

# A.P. U.S. History Toolbox

The Advanced Placement United States History class enables willing and academically prepared students to pursue a college-level course in a high school setting, with the opportunity to earn college credit. Students who earn a passing score on the May exam are generally able to receive college credit. AP U.S. History focuses on developing students' abilities to think conceptually about United States History and apply historical thinking skills as they learn about the past.

## Course Structure

This is a brief overview of how the AP U.S. History course is structured. You can see more detailed information on the College Board website, [apstudent.collegeboard.org](http://apstudent.collegeboard.org).

### Key Period Timeline

Key Period	Time frame	Percentage of Course
1	1491-1607	5%
2	1607-1754	45%
3	1754-1800	
4	1800-1848	
5	1844-1877	
6	1865-1898	45%
7	1890-1945	
8	1945-1980	
9	1980-Present	5%



### Major Historical Themes – (MAGPIES)

- **Migration and Settlement** – This theme focuses on why and how the various people who moved to and within the United States both adapted to and transformed their new social and physical environments.
- **America in the World** – This theme focuses on the interactions between the U.S. and the rest of the world, as well as how America influenced and was influenced by world events.
- **Geography and Environment** – This theme focuses on the role of geography and both the natural and human-made environments on social and political developments in what would become the United States.
- **Politics and Power** – This theme focuses on how different social and political groups have influenced society and government in the United States, who has and doesn't have a political voice, and how political institutions have changed over time.
- **American Identity** – This theme focuses on how and why definitions of American and national identity and values have developed, as well as on related topics such as citizenship, constitutionalism, foreign policy, assimilation, and American exceptionalism.
- **Work, Technology, and Exchange** – This theme focuses on the factors behind the development of systems of labor and economic exchange, particularly the role of technology, economic markets, and government.
- **Culture and Society** – This theme focuses on the roles that beliefs, social mores, and creative expression have played in shaping the United States, as well as how various identities, cultures, and values have been preserved or changed in different contexts of U.S. history.

### Historical Thinking Skills (HTS)

Each of the skills listed below focus on the habits of mind that historians use when they approach the past in a critical way, and the skills used while trying to construct and test historical arguments about the past.

<b>Contextualization (CONT)</b>	<b>Comparison (COMP)</b>	<b>Causation (CAUS)</b>	<b>Continuity and Change over Time (CCOT)</b>
Describe an accurate historical context for a specific historical development or process	Describe similarities and/or differences between different historical developments or processes	Describe causes or effects of a specific historical development or process	Describe patterns of continuity and/or change over time
Explain how a relevant context influenced a specific historical development or process	Explain relevant similarities and/or differences between specific historical developments and processes	Explain the relationship between causes and effects of a specific historical development or process. Explain the difference between primary and secondary causes and between short and long-term effects	Explain patterns of continuity and/or change over time
Use content to explain the relative historical significance of a specific historical development or process	Explain the relative historical significance of similarities and/or differences between different historical developments or processes	Explain the relative historical significance of different causes and/or effects	Explain the relative historical significance of specific historical developments in relation to a larger pattern of continuity and/or change

## Exam Overview

The AP U.S. History Exam is 3 hours and 15 minutes long, with a multiple-choice/short answer section and a free-response essay section. The AP Exam is graded on a 1-5 scale, with a 3 being considered a passing score.

<b>Question Type</b>	<b>Number of Questions</b>	<b>Structure</b>	<b>Timing</b>	<b>Percentage of Total Score</b>
Part A: Multiple-choice	55 questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Questions in sets of 2-5</li> <li>• Stimulus-based, both primary and secondary sources</li> <li>• Covers Key Periods 1-9</li> </ul>	55 minutes	40%
Part B: Short-answer questions	3 questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Questions #1 and #2: Required, Key Periods 3-8</li> <li>• Q#1 based on secondary source; Q#2 and #3 on causation or comparison</li> <li>• Question #3: Option of two prompts – KP1-5 or KP6-9, no stimulus</li> </ul>	40 minutes	20%
Part A: Document Based Question (DBQ)	1 question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 7 primary source documents</li> <li>• Covers Key Periods 3-8</li> </ul>	60 minutes	25%
Part B: Long Essay	1 question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Choose one of three options (KP1-3, KP4-6, KP7-9)</li> <li>• All three options address the same skill</li> </ul>	40 minutes	15%

### Multiple-Choice Section

The multiple-choice section is designed to measure what students know of the subject matter commonly covered in introductory college courses in American History. Questions appear in sets of 2-5 questions that relate to a historical stimulus (e.g. document, quote, map, image, etc.). The stimuli are most often primary sources, however, secondary sources and interpretations by historians are occasionally used.

