

AP World History - Overview

What exactly *is* AP World History? Let's start with how the course is created.

Like all AP courses, APWH is created by the College Board, a not-for-profit organization that also creates the SAT. Each AP course is designed by a Test Development Committee of high school teachers and college professors experienced in teaching this course. (I served on this committee from 2008-10.) This Test Development Committee also designs the Exam given each year. Approximately 250,000 students took this exam in May, 2014.

Philosophy of AP World History

If you were going to design a world history course, how would you decide what is “important enough” to include in the course? Would you pick a set of important names, dates, and events, or concentrate more on trends that affect the greatest number of people? As the Test Development Committee says,

“The purpose of the AP World History course is to develop greater understanding of the evolution of global processes and contacts, in interaction with different types of human societies. This understanding is achieved through a combination of selective factual knowledge and appropriate analytical skills.”¹

Note that APWH stresses *both* “selective factual knowledge” and “appropriate analytical skills.” Why not just one or the other? Factual knowledge alone would create a course that is little more than rote memorization of facts, without necessarily any real understanding or interpretation of those facts. Given that AP courses should be the same difficulty as a college-level course, AP students are required to demonstrate college-level thinking skills. Only when you combine the “selective factual knowledge” and the “appropriate analytical skills” do you have the necessary ingredients for an AP course. So, history is part fact and part interpretation. Memorizing individual facts, names, dates, etc. is relatively easy. Learning to *interpret* facts, especially how multiple facts all interact together, is much more difficult. The Test Development Committee calls these interpretation skills “Historical Thinking Skills.”

Historical Thinking Skills, or “Why should I study world history?”

The Historical Thinking Skills are the *real* purpose for any AP course. The *content* is obviously important to the course itself, but the *skills* you will learn will be transferable to other situations throughout your whole life. So if you're wondering, “When will we ever need to know/use this?” The answer is “Probably rarely. But you'll need to be able to *do* what this course is asking you to *do* every day of the rest of your life.”

Every reading, assignment, essay, etc. should develop one or more of these skills.

¹ AP World History 2006-07 Course Description, p. 3.

| Historical Thinking Skills | |
|---|--|
| Name of Skill | Description |
| (Prerequisite) Content Knowledge | Deep knowledge of a great deal of information— names, chronology, facts, events, trends, patterns, etc. |
| 1 Crafting Historical Arguments From Historical Evidence | |
| Historical argumentation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make an argument that is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Based on evidence, including both pro- & con- evidence ◦ Has a Clear Thesis • Evaluate other peoples' arguments |
| Appropriate use of relevant evidence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use evidence to support arguments. • Understand the context & limitations of evidence |
| 2 Chronological Reasoning | |
| Historical Causation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship between causes & effects: Short-term vs. Long-term • Difference among Causation, Coincidence & Correlation |
| Patterns of Continuity & Change Over Time | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize, analyze & evaluate patterns of change/continuity • Relate patterns to larger historical processes/themes. |
| Periodization | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construct models of historical periodization • Realize that the choice of specific dates is subjective • Periodization changes a historical narrative. • Historians themselves are subjective & fallible |
| 3 Comparison and Contextualization | |
| Comparison | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compare multiple historical developments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Within one society, ◦ Between different societies ◦ In different time periods or places • Compare multiple perspectives on one topic. |
| Contextualization | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect broad, global developments to specific time and place (“zoom in”) • Connect local developments to broader global processes. (“zoom out”) |
| 4. Historical Interpretation and Synthesis | |
| Interpretation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate others' interpretations of history. • Consider evidence, reasoning, contexts, points of view, frames of reference. |
| Synthesis | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply all of the Historical Thinking Skills • Draw on ideas from different fields or disciplines • Creatively fusing disparate, and perhaps contradictory evidence • Apply insights to other historical contexts or circumstances, including the present. |

Themes, or “How does AP categorize historical topics?”

