



## Student Performance Q&A:

### 2014 AP® Japanese Language and Culture Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2014 free-response questions for AP® Japanese Language and Culture were written by the Chief Reader, Sufumi So of George Mason University in Fairfax, Va. 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.

#### Interpersonal Writing Task: Text Chat

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

This task evaluated writing skills in the interpersonal communicative mode by having students respond as part of a simulated exchange of text-chat messages. The prompt comprised a statement in English identifying an interlocutor and conversation topic, and a series of six brief messages to which the student responded. Each message consisted of a chat entry in Japanese and a brief direction in English that provided guidance on what is expected in the response. Students were asked to participate in an exchange of text-chat messages with an exchange student at their school, Takashi Matsuda, about eating habits. Students were asked to (a) respond to the question of how often their friends eat fast food, (b) state and explain their opinion about fast food, (c) give more than two examples of food that they think are good for one's health, (d) elaborate on their prior response, (e) respond to the question of what dietary cautions they heed, and (f) pose a specific question about Japanese high school students' eating habits.

Students had 90 seconds to read the message and respond at each turn in the text-chat exchange. Each of the six responses received a holistic score based on how well it accomplished the assigned task, and all six scores counted equally in calculating the total score.

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

The mean score for the Standard Group<sup>1</sup> was 20.16 out of a possible 36 points. The mean score for the Total Group was 23.17. Most students were able to perform the task relatively well.

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

The text chat involved communicating in writing with an exchange student from Japan about eating habits. The topic seemed to be a familiar one to most students and all of the six prompts were expressed in

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<sup>1</sup> The Standard Group does not include students who hear or speak Japanese at home or who have lived for a total of one month or more in Japan, a country where Japanese is the language spoken predominantly. Decisions on cutoff scores are based on the Standard Group.

straightforward language at the appropriate level. Thus, the students were generally able to respond to all of the prompts. The following were errors or omissions specific to each of the six prompts:

Text Chat #1 – Respond. あなたの友達はよくファーストフードを食べますか。

A significant number of students overlooked 友達 (friends) and responded as if they were asked about themselves, thus failing to address the prompt directly. Some responses were ambiguous (e.g., ええ、いいえ; ファーストフードをあまり食べます), which failed to convey their message clearly to the interlocutor. Furthermore, knowing that this is the first exchange of the text chat, a large number of responses began with a greeting or self-introduction (e.g., はじめまして、どうぞよろしく。私は・・・です。). Doing so is not necessarily wrong but could disrupt the natural flow of the conversation.

Text Chat #2 – Explain your opinion. あなたは、ファーストフードについてどう思いますか。

Although this prompt requires higher-order thinking skills, most responses did address the prompt directly and provided an appropriate answer. However, some responses provided only an opinion without explaining it. A conspicuous mistake was some students' use of 元気 (vigor) for 健康 (good health), an error of word choice since the words differ in meaning and collocation with other words.

Text Chat #3 – Give more than two examples. どんな食べ物が体にいいと思いますか。

While most responses included two or more food items as instructed in English, some provided only one example or listed food ingredients (e.g., さとう, しお, あぶら rather than あぶらが少ない食べ物), thus failing to address the prompt appropriately or fully.

Text Chat #4 – Elaborate. そうですか。どうしてそう思うんですか。

Rather than elaborating on health benefits of the food items mentioned in the preceding response, many responses provided a description of them (e.g., やさいはおいしいです) or the student's preference (e.g., 果物は好きじゃありません), thus failing to address the prompt directly. There were also frequent orthographic errors with katakana words (e.g., バイタミーン, エナジー, ヌトリエント, レストランテ), some of which were comprehensible, some incomprehensible. Furthermore, there were collocational errors (e.g., 野菜はげんきです, くだものはけんこうです), which were mostly comprehensible but created an unnatural flow of expression.

Text Chat #5 – Respond. あなたが食事で気をつけていることは何ですか。

Like some of the responses to Text Chat #4, there were responses that merely described food with adjectives (e.g., もちはおいしい), addressing the prompt only minimally or marginally. A significant number of students responded by stating that they would cook certain food (e.g., ケーキをつくります) and failed to address the prompt appropriately. Furthermore, some students described food that was good or bad for one's health (e.g., 野菜はからだにいい) but did not state what dietary cautions they would heed as the prompt asked. Such responses were considered incomplete. There were also responses that restated a part of the prompt but then ended with something unrelated (e.g., 私は食事で気をつけていることはサッカーです). Succinct responses such as 気をつけていることはありません and とくにありません were regarded as addressing the prompt appropriately but not fully.