### Multiple-Choice Strategies

1. **Pace Yourself**—Although you will have 60 seconds per question in this section, it is designed that you will need to read, analyze, and interpret the stimulus before you are able to accurately answer the questions associated with it. Don't spend too long on any one question. Either guess or mark it for later consideration.
2. **Be Careful**—Always make sure you read the question and the answer choices carefully! Students often make silly mistakes when they feel stressed for time. Don't rush! Read carefully. Some answers are designed to mislead you. Remember, not all true statements are correct answers; it depends on what is being asked.
3. **Use the Process of Elimination**—Cross out the obvious wrong answers. You are not penalized for wrong answers, so play the odds! Don't leave any questions blank!
4. **Focus on the Big Picture**—Correct answers will not contradict the general trends of American history. The A.P. exam does not ask arcane questions based on rote memorization. Questions are always in historical context.
5. **Trust Your Instincts**—When choosing between answers pay attention to what your hunch or first guess is. Don't try to outsmart or overanalyze a question.

### Sample Multiple Choice Question

"Our... destiny [is] to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions... The Anglo-Saxon foot is already on [California's] borders. Already the advance guard of the irresistible army of Anglo-Saxon emigration has begun to pour down upon it, armed with the plough and the rifle, and marking its trail with schools and colleges, courts and representative halls, mills and meeting-houses. A population will soon be in actual occupation of California... Their right to independence will be the natural right of self-government belonging to any community strong enough to maintain it." —John L. O'Sullivan, 1845

The process described in the passage above most directly led to political controversies in the 1840s and 1850s over the

- A. Expansion of slavery into newly acquired territories
- B. Authority of the Supreme Court to overturn federal laws
- C. Role of the federal government in economic development
- D. Use of natural resources in newly acquired territories

**Answer: A**

### Short Answer Section

Most Short Answer questions are text-based, but may occasionally include images, maps, or graphs. Short-answer questions **DO NOT** require students to write a thesis statement. Students must answer three short-answer questions within a 40-minute time limit.

### Sample Short-Answer Question



Use the image and your knowledge of United States history to answer parts A, B, and C.

- A. Explain the point of view reflected in the image regarding ONE of the following:
  - Migration
  - Technology
  - American Indians
- B. Explain how ONE element of the image expresses the point of view you identified in Part A.
- C. Explain how the point of view you identified in Part A helped shape ONE specific United States government action between 1845 and 1900.

In order to ensure that you receive the full points for your answer, it is recommended that you structure your answer the same way as the question (A, B, C...).

### Free-Response/Essay Section

The free-response section of the AP exam is designed to assess the student's ability to synthesize the content material they have learned into a comprehensive essay. There are two parts to this section: the Long Essay Question (LEQ) and the Document Based Question (DBQ). The Long Essay prompts are broader-based questions, generally comparing people, events, eras, etc., illustrating the interconnectedness of history. The DBQ requires students to analyze and use specific documents in a more detailed essay, based on a broad prompt.

### **Sample Long Essay Question**

Some historians have argued that the Spanish-American War in 1898 marked a turning point in United States foreign policy. Support, modify, or refute this contention using specific evidence.

### **Sample Document-Based Question**

Analyze major changes and continuities in the social and economic experiences of African Americans who migrated from the rural South to urban areas in the North in the period 1910-1930. (Documents include a map, newspaper articles, a letter, song lyrics, and a folk saying)

## **Essay Question Strategies**

1. **Read the Question** – Yes, this sounds obvious, but if you don't read the question carefully or clearly understand what it is asking, you cannot answer it accurately.
2. **Outline, Outline, Outline** – Organizing your thoughts before starting to write will help you avoid run-on sentences, unclear arguments, etc. You can always add details if you think of them during the writing process, but a solid blueprint will ease the stress of the essay.
3. **Know Your Argument** – Always have a clear position on the prompt. State your argument concisely, while making sure to address all aspects of the prompt. And remember to remain objective – you may think Thomas Jefferson was a total jerk, but please don't say so in your essay
4. **Be Professional** – Although you are not graded on formatting, adhere to the steps of writing a good essay and its basic structure. It is easier for the reader to follow your argument, and makes scoring much easier. Avoid absolutes, generalizations, and unsupported statements ("many" vs. "all"); use of first or second person voice (e.g. "I," "you," "we," etc.); use of slang of any kind **EVER!** (e.g. "like" as a hesitation word, "jk," "lol," :), etc.)
5. **Don't Sweat the Small Stuff!** - Small slips won't cost much, if anything. But do not write about the wrong time period or confuse Lincoln with George Washington, the Civil War with the Revolutionary War, or the Missouri Compromise with the Compromise of 1850. You will receive major deductions for major mistakes.

