



AMERICA: THE LAST BEST HOPE

DESCRIPTION OF THE AP US HISTORY EXAM

[College Board Home Page and Website](#)

This is the best site to visit in order to get a good overview of the AP US History exam. It covers the length of the test (3 hours and 5 minutes), each of the sections, the types of essays, and the scoring for the test.

[AP US History Course Home Page](#)

This site is a treasure trove of information about the exam.

HINTS FOR PREPARING FOR THE AP US HISTORY EXAM

1. “Slow and steady wins the race.” There is too much information in AP US to learn in a few days. Therefore, make AP US a priority and try to set aside a half-hour to an hour each day. If that means that you’re doing your AP US homework during that time, that’s okay, but try not to miss many days. The continuity of study will pay off over time.
2. “Leave a paper trail.” Take good notes and complete the chapter reading logs, vocabulary definitions, lecture sheets, etc. Of course, each AP US class will differ, nevertheless, there should be plenty of opportunities to write notes sheets to use as reference later. It is important to start review in March, and the notes will be very helpful when you start reviewing the material.
3. “Learn it the first time.” Instead of racing through homework or skimming the chapter to answer questions, slow down and concentrate the first time through. This will give you a much better foundation for learning future material, will help you get better grades in the class, and will help you when you try to review for the AP exam.
4. “Nothing good happens without hard work.” Be a diligent student and don’t settle for the minimum. As with most things in life, the harder you work, the better the results. So, if you need help with vocabulary, look up words and keep a list of definitions – even if it’s not for a grade. Identify your weak points and do what you can to compensate. Your AP US History homework and coursework is designed to help you prepare for the AP exam. However, you can also take the initiative and do even more to prepare. Some suggestions:



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- a. Go on-line to try out various AP US History exam sites.
 - b. Make note cards that you can use to study.
 - c. Buy an AP US History Exam Preparation Book to read. Some good books are:
Fast Track to a 5 by Mark Epstein (Wadsworth – Cengage Learning), *The Best Test Preparation for the Advanced Placement Examination – United States History* by Jerome McDuffie, Garry Piggrem and Steven Woodworth (Research and Education Association), *How to Prepare for the Advanced Placement Examination – AP United States History* by William Kellogg (Barron's) and *Everything you need to score high – AP United States History* by John Crum (Macmillan).
 - d. Take practice tests and time yourself.
 - e. Practice reading primary source materials to prepare for the Document-Based Question.
5. “Be a happy pest.” As you work on your weak points, don’t forget that your AP US History teacher is probably your biggest advocate and resource. Don’t be afraid to ask for help – often. On the other hand, remember that teachers can be busy so respect their time and try to work with their schedule. Keep a small notebook to record US History questions that come to mind throughout the day. When you see the teacher, ask the question and record the answer.
6. “Review.” If your teacher holds review sessions, go to as many as possible. If you have note cards, practice with them. If you have classmates who are also studious, work with them for some review sessions. Basically, spend time getting familiar with the content. Oftentimes, it’s a good idea to start reviewing in March so you have a couple of months to go through everything.
7. “Mellow before the test.” Do NOT stress or cram the day before the exam. Hopefully, by this point in time, you will have spent the time you need to prepare. If so, then it is now time to get into the right frame of mind. If not, it’s still time to get into the right frame of mind. The AP US History exam is in the morning and takes about four hours with all of the testing information, bubbling, breaks, etc. Therefore, get a good night’s rest, eat a good breakfast and stay calm. Some hints for being mellow:
- a. Work hard ahead of time so you feel good at the end.
 - b. Stay positive and hope for the best
 - c. If you get nervous, take several deep breaths
 - d. Don’t try to read the future. Live in the moment and do the best you can.



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HINTS FOR TAKING THE AP US EXAM

The AP US exam is written and administered by the Educational Testing Service and overseen by the College Board. It is three hours and five minutes in length and consists of two sections:

- 1) 55 minute multiple choice section that includes 80 questions (50% of grade)
- 2) 130 minute "free response" section which is divided into (50% of grade):
 - a. 15 minute reading period of documents associated with the first question which is a document based question (DBQ)
 - b. 45 minute period to organize and write an answer to the DBQ
 - c. 70 minute period to write responses to TWO standard essay questions/free response essays

The DBQ is 45% of this portion

The two free response essays are 55% of this portion

Final scores for the AP Exam run from a low of 1 to a high of 5.
3 is a minimum passing grade for most colleges.

