

Chief Reader Report on Student Responses: 2019 AP[®] Human Geography Free-Response Questions

Set 2

• Number of Students Scored	225,235			
• Number of Readers	862			
• Score Distribution		Exam Score	N	%At
		5	24,373	10.8
		4	41,004	18.2
		3	45,253	20.1
		2	37,707	16.7
		1	76,898	34.1
• Global Mean	2.55			

The following comments on the 2019 free-response questions for AP[®] Human Geography were written by the Chief Reader, Seth Dixon, Associate Professor, Political Science Department-Geography Program, Rhode Island College. 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 preparation 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**Topic:** Industrialization and Economic Development**Max. Points:** 7**Mean Score:** 2.41***What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?***

Students were asked to demonstrate a knowledge of various aspects of post-industrialization and to demonstrate skills by synthesizing and integrating information across units. Students needed to describe the tertiary sector of a country's economy as it becomes a postindustrial economy. Additionally, students needed to describe how gender roles in the paid workforce change in these countries and how these countries utilize the international division of labor. Students were also expected to demonstrate an understanding of postindustrial urbanization by describing ways in which brownfields can be redeveloped.

How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?

Students struggled with relevant course content. Many seemed to have misread the question and, therefore, provided incorrect answers or dropped terms that they knew in an attempt to try and get points. Students also tended to not write much for the “describing” part and usually gave generic examples. Part B was the strongest part of the question and the strongest area where students could explain their line of reasoning and knowledge. Many responses showed a lack of nuance and critical thinking and failed to make connections.

What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

- Students did not know what brownfields are, and some confused them with agricultural fields or brown fields. Since the question did not ask students to define the term, there were many times when students were able to get points for having a correct example such as building a mall.
- Some students talked about remediation instead of redevelopment in part D.
- Many students did not know what deindustrialization means. They seemed to believe that the conditions for women until very recently were that of the late 18th century (or earlier) and that “deindustrialization” would mean a return to those conditions (i.e., agriculture and primary economic activities).
- Students seemed to make all kinds of sexist/racist assumptions in parts B, C and D (e.g., women didn't work because they are not strong enough to do primary and secondary jobs).

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many students were unfamiliar with the terms “postindustrial” and “deindustrial.” Some otherwise well-thought-out responses assumed that to deindustrialize was to revert to a preindustrial era dominated by agriculture. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better responses noted that postindustrial economies have scaled down basic manufacturing and are dominated by tertiary sector activities such as communications, retail, medical, knowledge/research-based, financial, etc.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students who did not receive points in part B often attempted to answer the question at the wrong scale. The phrase “countries utilize the international division of labor” was meant to key them in to economic global and international patterns, but many still answered at the local or national scale. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better responses saw that regional complementarity would allow postindustrial countries to utilize the international division of labor by importing manufactured goods produced in countries with lower wages, lower cost inputs, lower taxes, or less organized labor.

Based on your experience at the AP® Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?

- Do not teach the course based on one textbook (e.g., not all approved textbooks address brownfields). Instead, base your course on the AP Human Geography Course and Exam Description.
- Use correct terms (e.g., primary, secondary, and tertiary sectors) instead of shorthand (e.g., sectors 1, 2, and 3).
- Look at vocabulary from the curriculum framework. Correct use of the terms brownfield, knowledge sector, and tertiary sector would have earned students 4 points in this question.
- Encourage students to read the questions carefully and recognize the theme of the whole question first, then work on deconstructing the specific prompts within the question.

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

- Read and use the new course description/articulation.
- Teach the verbs: identify, describe, and explain.
- Use examples anywhere possible, but specific, concrete examples.
- Use previous FRQs for practice and use the scoring guidelines online to show students how to better read the questions and respond to them. Provide feedback.
- In AP Classroom, teachers will find a rich, new collection of resources for the 2019 school year that includes newly created formative and summative assessment items for every unit of the course and that represent each of the types of questions on the AP Exam. This includes practice FRQs for teachers to use as formative assessment pieces beginning with scaffolded questions that represents what students are ready for at the beginning of the school year and an increased challenge as teachers progress through the course.
- Have students “score” each other and themselves.
- Teach students that FRQs are about real present-day patterns tied into the past. FRQs do not address hypothetical or futuristic patterns.

