



# ACT Course Standards U.S. History

A set of empirically derived course standards is the heart of each QualityCore® social studies course. The ACT Course Standards represent a solid evidence-based foundation in social studies. They were developed from an intensive study of high-performing high schools with significant minority and low-income enrollments that produced many graduates who met or exceeded ACT College Readiness Benchmark Scores (See <http://www.act.org/path/policy/reports/success.html>).

This document contains a list of ACT Course Standards for a rigorous U.S. History course—what students should know and be able to do in the course—and a worksheet teachers can use to compare their course content to these standards. The ACT standards encompass the following overarching themes and/or foundational concepts:

- A. Exploring the Skills and Strategies Underlying U.S. History
- B. Building a Nation (Colonization—ca. 1877)
- C. Rebuilding a Nation (ca. 1877—ca. 1914)
- D. Challenges at Home and Abroad (ca. 1914—1945)
- E. America Since World War II (1945—Present)

## ACT Course Standards—U.S. History

A. Exploring the Skills and Strategies Underlying U.S. History	
1. Process Skills	
a.	Apply terms relevant to the content appropriately and accurately
b.	Identify and interpret different types of primary and secondary sources of fundamental importance and relevance to topical inquiry and understanding
c.	Interpret timelines of key historical events, people, and periods; locate significant historical places and events on maps
d.	Analyze the importance of context and point of view in historical interpretation (e.g., interpret past events and issues in historical context rather than in terms of present norms and values); recognize that historians interpret the same events differently due to personal values and societal norms
e.	Analyze and evaluate historical sources and interpretations (e.g., credibility, perspective, bias, and authenticity; verifiable or unverifiable; fact or interpretation)
f.	Utilize research strategies, methods, and sources to obtain, organize, and interpret historical data
g.	Compose arguments/position papers, and participate in debates on different interpretations of the same historical events; synthesize primary and secondary sources to justify position
h.	Compose an analytical, historical essay containing a thesis, supporting evidence, and a conclusion

i. Identify, analyze, and understand elements of historical cause and effect; recognize and understand patterns of change and continuity in history
j. Develop open-ended historical questions that can be addressed through historical research and interpretation
k. Analyze how the past influences the lives of individuals and the development of societies
<b>B. Building a Nation (Colonization—ca. 1877)</b>
<b>1. Colonization and Forging a New Nation</b>
a. Identify the reasons for colonization, evaluate its impacts, and analyze the success or failure of settlements in North America
b. Analyze religious development and its significance in colonial America (e.g., religious settlements, the Great Awakening)
c. Describe significant aspects of the variety of social structures of colonial America
d. Compare the economies of the various colonies, and analyze the development and impact of indentured servitude and African slavery in North America (e.g., social, political, and economic)
e. Explain the origins and development of colonial governments
f. Evaluate the influence of Enlightenment ideas on the development of American government as embodied in the Declaration of Independence
g. Identify and evaluate the ideas and events that contributed to the outbreak of the American Revolution, and determine the key turning points of the war
h. Identify the impetus for the Constitutional Convention (limitations of government under the Articles of Confederation), and analyze the events and outcomes of the Convention (i.e., the “bundle of compromises”)
i. Interpret the ideas and principles expressed in the U.S. Constitution
j. Explain the development of the Bill of Rights, and assess various debates of the day
k. Identify and evaluate the political and territorial changes resulting from westward expansion of the United States in the early nineteenth century
l. Analyze and evaluate federal and state policies toward American Indians in the first half of the nineteenth century
m. Evaluate, take, and defend positions on the development of U.S. foreign policy during the early nineteenth century (e.g., Embargo Act, Monroe Doctrine)
<b>2. Antebellum America</b>
a. Describe and evaluate the impacts of the First Industrial Revolution during the nineteenth century (e.g., the Lowell system, immigration, changing technologies, transportation innovations)
b. Identify and evaluate the major events and issues that promoted sectional conflicts and strained national cohesiveness in the antebellum period
c. Identify significant religious, philosophical, and social reform movements of the nineteenth century and their impact on American society
d. Identify the major characteristics of the abolition movement in the antebellum period, its achievements, failures, and Southern opposition to it
e. Analyze the women’s rights and the suffrage movements and the impact of women on other reform movements in the antebellum period
f. Compare and contrast the economic, social, and cultural differences of the North and South during the antebellum period