Text Chat #6 – Ask a specific question. 日本の高校生の食事について何か聞いてください。

Lack of careful attention to the English direction or the Japanese prompt was evident in a number of responses that stated the student's own opinion, reacted merely to the last part of the prompt (はい、聞いています), or asked about eating habits of Japanese people in general or the interlocutor Takashi Matsuda.

Overall, a significant number of responses contained basic errors in orthography and grammar; however, most of them did not interfere significantly with comprehensibility.

***Based on your experience of student responses at the AP<sup>®</sup> Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?***

Remind students that they should carefully read the instructions on how to respond to each prompt and respond as fully and appropriately as possible each time it is their turn. Students should write as much as possible in response to each prompt and not be content with a minimal answer, even one that may be appropriate in real life under certain circumstances. It is important to emphasize the importance of meeting the task requirements and for students to concentrate on completing the task before elaborating. Remind students that there is a 90-second time limit for each response and that they should read the prompt and write their response within that time limit.

Instruct students to pay careful attention to the pointer given in English above each of the interlocutor's messages. In this particular text chat task, the pointers were to "respond," "explain your opinion," "give more than two examples," "elaborate," "respond," and "ask a specific question" in response to the interlocutor's text messages. Some students provided minimal responses that did not follow these instructions and therefore, did not fully address the prompts. Have students practice these linguistic functions so that they become more familiar with various grammatical and syntactic structures that can be used to fulfill these functions. In particular, help students develop their skills in accurately producing compound and complex sentences appropriate to the AP<sup>®</sup> level. Review a range of question words that may be used in the interlocutor's text messages (e.g., どう, どうな, どうして, 何, used in this year's task) and have students practice formulating proper questions and responses. Practice with cohesive devices and transitional elements could have positive effects on text chat responses, if they are used appropriately, because of the relative brevity of each response.

Give students regular opportunities to type Japanese so that they feel comfortable switching between hiragana and katakana, converting to kanji when appropriate, and producing geminate consonants (っ, っ) and the kana ん and ん correctly. Have them practice reading kanji words correctly, spelling their readings accurately on computer, and recognizing and choosing the most appropriate kanji from the dropdown list. Although students are not penalized in the text chat task for not using kanji from the AP<sup>®</sup> Kanji list, appropriate use of kanji can improve readability. Students should also be encouraged to re-read and check their responses for accuracy before submitting them. Proper use of Japanese punctuation could also improve readability. Some students used unnecessary spaces between words (分かち書き), which can be time-consuming for them and distracting for Exam Readers.

Teachers should peruse and discuss the scoring guidelines for the interpersonal writing task (and other tasks, for that matter) with their students and help the students understand how their responses would be scored.

## **Presentational Writing Task: Compare and Contrast Article**

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

This task assessed writing skills in the presentational communicative mode by having students write an article for the student newspaper of a school in Japan. It comprised a single prompt in English, which identified two related topics and detailed how they should be discussed in the article. Students were asked to compare and contrast reading a book and watching a movie. They were asked to describe at least three aspects of each and highlight the similarities and differences between the two. They were also asked to state their preference and give reasons for it.

Students were given 20 minutes to write an article of 300 to 400 characters or longer. The article received a single holistic score based on how well it accomplished the assigned task.

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

The mean score for the Standard Group was 4.14 out of a possible 6 points. The mean score for the Total Group was 4.53. Most students were able to perform the task very well.

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

The task asked students to compare and contrast reading a book and watching a movie. The topic should be a familiar one to the test takers of AP<sup>®</sup> Japanese. The students were generally able to write a school newspaper article on this topic. Many responses included all of the required elements (i.e., introduction, body, and conclusion), describing three aspects of comparison and expressing preference and reasoning, but some omitted one or more of these parts.

Many students were able to use such conjunctions as *そして*, *でも*, *しかし*, and *それから* that helped to improve sentence-to-sentence connection and enhanced overall coherence. They also used paragraphs as devices to structure an essay, using such transitional phrases as *第一に*、*第二に*、*第三に*; *一つ目は*、*二つ目は*、*三つ目は*; and *まず*、*次に*、*最後に*、*けつろんとして* at the beginning of respective paragraphs. Nonetheless, students would still benefit greatly from expanding their repertoire of transitional elements and cohesive devices. Some were also able to use such phrases as *なぜなら*、*～からです* and *なぜかと言うと*、*～からです* to explain one's preference. On the other hand, there were some essays that did not use paragraphs effectively or lacked a logical flow or a smooth progression of the message.