Question #2**Topic:** Cities and Urban Land Use**Max. Points:** 7**Mean Score:** 1.77***What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?***

In part A students were asked to describe two factors that led to the development of the galactic city as an urban landscape in North America. This was intended to highlight urban models as a useful tool for explaining the internal structure of cities and urban development. In part B students were expected to describe two ways that the spatial organization of commercial land use is different between the original central business district (CBD) and the edge city. It was important for students to understand urban planning issues and land use considerations. In part C students were asked to describe one negative impact of edge city development on the environment, pulling in environmental problems associated with urban communities. In part D students were asked to explain two ways sustainable development initiatives or smart growth policies could address negative impacts of edge city development on the environment. This final part was intended to integrate their knowledge about several urban issues.

How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?

Most students who earned 1 or more points in part A correctly described the process of suburbanization and decentralization in a way that demonstrated an understanding that urban models developed to show the processes that are impacting cities. Students that only saw the model as static and unchanging struggled to describe and explain urban geographic issues.

Most students who earned 1 point on this question did so in part C by describing a negative impact of edge cities; that was the easy “entry point” for students. The most commonly cited negative environmental impacts were related to sprawl, loss of habitats, and an over-dependence on private motor vehicles. The most commonly cited sustainable design initiatives were to improve modes of transportation, bolster walkability, and expand green spaces. The most qualified students could connect these initiatives to reducing pollution, preserving habitats, and preserving farmland on the urban periphery.

What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

- Students tend to identify when asked to describe and to describe when asked to explain.
- Many students discussed gentrification, which was not relevant to the question. However, gentrification seems to be the urban issue that students felt the most comfortable writing about.
- Some students spoke about intensive and extensive land use in the agricultural context instead of the urban context.
- Students seemed to want to explain the model in terms of stagnant features instead of discussing processes that shaped the emergence of the new cities described by the model.
- Many students could identify either an initiative or an impact, but fewer were able to identify both.
- Many students wrote a general statement such as “edge cities harm the environment” without any specifics. This type of statement often simply restated the prompt.
- Students talked about sustainability in general terms rather than discussing sustainable design.
- Students tended to use vague pronouns (“it,” “they,” etc.) that made their responses difficult to interpret. Students should explicitly demonstrate their knowledge. Readers cannot assume knowledge that the students don’t explicitly demonstrate through their writing.

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In part B, many students described the spatial organization of residential land use patterns. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better responses addressed commercial land use patterns (as was specified in the question).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many responses discussed the link between increased urbanization and increased pollution, in general terms, without referring to edge cities. Many responses addressed environmental issues at a global scale (such as sea-level rise), forgetting that the question was at the city scale. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better responses noted how edge cities lead to more sprawling, less compact urban areas where there once was farmland or wilderness. Better responses addressed the urban environmental problems of edge cities such as encroachment on natural habitats on the urban fringe.

Based on your experience at the AP® Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?

- Although history certainly influences contemporary geography, the emphasis of the class should be on current spatial patterns and processes.
- Teach students that models are representations of reality, which are subject to interpretation and not static.
- Students should understand the processes associated with models instead of just memorizing models.
- Encourage students to see beyond the vocabulary terms to how concepts are interrelated in the real world.
- Teach students to approach a question objectively. Responses are scored based on an understanding of the concepts, not personal opinion.
- Have students read and reread the wording of the question to understand what is being asked in order to answer effectively.
- Students tended to use vague pronouns (“it,” “they,” etc.) that made their responses difficult to interpret. Students should explicitly demonstrate their knowledge through their writing.

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

- Return to Edge City <https://www.citylab.com/design/2018/04/return-to-edge-city/552362/>
- How Traffic Jams Decentralize Cities <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-traffic-jams-decentralize-cities/?redirect=1>
- Edge Cities and Urban Sprawl <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199874002/obo-9780199874002-0195.xml>
- Smart Growth Guidelines for Sustainable Design and Development <https://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/smart-growth-guidelines-sustainable-design-and-development>
- Various news articles, podcasts, and videos about urban models compiled by the chief reader: <https://geographyeducation.org/?s=urban+models>
- In AP Classroom, teachers will find a rich, new collection of resources for the 2019 school year that includes newly created formative and summative assessment items for every unit of the course and that represent each of the types of questions on the AP Exam. This includes practice FRQs for teachers to use as formative assessment pieces beginning with scaffolded questions that represents what students are ready for at the beginning of the school year and an increased challenge as teachers progress through the course.

Question #3**Topic:** Political Organization of Space**Max. Points:** 7**Mean Score:** 1.84***What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?***

This question is mainly a political geography one centered on two concepts: the process of nationalism and the idea of supranationalism. Supranational political decisions reflect a desire to cooperate in economic, social, and political arenas; well-prepared students understood that this leads to changes in sovereignty and challenges to sovereignty. Knowledge of economic geography is useful in describing how supranationalism affects boundaries, articulating the function of boundaries in regulating economic activity.

