



GED Study Guide

SOCIAL STUDIES

What you need to know about the GED® Social Studies Test

- 1** You should be familiar with basic social studies concepts, but you're not expected to have in-depth knowledge of each topic.
Remember, the social studies test is not a memorization test! You don't need to know the capitals of countries or the timeframes that certain wars occurred.
- 2** You'll need to understand social studies concepts, use logic and reasoning, and draw conclusions (which is using your critical thinking skills in social studies).
This study guide and the example questions in it will help you get an idea of what's going to be on the test.
- 3** You don't need to know everything in this guide!
If you want to see how close you are to passing, the GED Ready® official practice test is a great way to help you determine if you're ready.

Test Overview

**Topics**

Reading and Writing in Social Studies
Applying Social Studies Concepts
Applying Mathematical Reasoning in Social Studies

**Time (to take the test)**

70 minutes
No breaks

**Format**

Calculator allowed
Access to calculator reference sheet
Multiple choice and other question types (drag and drop, fill in the blank, hot spot, and drop down)

What you'll be tested on

The GED test will measure your strength in the skills below. Click on a skill to learn more about it.

Reading and Writing in Social Studies



1 Main ideas and details in social studies readings

You'll be presented with social studies passages and be asked to:

- Determine the main ideas
- Use details to make inferences or claims

Social studies passages often make particular claims about a topic and then provide details that the author uses to support the assertions made.

Social studies readings may be from a primary source (created by someone with firsthand knowledge of an event) or a secondary source (created by someone at a later time who did not have firsthand knowledge of the event). Sometimes these documents are complex or written in an "old-fashioned" style, and it takes skill to read and understand what the main point or points of the reading are - which might not be obvious to you on the first read.

For example, a reading about American History might argue that the cause of the American Revolution was the unfair taxation of the American colonies. The reading might then provide details or examples of unfair taxation that support the author's position.

Or, you might read an excerpt of a letter written by a soldier during the U.S. Civil War. This primary source document explains the perspective of that individual and what he was doing or experiencing at the time. As a reader, your task might be to explain or summarize the main points or theme of what the soldier was trying to communicate.

Example Questions

Main ideas and details in social studies readings

This excerpt is from the "Declaration of Sentiments" presented to the Seneca Falls Convention by Elizabeth Cady Stanton in 1848.

We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights governments are instituted, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. Whenever any form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of those who suffer from it to refuse allegiance to it, and to insist upon the institution of a new government...

Question:

What concept is a main idea of this excerpt?

- A nationalism
- B natural rights
- C imperialism
- D majority rule

2 Social studies vocabulary

You'll be presented with social studies passages which include common social studies terms and phrases.

For example, the term "capitalism" describes the main economic system that is in place in the U.S. You may need to be able to understand what that term means in order to distinguish it from other economic systems, such as "socialism" or "communism."

Example Questions

Social studies vocabulary

The chart below describes the four methods used to amend the U.S. Constitution.

Four Methods of Amending the U.S. Constitution

	Step 1	Step 2
1.	A two-thirds vote in both houses of the U.S. Congress	Ratified by three-fourths of the state legislatures
2.	A two-thirds vote in both houses of the U.S. Congress	Ratified by ratification conventions in three-fourths of the states
3.	A national constitutional convention called by two-thirds of the state legislatures	Ratified by three-fourths of the state legislatures
4.	A national constitutional convention called by two-thirds of the state legislatures	Ratified by ratification conventions in three-fourths of the states

The 17th Amendment

The 1787 delegates to the Constitutional Convention decided to give state legislatures the power to select U.S. senators. The purpose was to ensure that the interests of the states were represented in that national legislature. However, some argued that the people should directly elect their senators. They thought the interests of the states would be preserved because the people were the source of all government power.

The first of nearly 300 congressional resolutions calling for direct election of senators came in 1826. Over the next 85 years, an amendment to directly elect U.S. senators was debated extensively. Finally, in 1913, the 17th Amendment, which allowed for the direct election of senators, was ratified.

Question:

What does the word **convention** mean in both the chart and *The 17th Amendment* passage?

- A cultural tradition
- B formal assembly
- C agreed-upon contract
- D preferred writing style

3 How authors use language in social studies

You'll be asked to identify how authors use language, (for example, imagery or facts) to establish their points of view or purpose.

Social studies authors use language to support their arguments in a variety of different ways. One author might use facts to create an argument, while another might use metaphors to create more of an emotional argument.

For example, an author writing about competition in the communications industry might cite facts about company revenues, profits, or market share. Another writer discussing the effects of competition on cell phone prices might provide examples of how consumers felt about their treatment by cell phone service providers. These authors have different purposes and use different kinds of language to support their purposes. As a reader, it is important to be able to identify the different characteristics of writing in order to be able to understand and evaluate the meaning of the passage.

Example Questions**How authors use language in social studies**

This excerpt is from President Barack Obama's 2017 farewell address.

Our democracy is threatened whenever we take it for granted. . . . When voting rates in America are some of the lowest among advanced democracies, we should be making it easier, not harder, to vote. When trust in our institutions is low, we should . . . insist on the principles of transparency and ethics in public service. When Congress is dysfunctional, we should draw our congressional districts to encourage politicians to cater to common sense and not rigid extremes.

But remember, none of this happens on its own. All of this depends on . . . each of us accepting the responsibility of citizenship, regardless of which way the pendulum of power happens to be swinging.

