

## Student Performance Q&A: 2010 AP® World History Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2010 free-response questions for AP® World History were written by the Chief Reader, Merry Wiesner-Hanks, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, and Question Leaders Tim Keirn, California State University, Long Beach; Kathy Callahan, Murray State University, Ky.; and Ryba Epstein, Rich East High School, Park Forest, Ill. 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?***

The intent of the question was to compare the characteristics of the mechanization of the cotton textile industry in Japan and India during the late-19th and early-20th centuries. Unlike most recent document-based questions (DBQs), these documents could not simply be classified in one category for analysis. Many of the 10 documents had internal evidence that represented multiple characteristics of mechanization. Given the richness and diversity of the sources, students could use individual documents in a variety of ways to represent different characteristics of mechanization in India and Japan and to provide multiple differences and similarities between the two. Documents could be grouped in a variety of ways: for example, in terms of growth in production, gender of the labor forces, traditional forms of production, and labor conditions in both India and Japan. Attribution for the individual documents was clear and provided ample opportunities for discussion of point of view and analysis of potential additional documents and sources.

AP Exam Readers were enthusiastic in their view that this was an exemplary DBQ in terms of both the question and the ease and reliability of applying the scoring guidelines. Students were given the opportunity to construct arguments in myriad ways, with evidence found internally within the same document(s). The question was very efficiently and accurately scored.

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

The mean score was 3.03 out of a possible 9 points, significantly higher than last year's mean of 2.62; 4.6 percent of students received a score of 7, 8 or 9, a figure that was also significantly higher than last year's 2.9 percent of students receiving top scores. Because the question required students to look at the characteristics of the mechanization of the cotton industry in both Japan and India, not at attitudes toward or responses to mechanization, students were able to organize

groups more easily, focus on the content of the documents, develop points of view, and identify and explain additional documents that were directly connected to the question.

Given the extent of evidence to be found within each document, students could use a broad spectrum of strategies, and there was no clear pattern or tendency in their groupings of documents. The variety of responses was a consequence of both the richness of the documents and the comparative nature of the question. Not only did students successfully use documents in multiple groupings around coherent patterns of the characteristics of mechanization in Japan and India, but they also grouped documents in a comparative analysis of the two (e.g., comparing the predominance of men in Indian factories [Document 10] with the predominance of women in Japanese factories [Documents 7 and 8]). Admirably, many students used a single document to provide evidence of a variety of characteristics, putting the same document in multiple groupings.

Most students grouped the documents around coherent characteristics of mechanization in each country. Given the large number of potential subgroupings manifest in the documents, a minimum of three groupings was required. Many of the stronger essays created distinct subgroupings within overarching themes (e.g., making distinctions between dangerous or substandard conditions and low wages). Students with reasonable writing skills and the ability to make relevant comparisons were able to craft acceptable thesis statements, plausibly drawn from the documents, that identified multiple characteristics of mechanization. The scoring guidelines permitted students to demonstrate basic understanding of the documents through accurate grouping or discussion of Japanese or Indian characteristics, so this was the most widely earned core point. Earning the thesis point proved more difficult, as discussed in the next section of this “Q&A.”

When students addressed point of view, they generally did so with competence, for example, when discussing the position of the document’s author with regard to the content of the document (e.g., a British official’s unemotional description of working conditions in Indian factories [Document 9] or the two Japanese girls’ painful recollections of factory life [Document 3]). When students discussed an additional document, they most often recognized that the perspective of an Indian worker was missing, or that an Indian woman may have provided a relevant comparison with her Japanese counterparts.

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

Although the mean score and number of students who received a 7, 8 or 9 on the 2010 DBQ were higher than in the preceding year, nonetheless the number of students receiving a score of 7 or above was still lower than desired. Three major problems are apparent when examining student responses to this question.

- **Core Point 1** — Although many students did attempt a thesis, to receive this point they needed to provide explicit comparisons between the characteristics of mechanization for both Japan and India. Many students failed to make any direct comparisons or to provide an explicit similarity or difference.
- **Core Point 4** — Although many students did attempt to discuss point of view, they did not successfully analyze the documents. A few confused interpretation with point of view or made vague statements about bias without any form of analysis, and many simply accepted the “objectivity” of the images and the charts without critical reflection. More needs to be done to encourage students to see point of view in these types of sources.
- **Core Point 6** — Students often asked for another point of view or document that was potentially relevant but did not explain how it would enhance understanding of the mechanization of the cotton industry in Japan or India. Missing points of view that

overlapped with Documents 1–5 were accepted (if adequately explained), given that the sources cited for those documents did not identify the types of document they were.