<b>3. Civil War and Reconstruction</b>
a. Identify and analyze the technological, social, and strategic aspects of the Civil War
b. Explain the influence of Abraham Lincoln's philosophy of the Union and his executive actions and leadership on the course of the Civil War
c. Describe the basic provisions and immediate impact of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution
d. Evaluate different Reconstruction plans and their social, economic, and political impact on the South and the rest of the United States
e. Analyze the immediate and long-term influences of Reconstruction on the lives of African Americans and U.S. society as a whole
<b>C. Rebuilding a Nation (ca. 1877–ca. 1914)</b>
<b>1. Industrialization and Urbanization</b>
a. Evaluate the impact of new inventions and technologies of the late nineteenth century
b. Identify and evaluate the influences on business and industry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries
c. Identify labor and workforce issues of the late nineteenth century, including perspectives of owners/managers and Social Darwinists
d. Explain the challenges and contributions of immigrants of the late nineteenth century
e. Explain the causes and impact of urbanization in the late nineteenth century
f. Compare and contrast the experiences of African Americans in various U.S. regions in the late nineteenth century
g. Identify and evaluate the influences on the development of the American West
h. Analyze significant events for Native American Indian tribes, and their responses to those events, in the late nineteenth century
<b>2. Increasing Influence and Challenges</b>
a. Identify and explain significant issues and components of the Populist movement and their impacts
b. Explain the origins and accomplishments of the Progressive movement
c. Analyze the efforts to achieve women's suffrage in the early twentieth century
d. Evaluate, take, and defend positions on the various U.S. foreign policies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries
e. Analyze the causes and consequences of the Spanish-American War
f. Identify and evaluate the factors that influenced U.S. imperialism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the ensuing debate over imperialism
<b>D. Challenges at Home and Abroad (ca. 1914–1945)</b>
<b>1. The United States in a Changing World</b>
a. Identify and analyze the causes and significant events of World War I and their impact; evaluate the impact of the Treaty of Versailles
b. Describe and evaluate the impact of scientific and technological innovations of the 1920s
c. Identify and evaluate the impact of new cultural movements on American society in the 1920s
d. Identify the characteristics of social conflict and social change that took place in the early 1920s
e. Identify and explain the economic factors that contributed to the stock market crash of 1929 and the Great Depression

f. Explain the economic, environmental, and social impact of the Great Depression on American society
g. Evaluate the impact of the New Deal on various elements of American society (e.g., social, political, environmental, economic)
<b>E. America Since World War II (1945–Present)</b>
<b>1. America at War</b>
a. Describe circumstances at home and abroad prior to U.S. involvement in World War II
b. Identify the significant military and political aspects of World War II
c. Analyze dimensions of the Holocaust and the Allies' response to the Holocaust and war crimes
d. Evaluate the social, political, and economic impacts of World War II on the home front
e. Identify and evaluate the scientific and technological developments in America during and after World War II
f. Analyze the social, cultural, and economic changes at the onset of the Cold War era
g. Analyze the origins of the Cold War, foreign policy developments, and major events of the administrations from Truman to present
h. Describe and evaluate the political and social impact of the Vietnam War
<b>2. Changes at Home</b>
a. Analyze major domestic issues and responses of the administrations from Truman to present
b. Evaluate the impact of innovations in technology and communication on American society
c. Identify the events and influential individuals of the civil rights, human rights, and counterculture movements and assess their impact
d. Evaluate the impact of changes in the national economy on contemporary American society
e. Identify the major contemporary social, environmental, and political issues (e.g., immigration, global warming, terrorism), the groups involved, and the controversies engendered by those issues
f. Assess increasing global interdependence, the potential for conflict, and the U.S. role in world events in the present and future

## ACT Course Standards Worksheet—U.S. History

This worksheet gives teachers an opportunity to compare their course content to ACT's QualityCore® program. Completing the worksheet also allows teachers who teach the same course to ensure their courses have similar outcomes.

### Gap Analysis 1—Individual Teacher Review

This analysis allows individual teachers to identify “gaps” between ACT Course Standards and their course content. They should review the ACT standards on the following worksheet, then determine whether the ACT standard **is** or **is not** included in the course as it is currently taught. “Included” means the standard is taught and students are expected to demonstrate proficiency by the end of the course. “Not Included” means the standard is not taught in the course, is taught in another course, or is already mastered. In the “Gap 1” column on the worksheet, place an “I” for “Included” or an “NI” for “Not Included.” Analyze any gaps between the current course standards and the ACT Course Standards. Identify reasons the standards receiving a “Not Included” designation are not included in the course.

### Gap Analysis 2—Group Consensus

This analysis allows groups of teachers who teach the same course and who have completed Gap Analysis 1 individually to identify differences in how they evaluated the gaps between ACT Course Standards and current course standards. In the “Gap 2” column of the worksheet, place an “X” where members of the group differed in their assessment of whether a particular ACT standard is included in the course as it is currently taught.

The following questions can guide discussion of the gaps:

#### Overarching Questions

1. What should students know and be able to do before going to the next course?
2. Do all teachers teaching this course have a shared understanding of the intent or meaning of each course standard and topic area?

#### Gap Analysis 1 Questions

1. Which ACT Course Standards were identified as not included in the course?
2. What is the level of agreement among the group of teachers about the skills and knowledge that is or is not taught in the course?
3. Are there sound pedagogical reasons for not including specific ACT standards in the course?
4. What implications will any decisions have on students' future learning and academic achievement?

#### Gap Analysis 2 Questions

1. Which of the ACT Course Standards elicited differences of opinion?
2. What are the possible reasons for different opinions about the standards that are or are not included in the course?
3. Are there sound pedagogical reasons for including or not including these disputed standards in the course?
4. What implications will any decisions have on students' future learning and academic achievement?

Finally, document the necessary steps to address the outcomes of the discussion. Be sure to note whether course standards will be added, deleted, or modified; identify who will be responsible for communicating any changes to other teachers; and note any other decisions. Document responsibilities and establish a timetable for continuing the discussion and implementing the decisions.

NOTE: This course content review is most effective as a continuous process that generates feedback throughout the year. ACT recommends, at minimum, monthly status update meetings for teachers and departments involved in the review.

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