MULTIPLE CHOICE

The 80 questions in the multiple choice section measure a student's knowledge of subject matter commonly covered in introductory college courses in US History. A student must answer 60% correctly to receive a "3." For each incorrect response, $\frac{1}{4}$ of a point is subtracted from the total number correct. The best strategy for the test is; if a student can narrow down the given possible answers to two, go ahead and guess. Approximately, $\frac{1}{6}$ of the questions deal with America prior to 1789, $\frac{1}{2}$ deal with the period from 1790-1914 and $\frac{1}{3}$ from 1915 to the present. 1970's and beyond are ten or fewer questions.

Political institutions and behavior and public policy account for about 35% of the questions and social change for about 35%. The remaining questions are roughly divided between the areas of diplomacy and international relations = 15%, economic developments = 10%, and cultural and intellectual developments = 5%.



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HINTS:

1. Look for context clues – you need the BEST answer
2. Questions get harder as you go through the test. #10 is easier than #70. Make sure you really concentrate and knock down the easy questions.
3. Eliminate obviously wrong answers until you can narrow down your choices. If you can't narrow the choices then you can skip the question but don't skip more than 6 questions! Don't get stuck on one; mark it and come back.

ESSAYS

Document Based Questions (DBQ): The DBQ emphasizes your ability to analyze and synthesize historical data and assess verbal, quantitative, or pictorial materials as historical evidence. This means that you must interpret the document and write an essay with a thesis that is backed by supporting outside information and the documents. This is where studying for the multiple choice questions can be helpful; even for the essays.

The documents will probably not be familiar classics, but their authors may be major historical figures. The material may include charts, graphs, cartoons, pictures, and written documents. The question (prompt) and the documents will be diverse, calling upon a broad spectrum of historical skills. The DBQ requires students to relate the documents to historical time periods, themes, and issues. Make sure you use outside knowledge as a supplement.

There are usually 10 documents. You should analyze at least 6-7 (1/2 plus 1 or 2).

STANDARD ESSAYS: Since the two essays are to be written in a 70-minute time period, you will not have time to develop a lengthy intro and essay. However, you must develop a strong thesis and support it in each response. You must argue a historical point and use factual information to support it. It is recommended that students spend 5 minutes preparing each answer, 25 minutes writing, and the last 5 minutes for proofreading.

Students will be given two groups, each containing two topics. Students must write on the topic from each group. The first group will cover the colonial periods to 1900. The second group will cover the 1900's with essay topics up to 1975. References may be made to events in the late 1970's to 1990's but the topics will not deal exclusively with that time frame.



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HINTS:

1. Write a strong thesis
2. Develop a “hook” or interesting overview of the essay/time period in the introduction so that you can “grab” the reader
3. Emphasize relationships
4. Back up your thesis with supportive facts and details
5. Use literature, architecture, art, etc. and focus on their relationship to politics, society, economic life or the intellectual movements
6. Don't add new facts or perspectives in the conclusion
7. You have to use a pen for the essays so if you make a mistake just draw a line or two through the word and move on. Don't use white out, as it takes too long; don't scratch out - just draw 1-2 lines through the word
8. Examine the question carefully: circle direction words (i.e. analyze, examine, etc.), underline key words (i.e.. What you're supposed to discuss/write about), and try to re-phrase the question in your own words to make sure you understand what it wants



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AP US "ELDERS" WORKSHEET

Since many AP students are underclassmen (juniors and sophomores), there are usually dozens of former AP US History students around the school (usually seniors). These former AP US History students can be called AP US "Elders." In an attempt to help students prepare for the test, encourage the to find one of the "Elders" and talk about the exam and AP class. This worksheet can guide this experience to talk and share ideas.

Name _____

AP US "ELDERS" WORKSHEET

TASK: Find someone who took AP US History and ask them a series of questions that are intended to help on the upcoming exam. These "Elders" are walking the halls of our school so....."tap into their knowledge; seek their wisdom."

BONUS 2 POINTS if you obtain "unique knowledge" from an AP US Elder who no one else has found.

AP US Elder's
Name _____

AP US Elder's
Autograph _____

1. Is there anything that you did that you found helpful in preparing for the AP US History Exam? Please give me some examples.
2. Is there anything you WISHED you had done to prepare for the exam when you were a student? Please explain.
3. What part of the exam did you find most challenging - free response essays, the DBQ or the multiple choice? Why?



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4. What should I do to prepare for that part of the test?
5. Based on your experience, recommend some topics that I should know for the test:

Famous People other than Presidents	Famous Events	Famous Era(s)

6. Anything else? Any final advice or wisdom?