



Student Performance Q&A: 2001 AP[®] European History Free-Response Questions

The following comments are provided by the Chief Faculty Consultant regarding the 2001 free-response questions for AP European History. *They are intended to assist AP workshop consultants as they develop training sessions to help teachers better prepare their students for the AP Exams.* They give an overview of each question and its performance, 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 included. Consultants are encouraged to use their expertise to create strategies for teachers to improve student performance in specific areas.

Question 1 (Document-Based Question)

What was intended by the question?

This DBQ asked students to use at least a majority of eleven documents to analyze various views of the character and condition of Greeks during their independence movement in the 18th and early 19th centuries. The eleven documents were of various types and were written by individuals from several national backgrounds. The documents were easy to group in a variety of ways. Most of the documents provided opportunity for analysis of bias, point of view, or of the reliability of the source. Clear instructions for writing the DBQ essay, with bullets for the key elements, were placed before the question itself.

How well did the students perform?

In general, most students performed reasonably well. Most students used most of the documents and grouped them appropriately. However, some students did not create the three groups required for the core point, although the instructions specifically told them to "group in as many appropriate ways as possible." Most students grouped the documents by nationality of the author; others used religion as a grouping, or positive, negative, and ambivalent views of the Greeks. Most students discussed several views of the Greeks. The majority of students gave attribution for the documents they discussed, and many analyzed POV. Many students wrote superb essays and genuinely analyzed the relevant documents.

What were the common errors or omissions?

Students encountered difficulties in grouping the documents, analyzing POV and reliability of individual documents, inclusion of a thesis statement, misreading documents (especially the ironic poem by Kalphoglou [Document 4]), and revealing anti-Turkish bias in their responses. Some also focused on Islamic-Christian tensions not found in the documents.

Question 2

What was intended by the question?

This social history question asks students to analyze changes in attitudes toward children and child-rearing and explain why these changes occurred. The question encompasses the Enlightenment, Industrial Revolution, and post Industrial Revolution. It is intended to lead students to a discussion/analysis of the emergence of childhood as described by Locke and Rousseau and how these ideas led to smaller families and the “cult of the child.” The essay might include attention to social classes and issues of education, child labor, family income, industrialization, and urbanization. The question also asks for a differentiation between the concept of “childhood” and the child-rearing practices that ensue.

How well did the students perform?

Students performed relatively well in answering this question. The textbooks as a whole provide adequate coverage. Students who chose this question provided some factual information to support their answers. There was evidence that teachers had used the 1982 DBQ on child-rearing practices among the English upper-classes. Students had the flexibility to choose one of several approaches for their answers: social, economic, intellectual, political, or a combination (socio-economic, socio-intellectual, socio-political). The better answers tended to provide a “combination” approach. The most common approach was solely economic where students primarily noted changes of attitudes from pre-industrial to industrial settings.

What were the common errors or omissions?

Students still have difficulty with thesis construction. Essays often provided a narrative of child-rearing practices or conditions without addressing attitudes. Others failed to provide any specificity. Enlightenment references to Locke and Rousseau were often omitted; it was not uncommon for students to refer (incorrectly) to Voltaire rather than Rousseau or Locke. Many students depicted pre-Industrial Revolution childhood as idyllic; therefore, the Industrial Revolution became a “bad” factor. Class differentiation created difficulties. Most students tended to discuss changes for one class and made them universally applicable. Demographic data was also problematic for students. There seemed to be a common misconception that people married very young, especially in the 1700s.

Question 3

What was intended by the question?

There are three basic topic areas raised by the question. It asks students to relate European overseas expansion first to global trade and then to international relations. The words “discuss and analyze” enjoin the student to present specific examples in each of the three topic areas (discuss) and to establish linkages between them (analyze). The key word in terms of discussion and analysis is “how.” It calls for the student to develop the process of change that came with overseas expansion in the areas of global trade and international relations. As such, it is essentially a cause and effect type of question, with overseas expansion being the cause and changes in global trade and international relations being the effects. Implied as well is the relationship between global trade and international relations, with new directions in the former leading to changes in the latter. The fact that states is referred to in the plural means that more than one state needs to be identified for the essay to meet the charge of the question. Lastly, the students must make an effort to situate their essay in the time period 1600 to 1715.

How well did the students perform?

Stronger essays had a generally balanced treatment of global trade and international relations as affected by overseas expansion. It was possible to perform well pursuing these topic areas separately or in an integrated fashion (in that case, usually a country-by-country approach). Mixed essays usually went beyond the prompt in either a superficial or simplistic fashion. Linkages between global trade and international relations tended here to be more implied than explicit. These essays also lacked balance, treating one of the topic areas fairly well. Weak essays almost invariably restated the prompt, but then proceeded to develop it in a confused or overly generalized fashion. These essays often treated only one of the topic areas at best in a superficial or simplistic way, with barely a nod to the other.

What were common errors or omissions?

The most common confusion responding to the question was in casting too broadly to include everything from early exploration to mercantilist trade practices. In addition, students frequently included materials from far beyond the time period or took a global approach that lacked specificity in responding.

Question 4

What was intended by the question?

This mainstream question asked students to demonstrate their knowledge of the social and political consequences of the Reformation during its early decades. Students were expected to know specific political developments evident before mid-century as well as specific changes in social patterns that became apparent during the same period.

How well did the students perform?