In part A students were expected to identify a geopolitical event that led to a change in boundaries. In part B the student was asked to explain in the abstract how nationalism can lead to the elimination of boundaries. The student then needed to describe an example of boundary elimination evident in the stimuli.

In part C the student needed to explain how processes of nationalism can lead to the creation of new boundaries, as well as provide a description of an example that is seen in the maps.

How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?

Many lower-scoring students correctly identified the geopolitical event in part A and earned a description point for either part B or part C for describing the event they identified in part A. Some students partially explained the processes but did not give concrete examples and adequate descriptions to earn description points in parts B and C. Some students argued that the European Union (EU) drew or redrew boundaries or credited the wrong supranationalist organizations (NATO or the UN) with impacting the borders in Europe. High-scoring students were able to demonstrate their knowledge of nationalism and supranationalism in discrete sections of the questions. Students who scored well described specific examples of changes in boundaries. These students were able to describe the abstract processes that were behind the elimination or creation of boundaries before proceeding to highlight connections to the examples they chose.

What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

- Many students confused place names (e.g., USSR, Russia, Balkans, and Yugoslavia). Some students described successor states in the wrong contexts (e.g., Slovakia being a successor of the USSR or Yugoslavia).
- Students had difficulty in interpreting the command verbs and other verbs in the questions. For example, in many cases the part A of a response went into description-level details when a mere identification would suffice, and vice versa.
- There was confusion in how to interpret elimination of boundaries versus creation of boundaries. For example, some students tried to argue that the collapse of the Soviet Union was an elimination of boundaries. Some responses argued that the Soviet Union's boundaries were eliminated or that the dissolution of Yugoslavia was an elimination of Yugoslavia's boundaries. Students should understand that, in these cases, the international boundaries were not redrawn to new locations. Instead, the countries on either side were changed. Only in a few cases have boundaries been established or even reworked.
- The lack of knowledge about geopolitical events in the given time period was a challenge. Students often used current events and issues such as Brexit, Ukraine, and the Middle East as examples that they tried to link to the stimulus maps.
- The idea that the concept of supranationalism "does" anything to effect boundaries. We were looking for a mention of actors that make policy and change the role of boundaries. Most successful students mentioned the European Union as the agent of change here.
- Many students could not differentiate nation versus state.

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students did not know the countries on the maps well enough to understand the patterns and processes. Many students labeled countries on the maps in the stimulus with letters, and then wrote responses referring to the labels rather than to the country names. Other students tried to identify a country using relative location to a country the student could identify. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better responses knew the countries on the map well enough to then identify the geopolitical event that led to the change (e.g., West and East Germany on the first map became a united Germany on the second map).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students often failed to understand supranationalism, treating it as if it were “supernationalism” in the form of extreme pride in the nation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better responses understood that supranational organizations, especially the European Union in this example, affect the function of borders by making borders between member states less rigid, while making the external borders of the organization more rigid.

Based on your experience at the AP® Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?

- Teachers should remember that the ability to identify a place or country on a map is an integral part of any geography course. This is a skill that would have helped in responding to the identification and description questions in parts A, B, and C.
- Analyze maps of change to show how spatial patterns change due to geographic processes.
- Make sure to impart what the command verbs mean and how to respond to them, specifically the verbs explain and describe.
- Ensure that students do not refer to any markings made on the stimulus. Describe and name what was labeled on the stimulus in the written response.
- Make sure the students address the region the question is referring to in their responses.
- Make sure that the concept of supranationalism is understood.

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

- The Murphy, Fouberg and de Blij book covers the topic fairly well. One reader emphasized the need to use multiple textbooks in preparing for this question.
- Films such as *Once Brothers* (though note there are Croatian basketball players that question the description of the central relationship) and *Winter on Fire*.
- Public Broadcasting Service. 2017. “Decades later, Bosnia still struggling with the aftermath of war.” *PBS News Hour*. November 19, 2017. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/years-later-bosnia-still-struggling-with-the-aftermath-of-war>.
- Toal, G., and Carl T. Dahlman. 2011. *Bosnia Remade: Ethnic Cleansing and its Reversal*. New York: Oxford University Press, Inc.

- Various news articles, podcasts, and videos about borders compiled by the chief reader:
<https://geographyeducation.org/tag/borders/>.
- In AP Classroom, teachers will find a rich, new collection of resources for the 2019 school year that includes newly created formative and summative assessment items for every unit of the course and that represent each of the types of questions on the AP Exam. This includes practice FRQs for teachers to use as formative assessment pieces beginning with scaffolded questions that represents what students are ready for at the beginning of the school year and an increased challenge as teachers progress through the course.