The Historical Thinking Skills answer the question of “How should world history be studied?” Another crucial question is, “How can I possibly remember all the ‘stuff’ I’ll learn?” Rather than try to create and memorize a boring list of 1,000 individual facts, APWH defines categories, called “Themes” that help you see the patterns referred to by the Historical Thinking Skills. Each of these themes are equally important, that is, they will be tested equally on the exam.

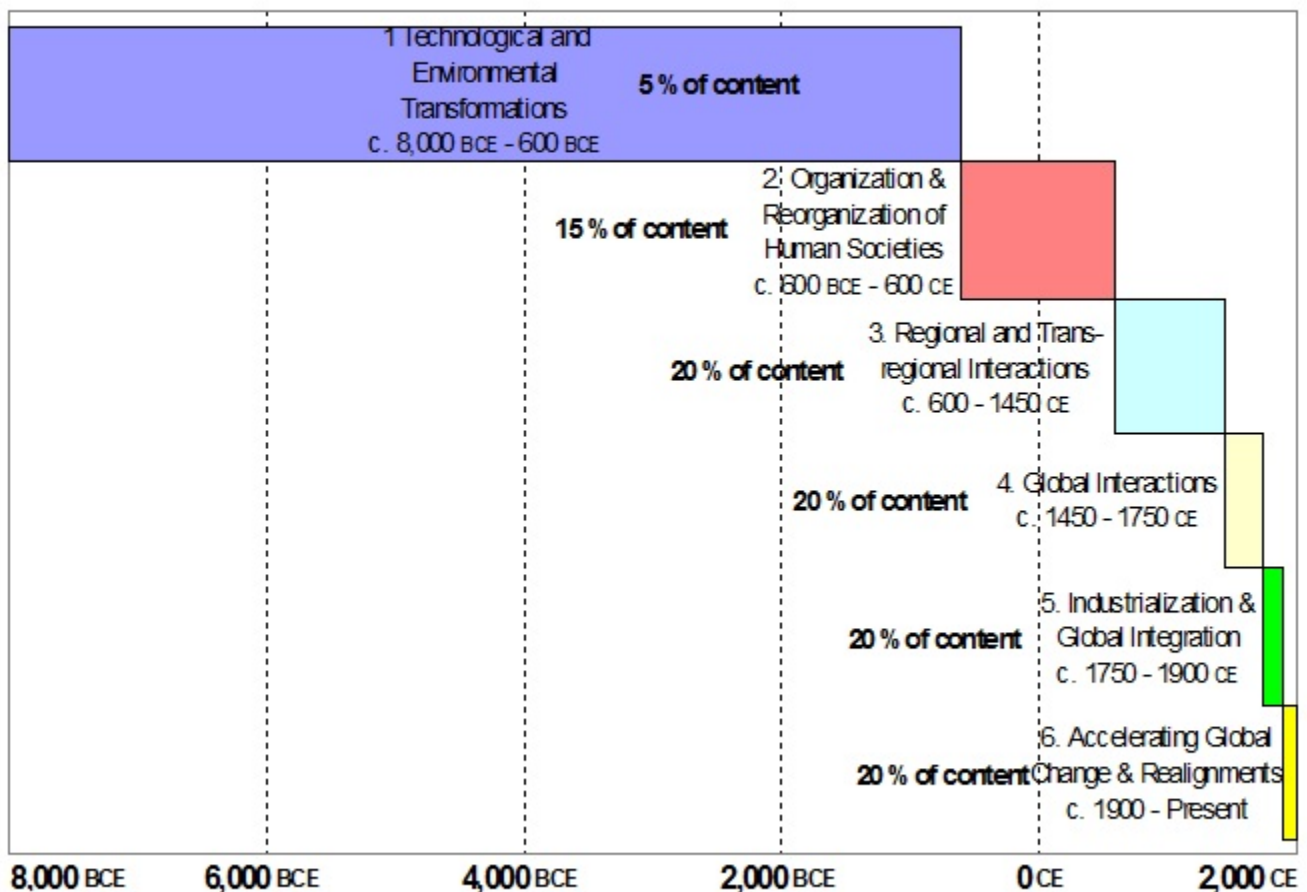
| Themes | | |
|--------|--|---|
| # | Official Description | Simplified Paraphrase <i>and typical questions this theme asks</i> |
| 1 | Interaction between humans & the environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demography and disease • Migration • Patterns of settlement • Technology | Human-Environment Interaction <i>How do humans deal with disease?</i> <i>Where do humans live, and why do they live there instead of somewhere else?</i> <i>How do humans use technology to help them live?</i> |
| 2 | Development and interaction of cultures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Religions • Belief systems, philosophies, ideologies • Science and technology • The arts and architecture | Cultures <i>How do humans develop religion?</i> <i>How do different societies use technology in relation to other societies?</i> <i>How do humans express themselves artistically?</i> |
| 3 | State-building, expansion, and conflict <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political structures, forms of governance • Empires • Nations and nationalism • Revolts and revolution • Regional, transregional, and global structures and organizations | Politics <i>How do humans establish order, govern themselves, and create political “units?”</i> <i>How do political units expand, and what happens when conflict arises?</i> <i>What are the different types of political units around the world?</i> |
| 4 | Creation, expansion, and interaction of economic systems <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agricultural and pastoral production • Trade and commerce • Labor Systems • Industrialization • Capitalism and socialism | Economic Systems <i>How do humans create and manage resources to improve their quality of life?</i> <i>How do humans organize their work to maximize their efforts?</i> |
| 5 | Development & transformation of social structures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender roles and relations • Family and kinship • Racial and ethnic constructions • Social and economic classes | Social Structures <i>How do men and women share the work?</i> <i>How is the family structured, and what role does family play in everyday life?</i> <i>How does this society think of race and/or ethnicity?</i> <i>What are the differences between high- and low-ranking members of society?</i> |