Although the bar for basic understanding was low, some students misinterpreted documents by forcing their analysis into a perceived category instead of making a more direct analysis (e.g., seeing the photos in Documents 8 and 10 as illustrating poor working conditions because the women are not smiling, without explanation or recognition of the posed nature of the photographs; stating that Japan was less successful or had failed because its overall production was “lower” than that of India [Documents 1 and 2]).

***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 be commended for having their students write the DBQ with greater attention to the directions. More than any other year, students answered the question more directly, made greater attempts to choose the additional document and analyze point of view, and generally grouped the documents in multiple categories of analysis. When students are practicing sample DBQs, they should be required to group the documents in at least three ways.

Even though more students directly addressed point of view, teachers need to continue to model this and allocate class time for practice so that recognizing point of view becomes an established habit of mind for their students. Students also must explain the request for additional documents within the context of the task posed by the question. In general, more needs to be done to enforce the point-of-view and additional document requirements as analytical tools throughout the course and not just as a requirement for this exam.

## **Question 2**

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

This year’s question about continuity and change over time asked students to describe and explain continuities and changes in religious beliefs and practices in either sub-Saharan Africa or Latin America/the Caribbean from 1450 to the present. The intent of the question was to have students explain how those practices and beliefs changed, as well as how they remained the same, over a 550-year time period. Students needed to choose the region or continent about which they felt most knowledgeable. Further, students were asked to accurately explain a reason for, or an impact of, a continuity or change in patterns of religious beliefs and practices. Understanding of religious beliefs and practices is an important component of instruction in the AP World History course.

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

Students performed higher on this type of question than they did in the two previous years. This year’s mean score was 3 out of a possible 9 points, exceeding the means of 2.67 in 2009 and 2.60 in 2008. Five percent of students earned a score of 7, 8 or 9, compared with 4.5 percent in 2009 and 4 percent in 2008. Students demonstrated significant improvements in writing — essays were better organized, and students made genuine efforts to earn higher scores by showing their historical knowledge. More students attempted to answer the question this year. Students were well versed in historical evidence (facts); this was especially true of those who wrote about Latin America.

Compared with student responses in previous years, many more students understood *and* could write about world historical context and analyze the causes for continuity and change. Numerous

responses included eloquent discussions of the continuity of religious beliefs and practices that Christianity brought to Latin America and Islam to sub-Saharan Africa. A few also wrote about the continuity of Christian beliefs and practices in sub-Saharan Africa by discussing Ethiopia and the subsequent arrival of Europeans (Portuguese exploration and post-Berlin Conference imperialism). Students were also familiar with other continuities, such as the syncretism of different belief and practice systems and the persistence of animist beliefs and practices.

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

Students continue to struggle with writing solid thesis statements. Many failed to include the dates as called for in the question. These dates had to be specific. For example, a thesis that included only the words “From 1450 on . . .” or “Since 1450 . . .” was not awarded a point as this did not *specifically* address the entire time period. Students who wrote “From 1450 to the present” or “In the Early Modern era to the 21st century” (or something similar) and met the other thesis requirements earned the point because these phrases clearly indicated a specific range of time.

Students were clearly comfortable with the concept of change but considerably less comfortable with the concept of continuity, and the latter was not specifically addressed in most theses. Many thesis statements were not valid because the student left out continuity; in addition, numerous essays with strong discussions of change received low scores because the responses did not address continuity at all.

Students often provided voluminous amounts of information that did not translate into relevant evidence. Moreover, some responses included far too much background information (from before 1450) while failing to address the entire time period as called for by the question, or to relate the background to continuity or change in the specified period. Often students relayed the same evidence over and over again. Also, many students were confused about Catholicism’s historical relationship to Christianity.

While improvement in addressing world historical context was evident, some students seemed genuinely puzzled about what was necessary when answering this question. Many made comparisons between regions instead of *connections* between regions or to global trends appropriate to the particular question. To earn a point for using relevant world historical context, students needed to be more focused on specific global links; for example, saying that “China and Brazil both had Jesuit missionaries” was a comparison, not a connection, unless the student drew it specifically (e.g., “European Jesuit missionaries were proselytizing in South America and winning converts. This happened in China as well.”). The term “European Jesuits” provided a specific reference showing how European practices affected South American beliefs.

In general, students demonstrated less comfort writing about sub-Saharan Africa than about Latin America and the Caribbean. Many showed clear historical understanding of Mali, Ghana, Ibn Batutta and Mansa Musa, but this information is outside the required time period of the question.

Occasionally students stumbled into analysis because of the “cause and impact” nature of the prompt. While efforts made in this category were better overall, too many students showed little understanding of analysis, often providing only factual information.

***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?***

More effort needs to be directed toward helping students learn to write thorough, concise thesis statements. Far too many students still write a thesis that simply parrots the question (e.g., “There

were many continuities and changes regarding religious practices and beliefs in sub-Saharan Africa”). Underscore the importance of qualifying the information requested in the question. For example: “Some Africans kept their polytheistic beliefs,” *not* “Some Africans kept their beliefs.”

