarse cada mes*"). Both poems are distinguished by their tone of disdain for masculine conduct toward women, shown above all to be based on hypocrisy. Each text makes use of a rich array of literary devices to develop the theme of the relations between the sexes; many of these devices are associated with the complexities of the Baroque mode of expression that predominated during the period when Sor Juana and Marcia Belisarda were writing.

The best responses clearly analyzed the literary devices present in both poems in relation to the development of the specified theme. In their essays students discussed the effects created by the use in *Hombres necios* of apostrophe, antithesis, paradox, play on words (*retruécano*), enjambment, chiasmus, hyperbaton, repetition, and classical allusions, and in *Décimas*, they commented on the use of metaphors ("*diamantes*"), enjambment, paradox, parallelism, and chiasmus, among others, analyzing how through these techniques the poets create an imaginary conversation between men and women that is in fact wholly dominated by the voice of the female poetic speaker, who defends women against unfair charges of ingratitude ("*ingrata*"), licentiousness ("*liviana*"), or inconstancy. In their essays they analyzed how the theme of the relations between men and women is developed in both texts to support their comparative analysis. Some of the most insightful responses compared differences in poetic tone, noting, for instance, that the speaker in the *Décimas* is more aggressive: Sor Juana complains (via rational argumentation), but Marcia Belisarda accuses, and her final verses ("*que el mentir vileza es / mudar de hombres, mejoría*") are not just mocking, but border on the sarcastic. Other stronger responses compared the ways in which the presentation of the shared theme is affected by the use of specific verse forms (e.g., use of the *redondilla*, a popular verse form). These students constructed well-developed and well-organized essays with an explicit thesis statement, a coherent progression of ideas, and a valid conclusion based on their comparative analysis. In the responses of less capable students, the analytical component was outweighed by reliance on summary or paraphrase of the two poetic texts. In such responses the development of the theme was described rather than analyzed; similarly, rhetorical and poetic devices were identified or perhaps even described, but the students were less successful in analyzing how such features affect the theme's presentation. While their answers included textual examples, these were not always clear or relevant to their discussion. They included a stated topic, an introduction, and a conclusion, but their essays were not well-developed. The weakest responses to Question 4 were multiply flawed: some students focused mostly, or wholly, on just one of the two poems; they may have omitted all reference to poetic language and devices; description or summary predominated, at the expense of relevant textual evidence; their answers either contained significant errors of interpretation or demonstrated a lack of understanding of one or both texts, especially as seen in the inclusion of irrelevant comments. Such responses were also characterized by an inability to structure ideas in an appropriate essay format; often there was no statement of purpose and the students' ideas were presented in random fashion rather than in a coherent and logical progression.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Paraphrasing or summarizing the cited excerpts instead of textual analysis.
- Failing to make an explicit comparison of the presentation of the theme in both texts.
- Failing to discuss literary devices; or merely listing literary devices without analyzing their effect in each poem to develop the theme.
- Providing insufficient examples from the cited excerpts to support the analysis.
- Demonstrating an inadequate understanding of the cited excerpts/poems.
- Offering general or vague responses that suggested an unfamiliarity with Sor Juana’s poem.
- Making superfluous and/or erroneous statements.
- Relying on a prepared overview of *Hombres necios que acusáis* and/or Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz’s biography with limited connection to the question.
- Poor organization or limited ability to write a well-developed essay

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?

In addition to the suggestion given above to help students better prepare for and perform on the Text Comparison question, teachers might also:

- Give students the opportunity to answer questions based on two texts—one from the required reading list, another one that they have not previously seen—in order to provide the experience of doing this type of comparative analysis; and at some point or points during the year, have students answer this type of question under conditions and time constraints that are similar to those of the AP® Spanish Literature and Culture Exam;
- Remind students to read and follow the directions carefully (that is, to respond to all components of the question—in this case, the comparative analysis of the presentation of the theme and the analysis of the effect of literary devices);
- Encourage students to highlight or circle important words or concepts in the questions;
- Work regularly with students on literary vocabulary (in this case, rhetorical devices, figures of speech, rhyme, and meter);
- Teach students how to better identify poetic devices and their effects;
- Help students learn to link sentences and paragraphs while integrating analytical comments, rather than writing anecdotal commentaries;
- Encourage students to write more than one draft of an essay in any given comparative analysis.

Because the Text Comparison essay will be based on one work from the reading list (along with a second one that is new to students), it is essential that students read all works on the list in their entirety. Teachers can also assist students by showing them how to do close readings of texts, including consideration of vocabulary and linguistic and stylistic features, regardless of the genre.