Periodization, the “When”

Learning and remembering all relevant info in world history can seem a daunting task. One way to help make the task easier is to organize all historical content into different chronological eras, called “periods.” The process of organizing is thus called “periodization.” (Yes, that’s a real verb.) APWH divides history into six different periods, with each period being equally emphasized in the course.

Many students feel that they must memorize the dates of all historical events. While you do NOT have to memorize the exact date of every event in world history, you should have an approximate idea of most historical events. The definition of “approximate” varies by era, but you should definitely be able to place each event into the correct period. For ancient events aim to place events in the correct century. The closer one gets to the present, the more precise you should aim for. For the 20th century, you should strive to place events in the correct year.

AP World History Periodization



Geography, the “Where”

Students must know some basic geography in order to answer questions. Both multiple choice and essay questions will require knowledge of geographic continents, concepts and world regions. There is no such thing as a comprehensive “list” of *every* world region, but experience has shown that too many students misidentify too much of the world. (e.g. they write embarrassing things like, “the country of Africa,” or “Indonesia is in central Asia.”) AP World History therefore identifies the most commonly *mis-identified* regions.



World Regions

Note: You are welcome to disagree with APWH’s definitions/labeling of these continents/regions, but in this course these are *the only acceptable* definitions. (e.g. South Asia includes India but not Thailand, no matter what other sources tell you.)

Key Concepts: or “What ‘stuff’ (content) do I need to learn?”

Studying history is a perpetually humbling experience. No matter how much you learn, there’s always far more to learn. Since there’s no way to “learn everything,” AP has chosen 19 important developments that historians consider to be *the* “most important” in world history. AP’s name for these developments is “Key Concepts.” Note that the term is “concept,” not “events,” “dates,” or “names.” There are many examples of each Key Concept in history. AP World History requires students to learn at least one example of each Key Concept, but *not every* example. (Phew!) You’ll learn the precise details re: the Key Concepts later, but for now just rest assured that by the time you’ve finished this course you will have learned both the “big picture” of world history and many examples of that “big picture.”