Failure to use complex sentence structures (e.g., relative clauses, comparative structures, and explanatory phrases) or a variety of grammatical and syntactic structures often marred presentational writing and detracted from the impression of ease of expression. Furthermore, orthographic errors (incorrect kanji use in particular), lack of kanji, and omission of punctuation could interfere with readability or comprehensibility.

The following points highlight errors or omissions most commonly observed in the presentational writing task:

- **No preference or reason:** A comparison was made but students forgot to include a personal preference, give a reason for that preference, or both. This was a very common mistake and often made by otherwise skilled students.
- **Lacking 3 comparisons/contrasts:** Students failed to include **three** points of comparison, or included one or more off-topic or incomprehensible points of comparison.
- **Point of view:** Students wrote very generally in the third person and apparently overlooked that the comparison should be based upon their own personal experience. In some cases, this made the preference statement unclear or difficult to identify.
- **Incorrect comparison:** Due to a careless reading of the prompt or because of the student's forgetting to address some portion of the prompt during the process of writing, the things being compared were not the ones specified by the prompt. For example, while the prompt requested a comparison of reading a book and watching a movie and asked to speak to the similarities and differences between the two activities, some students compared American books and movies to Japanese books and movies or a specific book to its film adaptation, or discussed numerous books and movies without any reference to the actions of reading and watching.
- **Misguided interpretation of the "sister school" part of the prompt:** Some students interpreted the sister school aspect of the prompt very literally. This resulted in a variety of possible mistakes. Common errors included (a) students' inclusion of self-introductions or lengthy greetings that did not satisfy the requirements of the prompt or were inappropriate for a presentational

writing style, and (b) completely off-topic responses which compared two specific schools or American and Japanese schools.

- **Orthography issues:** Students undertook hiragana-to-kanji conversions without confirming that the correct kanji or kanji compound had been selected. For example, the word 難しい became 無図化し and so on. These conversion errors diminished readability and comprehension and resulted in lower scores if they occurred too frequently or interfered with readability, comprehensibility or both. Other recurring kanji errors in this prompt included using 隙 for 好き and 法 for 方.

***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?***

Remind students to carefully read and address all aspects of the prompt in their responses. Taking time to outline ideas before beginning to write will help students organize their thoughts and structure their essay clearly and logically. Teach students to think in terms of a task completion checklist (i.e., three comparisons, personal preference, and reasons) while asking themselves “What exactly am I supposed to compare?”

Spend time helping students learn appropriate ways to introduce and summarize a topic. Have students practice appropriate essay layouts. Further, paragraphing is important in improving the flow of an essay and its readability. Students should also practice in using a range of appropriate conjunctions and transitional phrases. Help them practice appropriate use of such expressions.

For better readability, students should avoid excess use of spaces between words (分かち書き) and they should use punctuation properly. Make sure that students understand that to convert to kanji from hiragana, they should hit the space bar after the complete word or phrase is typed, not in the middle of it. Students should also be reminded to carefully read and confirm the kanji conversion they have selected. If they are unable to recognize the kanji, they should opt not to convert. Give students regular opportunities to type Japanese so they feel comfortable switching between hiragana and katakana and converting to kanji correctly when appropriate, using the space bar rather than function keys for shortcuts as the AP® Exam setup does not support function keys.

Encourage students to continue expanding their repertoire of vocabulary, idioms, kanji, and grammatical and syntactic structures (e.g., nominalization, relative clause, complex and compound sentences, particle use, verb conjugation), which will help them achieve natural, easily-flowing expression of their ideas.

More specifically, the following pieces of advice should be helpful in addressing the aforementioned common mistakes or omissions:

- **Incorrect comparisons:** Advise students to read the language of the prompt carefully — and perhaps twice — and to jot down a few notes about exactly what two things they are directed to compare. Every year we see responses from extremely skilled students who are writing very well about the wrong topic and these responses typically receive a zero or low scores as they do not address the prompt directly or appropriately.
- **Task completion issues:** Instruct students to also jot down notes in the form of a six-point checklist during the preparation time that may look like the following:
  1. Compare \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ (*fill in blanks*)
  2. Personal preference
  3. Reason for my preference
  4. Comparison 1 (*try to include both similarities and differences among the three points*)
  5. Comparison 2
  6. Comparison 3

A checklist like the one above helps the student to take a moment to confirm that their article satisfies all aspects of the prompt's instructions.

