

How to Prepare for the European History A.P. Exam Tips From the *Princeton Review*

Pacing

A big part of scoring well on the exam is working at a consistent pace. Don't spend too long on a single question. Tests are like marathons, and you do your best on them when you work through them at a steady pace. You can always come back to a question you don't know. All multiple choice questions are worth the same value towards your final score, all the questions on a test are of equal value, no one question is that important. You should always skip questions that give you trouble until you have answered every question that you know the answer to.

In the Final Week Before the Exam

- **Maintain your usual routine**
- **Do a general history review.** Focus on "big picture" issues, such as political, social, and economic trends.
- **Read all directions for the exam.** Know what you are supposed to do on each section of the test long before test day.

On the Test Day...

- **Start with a reasonable but not huge breakfast.**
- **Bring everything you need --** 2 or more number 2 pencils, an eraser, a dark blue or black pen, a watch, not one that beeps.
- **Wear comfortable clothing.**
- **Bring a snack.**

The College Board provides a breakdown of the exam's questions by era and by general subject matter. This breakdown will not appear in your test booklet. It comes from the preparatory material The College Board publishes. Here it is:

Breakdown by Era

<i>Era</i>	<i>Percent of questions</i>	<i>Number of Questions</i>
1450-1815	50	40
1815-present	50	40

Breakdown by General Subject

<i>Subject</i>	<i>Percent of Questions</i>	<i>Number of Questions</i>
Political and diplomatic themes	35-40	28-32
Cultural and intellectual themes	20-30	16-24
Social and economic themes	30-40	24-32

As you can see, the test seeks to achieve a measure of balance between the period from the Renaissance to Napoleon and the period after 1815. Also, while there is a bit of a bias toward the political/diplomatic history, you will see questions on social and diplomatic trends as well as on intellectual and artistic themes. Remember this as you study.

Chronological Order and the Order of Difficulty

The writers of the AP European History exam organize the multiple-choice section in a predictable way. Here are the things you can count on:

- Questions will be organized in groups of 4-7. Each group will be presented in roughly chronological order. The first question in a group may ask about the Renaissance and Reformation; the second, about the Industrial Revolution and its effects on society; the third, about the French Revolution and Napoleon, and so on. You will notice a sharp break in chronology when you move from one group of questions to the next. When you see a question about the Brezhnev Doctrine followed by a question on Renaissance humanism, for example, you will now that you have moved on to a new grouping.
- Each group of questions will be a little bit more difficult than the group that preceded it. The questions generally go in order of difficulty with the easiest questions appearing at the beginning of the multiple-choice test and the most difficult questions appearing at the end. Think of the first 20 questions as easy, questions 21-60 as being medium and 61-80 as difficult.

Remember that easy questions have easy answers. Do not choose an obscure or trivial answer for an easy question. Remember also that all questions are worth an equal amount toward your final score. It is important that you go slowly enough in the beginning so that you don't make careless mistakes on easier questions.

Summary

- Use the process of elimination on all but the easiest questions. Once you have worked on a question, eliminated some answers, and convinced yourself that you cannot eliminate any other incorrect answers, you should guess and move on the next question.
- Use common sense. Look for context clues.

ESSAY SECTION

Reasons to be Cheerful

AP graders know that you are only given 15 minutes to prepare, 45 minutes to write a DBQ, and only 70 minutes to write both your thematic questions. They also know that is not enough time to cover the subject matter tested by the question. The College Board's *Advanced placement course description: History* states:

“Answers to standard essay questions will be judged on the strength of the thesis developed, the quality of the historical argument, and the evidence offered in support of the thesis, *rather than factual information per se*. Unless a question asks otherwise, *students will not be penalized for one or another specific illustration [emphasis added]*.”

In other words, expressing good ideas and presenting valid evidence in support of those ideas are important. Making sure you mention every single relevant piece of historical information is not so important.

Things That Make Any Essay Better

First plan what you are going to write before you start writing!

Before You Start Writing

READ THE QUESTION CAREFULLY! Then, brainstorm for one or two minutes. In your test booklet, write down everything that comes to mind about the subject. Look at your notes and consider the results of your brainstorming as you decide what point you will argue in your essay; that argument is going to be your thesis. Tailor your argument to your information, but by no means choose an argument that you know is wrong or that you disagree with. Finally sort the results of the brainstorm. Some of what you write down will be “big picture” conclusions, and some will be historical facts that can be used as evidence to support you conclusions.

Next, make an outline. You should plan to write five paragraphs on the DBQ. Your first paragraph should contain your thesis statement. Your second, third and fourth paragraphs should contain three arguments to support your thesis, along with historical evidence to back those arguments. The fifth paragraph should contain your conclusion and will be where you specifically answer the question.

Before you start to write your outline, you will have to decide what type of argument you are going to make. Here are some of the classics:

Three Good Points

This is the simplest strategy. Look at the results of your brainstorming session, and pick the three best points and make these points the subject of one paragraph. Save the strongest point for the fourth paragraph. **Use specific supporting examples** whenever possible. Your first paragraph should state what you intend to argue; your final paragraph should explain why you have proven what you set out to prove.

The Chronological Argument

Many questions lend themselves to a chronological treatment. When you make a chronological argument, look for important transitions and use them to start new paragraphs.

Similarities and Differences

Some questions, particularly on thematic question section, ask you to compare events, issues, and or policies. This question requires you to start by setting the historical scene prior to the events/ issues/ policies you are about to discuss. Continue by devoting one paragraph to each of three and conclude by comparing and contrasting the relative importance of each. Again, be sure to answer your question in the final paragraph.

The Straw Dog Argument

No matter which format you choose, remember to organize your essay so that the first paragraph addresses the question and states how you are going to answer it. The second, third, and fourth paragraph should each be organized around a single arguments that supports your thesis, **and each of thesis arguments must be supported by historical evidence**. Your final paragraph then ties the essay up into a nice, neat package. Your concluding paragraph should also answer the question.

As You Are Writing, Observe The Following Guidelines

- Keep sentences as simple as possible.
- Remember that good writing does not have to be complicated; some great ideas can be stated simply. NEVER use a word if you are unsure of its meaning or proper usage.
- Write clearly and neatly. When you cross out, do it neatly. If you are making any major edits -- if you want to insert a paragraph in the middle of your essay, for example -- make sure you indicate this clearly.
- **Define your terms.** When you use them, define them. Take particular care to define any such terms that appear in the question. Be sure to define any term that you suspect can be defined in more than one way.
- Stick to your outline. Unless you get an absolutely brilliant idea while you are writing, do not deviate from your outline.
- Try to prove one "big picture" idea per paragraph. Keep it simple. Each paragraph should make one point and then substantiate that point with historical evidence.
- **Back up your ideas with evidence.** Do not just throw ideas out there and hope that you are right.
- Try to fill the essay form. An overly short essay will hurt you more than one that is overly long.
- Make sure your first and last paragraphs directly address the question.