## **Six Major Types of History Essay Questions**

1. **Analyze:** Determine the component parts; examine their nature and relationship.  
*Analyze the major technological changes that took place in America from 1870 to 1900 and describe what significant social ramifications they had.*
2. **Assess/Evaluate:** Judge the value or character of something; evaluate the positive points and the negative ones; give an opinion regarding the value of; discuss the advantages and disadvantages of  
*Evaluate the extent to which trans-Atlantic interactions from 1600 to 1763 contributed to maintaining continuity as well as fostering change in labor systems in the British North American colonies.*
3. **Compare/Contrast:** Examine for the purpose of noting similarities and differences  
*Compare and contrast the religious revival of the First Great Awakening to that of the Second.*
4. **Support, Modify, or Refute:** Given a statement about a historical event, theme, etc., you will choose to agree with (support), disagree (refute), or change (modify) the statement to be more accurate, based upon outside evidence.  
*Some historians have argued that the New Deal was ultimately conservative in nature. Support, modify, or refute this interpretation.*
5. **Describe/Explain:** Give an account of; tell about; give a word picture of.  
*Describe the extent to which nineteenth-century Transcendentalism was or was not a conservative cultural and intellectual movement.*
6. **Identify:** Cite specific events, phenomena, and show a connection.  
*Identify the social and economic factors in pre-industrial America that explain why it was one of the first countries to industrialize.*

## **APUSH Skills**

Analysis of primary sources goes beyond summarization. When one analyzes a source, one thinks critically about not only the content, but also how the content may have been affected by other factors. Analyzing the various features of a source helps establish the reliability of a source, and how it may be used to answer historical questions.

## How to Analyze Historical Documents like A Pro

Source Features	Questions to Consider
Format/Medium	What is the format of the source: text, image, art, newspaper article, letter, cartoon, etc.? Does the source's format or genre add meaning to what the source explicitly states? (i.e. novel, Impressionist painting, cartoon)
Content	What point(s) is the document trying to make? What does the document not say? (i.e. Does it selectively include/exclude information?) What was the author's central argument or thesis?
Authorship	Who wrote the document and what is his/her relationship to the historical event being addressed? What was the author's position in society? Do you know anything about this person would affect the reliability of the document?
Author's Point of View	What was the author's point of view? Does the author's point of view undermine the explicit purpose of the source? What other beliefs might the author hold based on their point of view?
Author's Purpose	Why did the author create the source? Why was the document created at the time? How does its purpose affect its reliability or usefulness?
Historical situation	When and where was the source produced? What contemporaneous events might have affected the author's viewpoint and/or message? How does the historical situation that the source was produced in affect the reliability of the source?
Audience	Who was the source created for? How might the audience have affected the content of the source? How might the intended audience affect the reliability of the source?
Limitations	What does the document not tell you? What might have limited the knowledge of the author (e.g. social status or position, education)? What other documents might offer alternatives to the author's point of view or fill in the gaps?
Significance	Why was the document important at the time? Why is it important today? Why do we study it? What insights, changes, or results came from the document?

## HIPPOS Document Analysis

HIPPOS is an acronym to help students analyze documents quickly and efficiently in order to better understand their meaning and place within history. It's a shorthand way to analyze a document (as opposed to the chart above), and a requirement on the DBQ.

**Historical Context:** What is going on in America or the world when the document was created? How might those circumstances impact the document in the way it was written or presented?

**Intended Audience:** Who is the intended audience of the document? Is the author addressing those who support their idea? Or their critics?

**Purpose:** What is the purpose of the document? To inform? Persuade? What impact does the author hope will come from the creation of the document?

**Point of View:** What is the author's point of view of the subject within the document? What is their station in life? How might that impact their point of view?

**Outside Evidence:** What information, not contained within the document, applies to the content, author, purpose, etc.? How does that information improve our understanding of the document?

**Significance:** Why is the document important in regards to the era? To the topic? To an essay? What is its significance in history? Why should we learn about this?