Furthermore, discourage students from spending time on self-introductions or extensive explanations of their school and so on. A number of responses with self-introductions showed that students ran out of time to write the more pertinent material and failed to address all of the prompt's key elements. If time is remaining after students have provided a preference, reason and three comparison statements, then they could always go back and include such information as additional detail later.

- **The issue of lacking one's preference and reason:** Stating one's preference and reason in the closing portion of the response is not the only way. It is possible to provide preference and reason in the first few lines of the response. This strategy helps to ensure that students do not forget or run out of time to write the preference and reason after spending all their energy on the comparison points.
- **Specific vocabulary, expressions, and structures for making comparisons:** Provide students with a "hit list" study guide of phrases and structures commonly used in the Compare and Contrast article, regardless of topic. These could include the following:
  - Basic comparative openings such as *これから A と B をくらべてみます* and *どちらの方がいいでしょうか*.
  - Sets of transitional elements to organize the flow of information such as *まず最初に、次に、最後に*.
  - Some alternate ways to talk about comparisons such as *ひかくして考えると* or *このように X と Y をくらべると*
  - Useful vocabulary such as *きょうつう点* and *そうい点*.
  - Expressions to introduce personal preference such as *個人的には、私は X の方がいいと思います* and *私の考えでは*; as well as phrases to preface reasons such as *なぜなら*.

## Interpersonal Speaking Task: Conversation

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

This task evaluated speaking skills in the interpersonal communicative mode by having students respond as part of a simulated conversation. It comprised a statement in English identifying an interlocutor and conversation topic, and a series of four related utterances in Japanese. Students engaged in a conversation with Aki Yamashita, a study abroad program assistant who is meeting the student at the airport, about plans for the day. Students were expected to (a) respond to Ms. Yamashita's greeting, (b) state their preference between the lunch options of hamburger and Japanese box lunch, (c) tell what they want to do in the afternoon, and (d) explain how they are studying Japanese.

Students had 20 seconds to speak at each turn in the conversation. Each of the four responses received a holistic score based on how well it accomplished the assigned task, and all four scores counted equally in calculating the total score.

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

The mean score for the Standard Group was 13.87 out of a possible 24 points. The mean score for the Total Group was 15.88. Most students were able to perform the task relatively well.

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

The conversation was with a study abroad program assistant meeting the student at the airport, about plans for the afternoon. It consisted of four turns; firstly to respond to an opening statement with a formulaic expression, secondly to state the student's preference between the two lunch options given by the assistant, thirdly to tell what the student wants to do in the afternoon, and lastly to explain how the student is studying Japanese. The topic seemed to be a familiar one to most students and all of the four prompts were expressed in straightforward language at the appropriate level. Thus, the students were generally able to respond to all the prompts.

However, many students did not respond as fully as possible as they were directed to do so. Some students forgot or overlooked the context of this conversation, which led to inconsistent register use, inappropriate speech level, or irrelevant references.

A number of responses indicated that the prompts spoken in Japanese were not fully understood. For instance, to prompt 2 (お昼ごはんですが、ハンバーガーがいいですか。それとも、日本のお弁当がいいですか), some students responded ハンバーガーが好きです, which makes it difficult to judge if the student understood the prompt or picked up the word ハンバーガー from the prompt and made up the sentence by adding 好きです. To prompt 3 (今日は、お昼ご飯のあと、少し時間があるんですが、何がしたいですか), some students continued talking about lunch. Responses must demonstrate that the prompts were understood correctly and answered appropriately.

Overuse of hesitation markers in English (e.g., “um”, “uh”), Japanese (e.g., あのう, えっと), or both detracted from the quality of responses even when the prompts were addressed appropriately.

### ***Based on your experience of student responses at the AP<sup>®</sup> Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?***

Remind students that they should read and listen very carefully to the instructions on how to respond and then respond as fully and appropriately as possible each time it is their turn. They should say as much as possible that is relevant and appropriate in response to each prompt and not be content with a brief, albeit appropriate, answer. Teachers should constantly remind the students that they should elaborate as much as possible. They sometimes respond to only a part of a prompt or to just one phrase within it rather than to the entire prompt. With only four short exchanges in the conversation, it is important for students to know that they need to make the most of every prompt to show their linguistic abilities.