This may not make much sense until you actually see a multiple choice question and how it requires knowledge of a Key Concept, regardless of which example(s) you learned. See the “Multiple Choice Section” on p. 7 for more.

The Exam

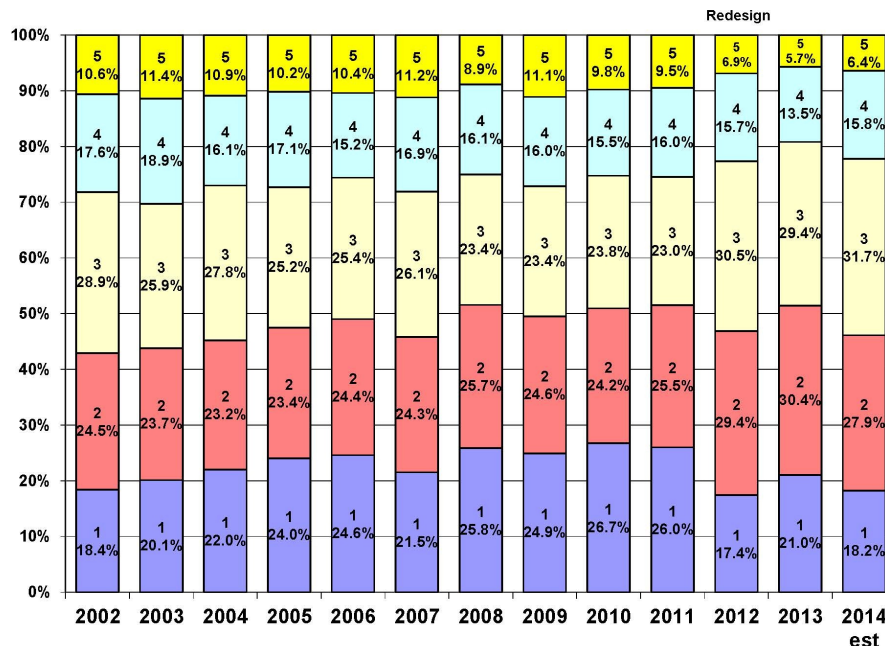
The APWH exam is divided into two major sections: the Multiple Choice, & Free Response (Essays).

| Section | Multiple Choice | Free Response (Essay) Section | | |
|----------------|---------------------------|--|---|---------------------------------------|
| Weight | 50% of Exam | 50% of Exam | | |
| # of Questions | 70 | 16.67% of Exam | 16.67% of Exam | 16.67% of Exam |
| Time Allowed | 55 minutes | 10 minute mandatory reading & essay planning period, then 120 self-budgeted minutes to write all 3 essays. | | |
| Suggested Pace | ~ 45 seconds per question | EBQ (Evidence Based Question) | CCOT (Continuity & Change Over Time) | Comparative (Compare and Contrast) |
| | | 40-45 minutes | 35-40 minutes | 35-40 minutes |

5-10 minute break

In the end, the multiple choice and essay section scores are added up to a Final Score of 1-2-3-4-5. (5 = Extremely Well Qualified, 4 = Well Qualified, 3 = Qualified, 2 = Possibly Qualified, 1 = No Recommendation) Many colleges and universities award credit, advanced placement, and/or preference in admissions for AP scores, although each college/university sets their own policy re: the specifics.²

AP World History Score Distribution



² Go to <http://collegesearch.collegeboard.com/apcreditpolicy/index.jsp> to see the AP policy of a particular college or university.

