
APUSH does not test definitions directly, but every essay rubric rewards precise use of the historical reasoning vocabulary – and the terms below are the ones students use loosely and lose points on.

Historical reasoning

Causation – an argument that one development produced another, which requires a stated mechanism rather than mere sequence

Continuity and change over time – a reasoning process asking what persisted as well as what altered across a period; an essay that names only change answers half the prompt

Comparison – an argument about similarity AND difference between developments, with the basis of comparison made explicit

Contextualisation – situating an argument in the broader historical circumstances that preceded or surrounded it – a separate rubric point from the thesis

Periodisation – the choice of dates bounding a period, and the argument that those turning points are the significant ones

Historiography – the study of how historians' interpretations of an event have themselves changed

Sourcing a document

Point of view – the perspective an author's position gives them, and how that shapes what the document can be evidence FOR

Purpose – what the author intended the document to accomplish, which usually explains its selection and emphasis

Audience – who the document was made for, which constrains what the author could say and how

Historical situation – the circumstances at the moment of creation that bear on the document's content

Recurring concepts

Republicanism – the ideology holding that legitimate government rests on the consent of a virtuous citizenry rather than on inherited authority

Federalism – the division of sovereignty between a national government and the states, and the recurring dispute over where the line falls

Judicial review – the power of courts to declare a law unconstitutional, established in practice by *Marbury v. Madison* (1803)

Manifest Destiny – the mid-nineteenth-century belief that the United States was destined to expand across the continent, used to justify acquisition and removal

Sectionalism – loyalty to the interests of a region above those of the nation, the organising force of antebellum politics

- Nativism** – hostility to immigrants and a preference for the established population, recurring in the 1850s, 1920s and later
- Progressivism** – the early-twentieth-century reform movement seeking to use government expertise to correct the effects of industrialisation
- Containment** – the Cold War strategy of preventing the spread of Soviet influence rather than attempting to reverse it