

AP Historical Thinking Skills

Effective Fall 2015



I. Historical Thinking Skills

The AP history courses seek to apprentice students to the practice of history by explicitly stressing the development of historical thinking skills while learning historical content. Students best develop historical thinking skills by investigating the past in ways that reflect the discipline of history, most particularly through the exploration and interpretation of a rich array of primary sources and secondary texts and through the regular development of historical argumentation in writing.

This section presents the historical thinking skills that students should develop in all AP history courses. The nine historical thinking skills are grouped into four categories: Analyzing Sources and Evidence, Making Historical Connections, Chronological Reasoning, and Creating and Supporting a Historical Argument. The first table describes how each skill demonstrates historical thinking from the perspective of a history practitioner. The second table lists the proficiency expectations for each of the nine historical thinking skills. **Every AP Exam question will assess one or more of the skill-based proficiency expectations as well as one or more of the thematic learning objectives.**

Historical Thinking Skill Categories

Analyzing Historical Sources and Evidence		Making Historical Connections	Chronological Reasoning	Creating and Supporting a Historical Argument
Primary Sources	Secondary Sources			

Historical Thinking Skill Descriptions

Analyzing Evidence: Content and Sourcing

Historical thinking involves the ability to describe, select, and evaluate relevant evidence about the past from diverse sources (including written documents, works of art, archaeological artifacts, oral traditions, and other primary sources) and draw conclusions about their relevance to different historical issues.

A historical analysis of sources focuses on the interplay between the content of a source and the authorship, point of view, purpose, audience, and format or medium of that source, assessing the usefulness, reliability, and limitations of the source as historical evidence.

Interpretation

Historical thinking involves the ability to describe, analyze, and evaluate the different ways historians interpret the past. This includes understanding the various types of questions historians ask, as well as considering how the particular circumstances and contexts in which individual historians work and write shape their interpretations of past events and historical evidence.

Comparison

Historical thinking involves the ability to identify, compare, and evaluate multiple perspectives on a given historical event in order to draw conclusions about that event.

It also involves the ability to describe, compare, and evaluate multiple historical developments within one society, one or more developments across or between different societies, and in various chronological and geographical contexts.

Contextualization

Historical thinking involves the ability to connect historical events and processes to specific circumstances of time and place as well as broader regional, national, or global processes.

Synthesis

Historical thinking involves the ability to develop understanding of the past by making meaningful and persuasive historical and/or cross-disciplinary connections between a given historical issue and other historical contexts, periods, themes, or disciplines.

Causation

Historical thinking involves the ability to identify, analyze, and evaluate the relationships among historical causes and effects, distinguishing between those that are long term and proximate. Historical thinking also involves the ability to distinguish between causation and correlation, and an awareness of contingency, the way that historical events result from a complex variety of factors that come together in unpredictable ways and often have unanticipated consequences.

Patterns of Continuity and Change over Time

Historical thinking involves the ability to recognize, analyze, and evaluate the dynamics of historical continuity and change over periods of time of varying length, as well as the ability to relate these patterns to larger historical processes or themes.

Periodization

Historical thinking involves the ability to describe, analyze, and evaluate different ways that historians divide history into discrete and definable periods. Historians construct and debate different, sometimes competing models of periodization; the choice of specific turning points or starting and ending dates might accord a higher value to one narrative, region, or group than to another.

Argumentation

Historical thinking involves the ability to create an argument and support it using relevant historical evidence.

Creating a historical argument includes defining and framing a question about the past and then formulating a claim or argument about that question, often in the form of a thesis. A persuasive historical argument requires a precise and defensible thesis or claim, supported by rigorous analysis of relevant and diverse historical evidence. The argument and evidence used should be framed around the application of a specific historical thinking skill (e.g., comparison, causation, patterns of continuity and change over time, or periodization).

Furthermore, historical thinking involves the ability to examine multiple pieces of evidence in concert with each other, noting contradictions, corroborations, and other relationships among sources to develop and support an argument.

Historical Thinking Skill Proficiency Expectations

Analyzing Historical Sources and Evidence		Making Historical Connections	Chronological Reasoning	Creating and Supporting a Historical Argument
Primary Sources	Secondary Sources			

Proficient students should be able to.....

Analyzing Evidence: Content and Sourcing

A1—Explain the relevance of the author's point of view, author's purpose, audience, format or medium, and/or historical context as well as the interaction among these features, to demonstrate understanding of the significance of a primary source.

A2—Evaluate the usefulness, reliability, and/or limitations of a primary source in answering particular historical questions.

Interpretation

B1—Analyze a historian's argument, explain how the argument has been supported through the analysis of relevant historical evidence, and evaluate the argument's effectiveness.

B2—Analyze diverse historical interpretations.

Comparison

C1—Compare diverse perspectives represented in primary and secondary sources in order to draw conclusions about one or more historical events.

C2—Compare different historical individuals, events, developments, and/or processes, analyzing both similarities and differences in order to draw historically valid conclusions. Comparisons can be made across different time periods, across different geographical locations, and between different historical events or developments within the same time period and/or geographical location.

Contextualization

C3—Situate historical events, developments, or processes within the broader regional, national, or global context in which they occurred in order to draw conclusions about their relative significance.

Synthesis

C4—Make connections between a given historical issue and related developments in a different historical context, geographical area, period, or era, including the present.

C5—Make connections between different course themes and/or approaches to history (such as political, economic, social, cultural, or intellectual) for a given historical issue.

C6—Use insights from a different discipline or field of inquiry (such as economics, government, and politics, art history, anthropology) to better understand a given historical issue. *(Note: For European and World History only).*

Causation

D1—Explain long and /or short-term causes and/or effects of an historical event, development, or process.

D2—Evaluate the relative significance of different causes and/or effects on historical events or processes, distinguishing between causation and correlation and showing an awareness of historical contingency.

Patterns of Continuity and Change Over Time

D3—Identify patterns of continuity and change over time and explain the significance of such patterns.

D4—Explain how patterns of continuity and change over time relate to larger historical processes or themes.

Periodization

D5—Explain ways historical events and processes can be organized into discrete, different, and definable historical periods

D6—Evaluate whether a particular event or date could or could not be a turning point between different, definable historical periods, when considered in terms of particular historical evidence.

D7—Analyze different and/or competing models of periodization.

Argumentation

E1—Articulate a defensible claim about the past in the form of a clear and compelling thesis that evaluates the relative importance of multiple factors and recognizes disparate, diverse, or contradictory evidence or perspectives.

E2—Develop and support a historical argument, including in a written essay, through a close analysis of relevant and diverse historical evidence, framing the argument and evidence around the application of a specific historical thinking skill (*e.g., comparison, causation, patterns of continuity and change over time, or periodization*).

E3—Evaluate evidence to explain its relevance to a claim or thesis, providing clear and consistent links between the evidence and the argument.

E4—Relate diverse historical evidence in a cohesive way to illustrate contradiction, corroboration, qualification, and other types of historical relationships in developing an argument.