Encourage students to think in terms of the periodization outlined in the AP World History Course Description (for this question: 1450–1750; 1750–1914; 1914 to the present), as it relates to the question. This approach would move students beyond a mechanistic “beginning, middle and end” format and give them a chance to demonstrate solid chronological knowledge. Applying this methodology also encourages them to cover the entire time period. Further, students should include dates in their essays to demonstrate that they know exactly when continuity and change occurred.

Additional teaching on African cultural life is important; students may benefit from exposure to graphic organizers specific to either time periods or regions.

Far too many students were unable to clearly demonstrate their understanding of historical continuity. This certainly challenges teachers and students alike on many levels, as textbooks are less explicit about continuity; this should be a point of emphasis in instruction.

Solid historical analysis explains the reason for or impact of a continuity or a change. While students have improved in this area, they need continued instruction. This year’s question tended to naturally lend itself to analysis, but more often than not, students wrote whatever facts they knew and were not specific about cause and impact.

Continue to urge students to write objectively, leaving personal opinions, in this case of religious practices, out of their responses.

Teaching students to write essays that attempt to organize the material politically, economically, socially and culturally, or in some other set formula, suggests to students that all answers can be forced into a pedagogically weak format. Often this approach will not work for the particular question posed.

Encourage students to write or print clearly; in the age of electronic communication, handwriting seems to be a dying transmission form. Every good faith effort is made to read what students write (often three to four people labor for several hours over illegible handwriting). Improved penmanship would assist in more efficient scoring of student responses.

### **Question 3**

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

The intent of the question was for students to pick two of the stipulated empires — Han China (206 B.C.E. to 220 C.E.), Mauryan/Gupta India (320 B.C.E. to 550 C.E.), Imperial Rome (31 B.C.E. to 476 C.E.) — and compare the ways those empires exerted political control over their populaces. Students were explicitly told to discuss both similarities and differences in methods of political control.

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

The mean score was 1.86, significantly lower than last year’s mean of 2.74, and the number of students who received a score of 7, 8 or 9 was also lower, 2.7 percent, as compared with last year’s 5.6 percent. The comparative question continues to receive many scores of 0; many students do not even attempt a response or write off-topic essays. In addition, this question tested material that many students had covered very early in the course or in some cases the year before, and they may

not have reviewed adequately. Students could choose from three empires for this question, and most chose to compare Imperial Rome with the Han dynasty, reflecting the emphasis in many major textbooks.

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

While student writing has improved over the last several years, students still often failed to write a thesis that actually addressed all the tasks laid out in the question. They needed to address at least one valid similarity and one valid difference between methods of political control (in other words, governance) in the two empires.

Some students attempted a comparison but not in political terms; they included information on trade, military history, religion, invasions and gender but did not tie these to methods of governance.

Some students failed to address all parts of the question, instead discussing only similarities or only differences between methods of political control for the two empires. Others attempted to compare all three empires. A few tried to compare the Maurya with the Gupta.

Students rarely provided analysis. They either ignored this task entirely or reversed cause and effect. Others attempted analysis but not as an explanation of a similarity or difference between methods of political control. Sometimes the analysis was strictly internal to one empire or the other, such as a discussion of why the empire fell.

Many students used supporting evidence that was outside the time period or was not from any of the stipulated empires (e.g., Roman Republic, Qin dynasty, Genghis Khan, Mansa Musa or Akbar). If the evidence was relevant it often had little to do with methods of political control. Some students simply wrote what they knew about the empires without directly responding to tasks set by the question.

***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?***

Spend more time teaching students how to analyze the question so that they understand what it is asking them to do and can organize their response so that it addresses all parts of the question.

Discourage students from constructing answers to comparison questions by discussing one region as a block and then the other region as a block, loosely linked by a transitional sentence. That sentence often was the only comparison in the response, and if it was incorrect the student was unable to earn any points for comparison, analysis or addressing the question.

Discourage students from writing to a preexisting format, such as political, economic, social/cultural or PERSIA (Political, Economic, Religious, Social, Intellectual, Artistic). Students need to respond to the question asked — which in this case was political.

Help students improve their understanding of content and chronology, and remind them to limit their responses to the appropriate period or empire.

Have students practice writing to a variety of prompts throughout the year.

**A general note:** The AP Reading provides an incomparable professional development experience for teachers. By helping to score the free-response questions and talking with other Exam Readers,

teachers learn strategies for teaching students how to write the three types of essays that appear on the exam. The Reading not only offers on-the-job-training but provides those teaching AP World History a valuable professional network. Although many school districts currently face economic difficulties, permitting teachers to attend the Reading is a good use of resources that can have a positive impact on student performance on future AP Exams.