

DIFFERENT SOLUTIONS TO APUSH® CHALLENGES

For six years now, AP® U.S. History (APUSH®) teachers have taught a course that focuses less on breadth of content and more on depth of understanding and implementation of historical thinking and writing skills. This shift from rote memorization creates unique challenges for students taking this course. In addition to the sheer volume of information they must learn, many students are being exposed to historical interpretation and analysis for the first time. Helping students through these challenges can be complicated and intimidating for teachers.

Recognizing this, veteran AP® teachers **Jason Stacy** and **Matt Ellington** endeavor to address the three most common challenges APUSH® students face. As current (Ellington) and former (Stacy) APUSH® teachers, these educators bring their experience to addressing teacher and student struggles in the course. Each have also worked with College Board as exam readers and in related capacities, which gives them a deeper understanding of the expectations for the exam.

Challenge #1 Processing a large amount of information

There is a lot of history to cover in the APUSH® course. Students often struggle to connect specific historical information to broader historical developments and trends simply because they suffer from information overload. Furthermore, the amount of time that can elapse between learning something new and having to apply it in an AP® exam-type atmosphere can be difficult for students. What's covered at the start of the course is typically not revisited until students see a related question in a teacher's exam prep or on the exam itself. This can cause disconnect because, again, there's so much history covered in the course.

Solution: Integrate, digest, apply

Stacy and Ellington have discovered a few simple strategies to help without cutting back the valuable information taught in the course.

1. Integrate new content into pre-existing knowledge.
2. Break new information down into digestible chunks.
3. Require students to apply what they learn immediately.

Combining new information with what students have already learned gives them a foundation in which to access the new content. Applying new information to pre-existing knowledge is known to deepen understanding and aid in content acquisition. Furthermore, students can understand information more quickly when new material is broken down into smaller segments. This way, students are less likely to get lost in the bulk of information, and they can easily focus and retain greater detail. Then, by immediately applying these small bits of information in a specific activity, the student develops even more context.

Challenge #2 Mastering a new set of skills and reasoning processes

Evaluating history requires a different set of skills than most students have developed, or at the very least, are accustomed to applying. Past history courses most likely taught memorization and identification as the key skills to success, but in APUSH®, students must learn to “do history.” This requires thinking critically to analyze documents, events, and movements in a variety of ways. Students must demonstrate these skills through an argumentative approach, using evidence to support their claims. For many, this is a brand new approach to the content, which can make it harder for students to connect their developing skills and processes to history specifically.

Solution: Practice toward perfection

According to Stacy and Ellington, these new processes and skills become familiar through practice. The more students can apply these newly-acquired abilities, the better they become. So practicing early and often is ideal. The AP® veterans suggest an incremental approach to allow students to build arguments and interpretations step-by-step. Blending and integrating the art of “doing history” with the new content being learned is the best way to ensure students are grasping both halves of the AP® course.

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Challenge #3 Putting it all together

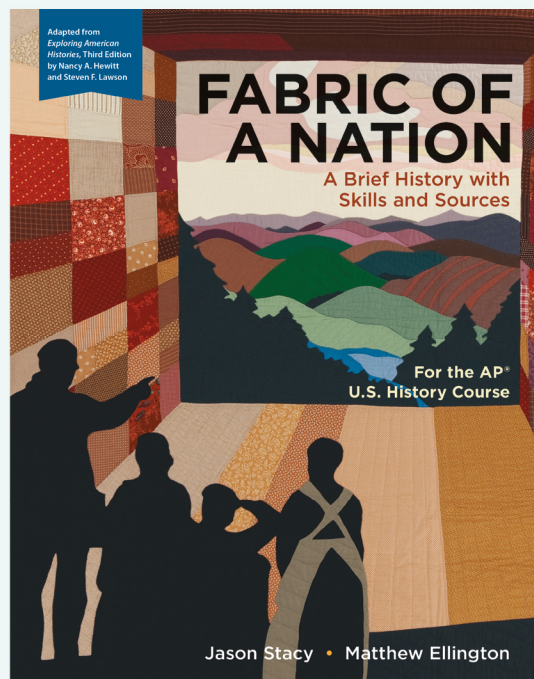
The last essential challenge for students in the APUSH® course is merging everything they learn. Demonstrating knowledge of historical information while also mastering the necessary reasoning processes and historical thinking skills is no easy feat. As students overcome the first two challenges, however, they grow more comfortable exhibiting the kind of analytical skills that professional historians use when practicing their craft.

Solution: Repetition with free-response prompts

The section of the exam where students become the most anxious is free response. Writing prompts for short-answer, long-essay, and document-based questions call on students to use everything they've learned in the course without much guidance. Stacy and Ellington find that guided practice along with a slow ramp-up to tackling writing prompts is the most successful strategy. Segmenting skills alongside the content also helps. As students are learning information in smaller chunks, they can practice skills in the same way, before being called upon to put it all together. Students also benefit from seeing a lot of examples and having opportunities to repeat what they know.

These essential challenges of the AP® U.S. History course don't have to remain pain points for teachers and students. With the right resources and tested strategies, students can easily prepare for the AP® Exam and head into the test with greater confidence.

A REVOLUTIONARY TOOL INTEGRATED HISTORICAL CONTENT AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT



Recently published by BFW Publishers, Stacy and Ellington's **Fabric of a Nation** tackles these primary challenges within the APUSH® course. This textbook is unique because it effectively unites historical content, with required skills, and scaffolded practice.

The **modular organization segments information into smaller chunks** rather than traditional textbook chapters. Students can more easily digest information, and teachers can more easily pace the course.

Primary sources are also integrated at point-of-use to give students a chance to apply what they're learning as they practice interpreting history. Additional models and practice are introduced immediately but gradually as new skills are developed.

Explicit instructions on free-response exam questions are given, starting with short-answer and moving into long-essay and document-based questions. The authors also help students break down writing prompts to better understand what's being asked.

To learn more, visit
<https://go.bfwpub.com/fabric-difference>