Our Constitution is a remarkable, beautiful gift. But it's really just a piece of parchment. It has no power on its own. We, the people give it power. We, the people, give it meaning. . . . Whether or not we stand up for our freedoms. Whether or not we respect and enforce the rule of law. That's up to us. America is no fragile thing. But the gains of our long journey to freedom are not assured. . . .

Question:

Based on the excerpt, which phrase identifies an *unstated* purpose of President Obama's speech?

- A to encourage support for the incoming administration
- B to gain support for the newly elected members of Congress
- C to convince his audience to actively participate in government
- D to convince his audience to be honest when dealing with the government

4 Fact versus opinion

You'll be asked to determine when an author is using factual statements or inferences, as opposed to opinions.

For example, an author might begin with the opinion that the 1960s were one of the most difficult and divided times in American history. They may go on to cite evidence or facts that describe the Vietnam War, civil rights protests, and the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Example Questions

Fact versus opinion

In January 1991, President George H. W. Bush made a speech about Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.

Question:

Which statement from President Bush's speech is an opinion?

- A "The United Nations, with the full support of the United States, has already tried to peacefully pressure Iraq out of Kuwait"
- B "And our own economy is suffering . . . the effects of higher oil prices stemming from Saddam's aggression. . . ."
- C ". . . [E]conomic sanctions are taking a toll, but they are still not forcing Saddam out of Kuwait. . . ."
- D "We have seen too often in this century how quickly any threat to one becomes a threat to all."

5 Claims and evidence in social studies

You'll be presented with social studies passages and be asked to:

- Determine whether a claim is or is not supported by evidence
- Compare information that differs between sources

For example, you might be provided with a passage that discusses the historical expansion westward of the United States in the 19th century and that argues that the expansion was beneficial to the Native American people who had occupied the land previously. The reading might provide evidence to support that claim and your task could be to evaluate whether it does. You might also be asked to read information from different sources and analyze whether the differing versions are credible in supporting the claims that are made.

Example Questions**Claims and evidence in social studies**

This paragraph is paraphrased from Federalist No. 84, an essay by Alexander Hamilton, published in 1788.

Hamilton's Essay

Not only is a bill of rights unnecessary, I am sure that in the proposed constitution it would even be dangerous. Why declare that things will not be done when there is no power to do them? Why assert that certain rights are protected when the government has no power to violate those rights? Why state that there is freedom of the press when the government is not given power that can be used to violate freedom of the press? It would only provide an excuse for power-hungry men to claim such a power.

This paragraph is paraphrased from a letter written by James Madison to Thomas Jefferson in 1788.

Madison's Letter

I have always favored a bill of rights, so long as it does not imply that the government has powers it is not meant to have. At the same time, I do not think the absence of a bill of rights is a major defect. The real threat to individual rights is not the government, but a strong-willed majority of the people. Nevertheless, the threat may occasionally come from the government, in which case a bill of rights will be essential. It is a sad truth that freedom is endangered whether the government has too much or too little power, and finding the thin line between the extremes is not easy.

Question:

How does Hamilton's essay *differ* from Madison's letter?

- A Only Hamilton suggests that governments might abuse power.
- B Only Hamilton argues that no other constitution contains guarantees of individual liberty.
- C Only Hamilton says that a bill of rights is acceptable as long as it does not give unintended power to the government.
- D Only Hamilton says that a bill of rights would damage the safeguards of liberty the proposed constitution

Applying Social Studies Concepts



1 Making inferences

Social studies authors often use evidence to guide the reader to draw conclusions.

You'll be asked to make inferences or draw conclusions by applying your logic and reasoning skills to the evidence presented in social studies readings.

For example, you may be provided with several pieces of evidence about a particular historical event and then infer what the most likely outcome might be in the future.

Example Questions

Making inferences

A recent magazine article examined government in the United States during the first decades after independence from Britain.

Question:

Which quotation from the article allows a reader to infer that the power of the U.S. government is limited?

- A "A fear of tyranny led to the creation of a national government under the Articles of Confederation, which lasted less than a decade."
- B "As a result, the founders drafted the U.S. Constitution, which addressed weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation."
- C "The U.S. Constitution, ratified over two hundred years ago, greatly changed the relationship between the national and state governments."
- D "The U.S. Constitution included safeguards to protect individual rights against abuse by the government."

2 Connections between different social studies elements (people, events, places, processes)

You'll be asked to:

- Analyze cause-and-effect relationships
- Describe the connections between people, places, environments, processes, and events
- Put events in order and understand the steps in a process (for example, how a bill becomes a law)
- Analyze the relationship of events, processes, and/or ideas. For example, you might analyze whether earlier events actually caused later ones or simply occurred before them.

Taking another example, an author writing about WWI might cite events leading up to the war, including political and social events. In the years prior to WWI, social unrest, fueled by food shortages, led to riots. Deposed Russian leadership left a dangerous power vacuum. At the same time, increasingly aggressive clashes arose between world empires.

In these passages, you will be provided with the historical facts. You will be asked to determine the connections between them.

Example Questions**Connections between different social studies elements (people, events, places, processes)****Reconstruction Policies**

After President Lincoln's assassination in April of 1865, President Andrew Johnson and the Radical Republicans in Congress battled for control of Reconstruction. The battle included setting the conditions for former Confederate states to be readmitted to the Union. President Johnson wanted even milder conditions than those that had been proposed by Lincoln. The Radical Republicans demanded policies that punished the South and ensured civil rights for African Americans.

By 1866, enough Radical Republicans had been elected to Congress to override Johnson's vetoes. Over the next two years, