

AP U.S. History Overview for Parents and Students

Course Overview

AP U.S. History (APUSH) is a rigorous, college-level course designed to give students a deep understanding of key events, individuals, and developments in US History. It covers a vast time period from pre-Colonial America to the present day and emphasizes critical analysis of historical events and their significance. By taking this course, students have the opportunity to earn college credit, strengthen their historical reasoning skills, and develop the ability to write evidence based essays.

Course Content: The course is divided into nine periods, each focusing on key historical themes

Period 1 (1491-1607)	Pre-European contact Native American societies, European exploration, the Columbian Exchange, and the impact of European colonization
Period 2 (1607-1754)	The development of European colonies in America, the role of the transatlantic trade, and colonial culture
Period 3 (1754-1800)	The American Revolution, creation of the U.S. Constitution, and early national identity formation
Period 4 (1800-1848)	The rise of political parties, technological innovations, and reform movements
Period 5 (1844-1877)	Manifest Destiny, the Civil War, and Reconstruction
Period 6 (1865-1898)	Industrialization, the “New South”, and shifts in immigration
Period 7 (1890-1945)	Imperialism, the World Wars, the Great Depression, and the New Deal
Period 8 (1945-1980)	The Cold War, Civil Rights movements, and American political transformation
Period 9 (1980-Present)	The rise of conservatism, the end of the Cold War, and modern challenges in the 21st century

Student Skill Developed

- Evaluate primary and secondary sources
- Analyze historical events, patterns, and processes
- Write evidence-based essays using a strong thesis and supporting arguments

Expected Student Workload

In Class Requirements:

Participate in a range of activities, including reading primary and secondary sources, writing essays (DBQs, LEQs), completing quizzes and tests, engaging in class discussions, and group work to foster critical thinking and collaboration. Actively contribute to discussions and in-class activities to deepen understanding of historical themes and concepts.

Out of Class/ Independent Work Requirements:

Read approximately 25-30 pages (one chapter) of college-level material each week, with independent note-taking to reinforce comprehension. Complete weekly out-of-class review activities to consolidate learning and prepare for assessments.

Budget approximately 3-6 hours per week outside of class for reading and assignments, depending on reading speed, comprehension level, and critical thinking skills.

AP Exam Structure		
The AP U.S History Exam tests students' understanding of key historical themes and skills outlined in the course framework. It is a comprehensive 3-hour and 15 minute exam , divided into two main sections.		
Section I		
Multiple Choice (40% of score)	55 questions in 55 minutes	Interpret, contextualize, analyze, or compare questions based on historical texts, maps, and images
Short Answer (20% of score)	3 questions in 40 minutes	Requires brief written responses to historical scenarios
Short Answer Format	Questions come in sets of 3-4	Short excerpts from historical documents or texts as prompts, requiring students to analyze the content, context, and perspective to demonstrate critical thinking and historical understanding. These questions often ask students to interpret the meaning, contextualize within a broader history, and compare ideas to other themes or documents.
Section II		
Document-Based Questions (25% of score)	One question in 60 minutes	Students analyze seven historical documents and develop an argument based on their interpretation
Long Essay (15% of score)	One question from three options, 40 minutes	Students choose one prompt to develop a historical argument using evidence and reasoning. The essay requires the application of historical reasoning skills (such as comparison, causation, or continuity and change over time) on topics covering different periods: 1491-1800, 1800-1898, 1890-2001

How AP Exams are Scored
AP U.S. History exams are scored through a combination of multiple-choice, short-answer, and essay sections to assess both factual knowledge and analytical skills.
Multiple-Choice and Short-Answer Sections
These parts cover key historical themes, testing students' abilities to analyze sources and demonstrate content knowledge. Each correct answer earns points; however, there's no penalty for incorrect responses, so students are encouraged to answer all questions.
Free-Response Section (DBQ and LEQ)
Students write two types of essays—the Document-Based Question (DBQ) and Long Essay Question (LEQ)—which require them to develop arguments supported by historical evidence. Trained AP readers grade each essay based on specific rubrics that evaluate thesis, argumentation, use of historical documents, and contextual analysis.
Grading Process and Consistency
Trained AP readers, many of whom are experienced teachers, grade the DBQ and LEQ essays to ensure scoring consistency. The process includes rigorous calibration to make sure scoring is as fair and uniform as possible.
Composite Score and Scaling
Scores from each section of the AP exam are combined into a composite score, which is then converted to the AP 5-point scale. A score of 5 means "extremely well qualified," while a 3 indicates "qualified," and a 1 means "no recommendation." A score of 3 or higher is generally considered passing, but some colleges only grant credit for scores of 4 or 5. Be sure to check your colleges of interest for their AP credit policy to confirm its score requirements for credit. All AP scores are released in July. Students can check their College-Board accounts for their scores. GCS only puts AP scores of 3 or higher on student transcripts.

