

IV. The AP U.S. History Exam

Exam Description

The AP U.S. History Exam consists of four parts, organized as follows:

Section 1

Part A: Multiple-choice questions (35–40 questions)

Part B: Short-answer questions (4 questions)

Section 2

Part A: Document-based question (1 question)

Part B: Long-essay question (1 question)

Student performance on these four parts will be compiled and weighted to determine an AP Exam score.

The following are general parameters about the relationship between the components of the curriculum framework and the questions that will be asked of students on the AP Exam:

- Students' achievement of the thematic learning objectives will be assessed throughout the exam.
- Students' use of the historical thinking skills will be assessed throughout the exam.
- Students' understanding of all nine periods of U.S. history will be assessed throughout the exam.
- No document-based question or long-essay question will focus exclusively on events prior to 1607 (Period 1) or after 1980 (Period 9).
- Students will always write at least one essay — in either the document-based question or long-essay sections — that examines long-term developments that cross historical time periods.
- The coverage of the periods in the exam as a whole will reflect the approximate period weightings (see Section III, page 20). Coverage of a period may be accomplished by asking questions in different sections of the exam. For example, the appearance of a short-answer question on Period 4 might mean that there are fewer questions addressing that period in the multiple-choice section.

Multiple-Choice Questions

The multiple-choice section will consist of 35 to 40 questions, organized into sets of two to six questions that ask students to respond to stimulus material — a primary or secondary source, a historian’s argument, or a historical problem. Each set of multiple-choice questions will address one or more of the learning objectives for the course. While a set may focus on one particular period of U.S. history, the individual questions within that set may ask students to make connections to thematically linked developments in other periods.

Multiple-choice questions will assess students’ ability to reason about the stimulus material **in tandem with** their knowledge of the historical issue at hand. The possible answers for a multiple-choice question will reflect the level of detail present in the required historical developments found in the concept outline for the course. Events and topics contained in the illustrative example boxes will **not** appear in multiple-choice questions (unless accompanied by text that fully explains that topic to the student).

Short-Answer Questions

Short-answer questions will directly address one or more of the thematic learning objectives for the course. At least two of the four questions will have elements of internal choice, providing opportunities for students to demonstrate what they know best. These questions will require students to use historical thinking skills to respond to a primary source, a historian’s argument, secondary sources such as data or maps, or general propositions about U.S. history. Each question will ask students to identify and analyze examples of historical evidence relevant to the source or question; these examples can be drawn from the concept outline or from other examples explored in-depth in classroom instruction.

Document-Based Question

The document-based question emphasizes the ability to analyze and synthesize historical data and assess verbal, quantitative, or visual materials as historical evidence. As with the long essay, the document-based question will be judged on students’ ability to formulate a thesis and support it with relevant evidence. The documents included on the document-based question are not confined to a single format, may vary in length, and are chosen to illustrate interactions and complexities within the material. Where suitable, the question material will include charts, graphs, cartoons, and pictures, as well as written materials. In addition to calling upon a broad spectrum of historical skills, the diversity of materials will allow students to assess the value of different sorts of documents. The document-based question will typically require students to relate the documents to a historical period or theme and, thus, to focus on major periods and issues. For this reason, outside knowledge beyond the specific focus of the question is important and must be incorporated into the student’s essay to earn the highest scores.

Long-Essay Question

To provide opportunities for students to demonstrate what they know best, they will be given a choice between two comparable long-essay options. The long-essay questions will measure the use of historical thinking skills to explain and analyze significant issues in U.S. history as defined by the thematic learning objectives. Student essays will require the development of a thesis or argument supported by an analysis of specific, relevant historical evidence. Questions will be limited to topics or examples specifically mentioned in the concept outline, but framed to allow student answers to include in-depth examples of large-scale phenomena, either drawn from the concept outline or from topics discussed in the classroom.

Period	Date Range	Approximate Percentage of ...	
		Instructional Time	AP Exam
1	1491–1607	5%	5%
2	1607–1754	10%	45%
3	1754–1800	12%	
4	1800–1848	10%	
5	1844–1877	13%	
6	1865–1898	13%	45%
7	1890–1945	17%	
8	1945–1980	15%	
9	1980–present	5%	5%

Timing:

PART I:	
Multiple Choice	55 Minutes
Short Answer	50 Minutes
Break	10 Minutes
PART II:	
FRQ Section	1 Hour, 30 Minutes
Reading & Prep.	15 Minutes
Writing	1 Hour, 15 Minutes
Total Time	3 Hours, 25 Minutes