Students should always keep in mind the context of the conversation so as to provide the most appropriate responses using the register and style suitable to the situation. They should practice using and responding to set phrases (e.g., greetings, apologies, expressions of appreciation, requests for assistance or advice) until they become automatic, and they should also practice elaborating appropriately when using different levels of discourse. Have students practice using — but not overusing — typical Japanese hesitation sounds (e.g., あのう, えーと) rather than “um” and “uh,” which will help the utterance sound more natural.

Have students practice using a range of grammatical phrases (e.g., relative clause, ～という) as well as such conjunctions as それに and だから in interpersonal speaking situations. Also, help them expand their repertoire of expressions that fulfill the same linguistic functions (e.g., なぜならば, どうしてかと言うと, なぜかと言うと for “The reason is that ...”).

There tends to be a wider gap between the Standard and the non-Standard Group students in their performances in speaking than writing. Such discrepancies may be alleviated by frequent simulated conversation practice in the classroom that could help develop skills in very careful listening and spontaneous response.

## **Presentational Speaking Task: Cultural Perspective Presentation**

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

This task assessed speaking skills in the presentational communicative mode by having students give a presentation on a cultural topic to a Japanese class. It consisted of a single prompt in English, which identifies a cultural topic and details how it should be discussed in the presentation. Students were given four minutes to prepare the presentation and two minutes for its delivery. Students presented their view or perspective on famous Japanese people. They were to begin with an appropriate introduction, discuss at least five aspects or examples of famous Japanese people, explain their own view or perspective about them, and end with a concluding remark.

The presentation received a single holistic score based on how well it accomplished the assigned task. In addition to language skills, the score reflected the level of the student's cultural knowledge exhibited in the presentation.

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

The mean score for the Standard Group was 3.51 out of a possible 6 points. The mean score for the Total Group was 4.18. Most students were able to perform the task relatively well.

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

The task asked students to present their own view or perspective on famous Japanese people. The topic seemed to be a familiar one to most students and they were able to speak on the topic, covering a wide range of choices including professional athletes, singers, movie directors and actors, historical figures, and fictional characters. However, some speeches included inaccurate cultural information ranging from minor (e.g., calling “となりのトトロ” “となりのココロ”; not following the proper order when saying Japanese names such as 駿 宮崎 and 明 黒澤) to more serious (e.g., スバル君はみんな頭があります in referring to the Japanese automaker as if Subaru were a person) errors. Some students listed general descriptions of famous people (e.g., 若い, 有名, うれしい, 変) that could be said about famous people anywhere.

Furthermore, some students were unable to explain their own view or perspective fully or clearly and presented very simple views or perspectives (e.g., すごいです; おもしろいと思います). Some responses lacked clear organization or transitional phrases. In addition, the absence of appropriate cohesive devices from sentence to sentence sometimes led to the presentation of scattershot bits of information. Insufficient detail or elaboration was another common characteristic in many responses.

Additional difficulties included the lack of rich vocabulary and idioms and the inability to use complex grammatical and syntactic structures correctly. Most responses were constructed with a limited variety of simple sentence structures. Some students had trouble producing a speech of the appropriate length and finished extremely early, and others ran out of time due to too much material to cover or because of frequent pauses, repetitions, and hesitation.

### *Based on your experience of student responses at the AP<sup>®</sup> Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?*

Remind students to address all the requirements of the prompt and outline their ideas before beginning to speak so as to ensure that they address all aspects of the prompt — including their own view or perspective — in a well-organized manner. Students also need more than superficial exposure to many different aspects of Japanese culture including their historical backgrounds, as well as many opportunities to practice describing those Japanese cultural products, practices, and perspectives and expressing their own opinions about them.



Additionally, students should have the opportunity to practice structuring their presentation with appropriate introductory and concluding remarks. Summarizing or restating what they have already said in different words at the end could serve as a conclusion. They also need practice in using a variety of transitional elements and cohesive devices appropriately as well as expressing themselves with a range of grammatical and syntactic structures building from simple to complex sentences. It is important to note that a high score (4 or higher) can be given to responses using just simple grammatical structures and fairly basic vocabulary if they are combined appropriately. Students should be taught to, first, come up with at least five aspects or examples of the give topic, then think about details and elaboration for each point, and finally, try to use more complex expressions in their speech. Further, they must learn how to give an introduction and a conclusion, how to organize a presentation using transitional devices, and how to present information with some detail.

Lastly, using a moderate amount of typical Japanese hesitation sounds such as あのう and えっと rather than “um” and “uh” will help make the speech sound more natural and flow more easily. Students should also practice giving a timed presentation multiple times so that they develop a good grasp of how much they can say in two minutes.