Student essays ranged over the entire scoring scale (0-9). Essays in the “stronger” and “mixed” categories directly addressed the tasks posed by the question with varying degrees of effectiveness. Sophisticated essays in the “stronger” category typically considered political and social consequences in a European context (England; Holy Roman Empire/Germany, Geneva, etc.) and were sensitive to differences among reform movements. Essays in the “mixed” category generally discussed either political or social consequences in a restricted geographical setting (usually Germany). Essays in the “weaker” category misconstrued the question and wrote essays on the causes of the Reformation, the history of the Reformation, the corruption of the papacy and the Catholic church, etc.

What were the common errors or omissions?

Many essays limited discussion to Lutheranism and omitted the political and social consequences of other reform movements (Calvinism, Anglicanism, Anabaptism, etc.). The most common error occurred in essays that focused on the doctrinal and religious dimensions of the Reformation and neglected to discuss political and social consequences. Many essays also carried the discussion beyond the first half of the sixteenth century into the second half of the century and into the seventeenth century. While many essays demonstrated a comfortable grasp of political consequences, many essays seemed less sure about social consequences and often confused the social with the political. “Social” in some essays seemed to mean “sociable” or “sociability”.

While most essays demonstrated an adequate historical grasp of the Reformation, many essays equated the Reformation with unbridled religious individualism.

Question 5

What was intended by the question?

The question directs students to analyze historical data, with which they are familiar (e.g., physics and psychology), and to examine these data from different perspectives: challenges to prevailing worldviews concerning the individual and society. Students have a threefold task: they are to discuss the new theories in physics and in psychology, and the manner in which these theories challenged the existing ideas on the individual and society. Central to the essay was the student's ability to discuss theories in physics and in psychology, with references to the pertinent theorists, and to analyze how these developments in science challenged the prevailing notions of the individual and society. The question afforded students the opportunity to demonstrate competence in differentiating between the traditional post-eighteenth century emphasis on rational thought, consciousness and predictability, and the nascent tendency toward emphasis on irrational human behavior, the unconscious and indeterminacy in the early twentieth century.

How well did the students perform?

Overall, the students selecting this question performed well. The question was clear in delineating the task, and raised issues that are covered thoroughly in courses and in textbooks. The stronger essays discussed the new theories in physics and psychology, and the various ways in which these theories challenged the prevailing ideas on the individual and society. Weaker papers discussed more the theories than the existing ideas of the individual and society which had been challenged, or addressed the challenges in generalized terms with little, if any, discussion of the theories.

What were the common errors or omissions?

The most common errors consisted of those essays that discussed more the effects of the new theories than the manner in which they challenged existing ideas. Many students discussed only one of the theories in relation to the challenges. The conflation of chronology (Scientific Revolution, Darwin and the First World War, Holocaust) and content (scientific theory and technology, the atomic bomb, physics and biology, Darwin as physicist, Nietzsche as psychologist, Existentialism, Fascism and Nazism) proved to be problematic and the reason for which most students veered away from the purport of the question. The atomic bomb distracted most of the weaker essays.

Question 6

What was intended by the question?

The question asks students to compare and contrast the political and economic effects of the Cold War on Eastern and Western Europe. There are many tasks; however, the comparative nature of the question helps students focus on political and economic effects of the Cold War and the stated time frame helps them to direct their observations. The question asked students to compare postwar Western Europe, characterized by democratic institutions, growing national economies, and the EEC to postwar Eastern Europe with its centralized political systems and planned economies. This is a standard postwar topic and receives substantial coverage in the textbooks.

How well did the students perform?

Students experienced difficulty with this question because of the variety of tasks. There were more in the mixed or lower categories than at the upper end. Many good students were confused by the prompt not knowing whether to respond to the Cold War period, 1945-1991, or the effects of that period on the past decade. The question did permit students to conceptualize in discussing policies and practices rather than focus on factual recall of specific examples.

What were the common errors or omission?

There were three common errors: difficulties with identifying similarities, such as the similar ways in which both regions were affected by the clash of two superpowers, difficulties discussing differences, the chief political/economic effect was the clash between Western democracy and Eastern tyranny, or Western recovery and prosperity versus Eastern stagnation and decay, and the failure to support sweeping generalizations. Many students also demonstrated limited factual knowledge.

Question 7

What was intended by the question?

Students are asked to compare and contrast, signifying that there are similarities and difference. Indeed, students most often phrased their theses in terms of similarities and differences between the Terror and the beginning years of the Stalin period in the Soviet Union. They are directed to the “use of state power” in both instances, and to the achievement of “revolutionary goals.” Both must be addressed if an essay is to be placed in the strong category.

How well did the students perform?

Most students understood the question and addressed at least some of its terms. Weak essays often repeated the question rather than developing a thesis, and addressed the issue of authority and control, usually phrased in terms of killing and terror, as both a use of power and a goal. Attention to goals thus became a secondary consideration, or was not considered at all. Stronger essays considered power and goals and some considered the quest for a republican polity and egalitarian society, or for control and development of the economy.

What were the common errors or omissions?

Common errors included factual errors about the Jacobins and Stalin.

The main omission in many essays was a reasonable discussion of goals. Students often saw power as a goal, with Robespierre and Stalin as “paranoid” or as “fanatics”. In the Jacobin period, few students discussed the levee en masse, the politicization of daily life, the control of culture, or public trials. In the Stalin years, fewer students discussed the cult of personality, the rewriting of history, the secret police, the control of culture, the gulag, and the Kulaks.