The Multiple Choice Section

APWH multiple choice questions are more difficult than the typical questions you're used to.

| "Regular" Question | AP-level Question |
|---|---|
| <p>1. When was World War I?</p> <p>(A) 1903-1912 (B) 1912-1919 (C) 1914-1918 (D) 1914-1922</p> <p>Correct answer: (C)</p> | <p>1. Which of the following accurately compares the motives for fighting World War I and World War II?</p> <p>(A) Imperialism was a major motive in World War I but not in World War II, as most colonial empires had already emancipated their colonial possessions.</p> <p>(B) In World War II the armies were more focused on killing the enemy's uniformed army than civilian population, resulting in fewer non-combatant casualties than in World War I.</p> <p>(C) The desire to develop new military technologies was a major factor in World War I, but played only a minor role in World War II.</p> <p>(D) In World War II racist attitudes played a major role, while in World War I nationalism was a bigger motivation.</p> <p>Correct Answer: (D)³</p> |

Note several differences between these two examples:

1. AP questions are much more difficult than what you're used to. In order to answer a question like this you'd need to possess both substantial factual knowledge and a nuanced awareness of subtle trends spanning multiple chapters in the textbook. (In other words, this is an example of exactly what the "Historical Thinking Skills" are meant to make you to do!) You can't "memorize" the answer to most AP-style questions because the answer is often a complex *set* of facts and trends scattered over 30-50 pages in your textbook, not just a simple, single fact or date. "The answer" to a multiple choice question will not be on a specific page in the textbook. Memorizing hundreds of "flash cards" won't help you much, if at all.
 - a. **Result #1:** You will need to develop entirely new, deeper and more substantial study habits than you've used in previous courses.
 - b. **Result #2:** You must do the reading assignments and class activities. You will not be able to "fake" any lack of knowledge by just "being smart" and "guessing well." Each year I ask my AP students to give some advice to the next year's students. Guess what the overwhelming #1 piece of advice is: Do the Reading!
2. AP answers are much longer and more complex. By the time you finish reading the last answer you may find it difficult to remember the question!

³ Don't feel bad if you answered incorrectly. 😊

The Free Response (Essay) Section

There are three essay questions. (officially called “Free Response” Questions) They are the

- Evidence Based Question (EBQ)
- Continuity & Change Over Time (CCOT), and
- Comparative (sometimes called the “Compare and Contrast”)

Each question requires you to demonstrate different skills and knowledge, and each is graded on a different rubric. You should familiarize yourself thoroughly with the rubrics used to grade each of these essays. Here’s just a quick summary to give you an overview of what to expect.

The Evidence Based Question (EBQ)

The purpose of the EBQ is to test students’ ability to *do* what professional historians actually do: use and interpret historical evidence/information to make conclusions based on that evidence. It is NOT a test of students’ *knowledge* (you’re not expected to know anything about the topic before the exam) but rather at test of students *skills* to perform a variety of analytical tasks.

The Continuity and Change Over Time Question (CCOT)

Fundamentally, every piece of historical information can be sorted into “that which changed” and “that which stayed the same” categories. The CCOT question requires students to analyze both changes and continuities two ways: chronologically (e.g. 1450-1750 C.E.) and geographically. (situate events in one region to events on a larger, global scale during the same time period) This essay has traditionally been the most difficult for students because it requires students to not only “know” individual historical facts, but be able to “place” each fact/trend into the correct chronological and geographical category in the context of *other* facts and trends. Additionally, the CCOT asks students to analyze *why* certain changes and/or continuities occurred.

The Comparative Question

The comparative question is one with which most students are familiar. Questions often choose different geographical regions and ask students to analyze two or more characteristics from those regions. Like the CCOT, the Comparative question also asks students to analyze *why* certain similarities and/or differences exist between the two regions.

Each Essay Question is graded according to a separate rubric. The maximum score for each essay is 9, but most students score well below that. (Nationally, the average essay score is ~2.5.)

One Last Comment

I think the most valuable aspect of this course is that you will have a ton of fun while you work your tail off learning a lot about the history of the world, all of which enables you to become a better, more mature and educated citizen capable of making intelligent and thoughtful decisions.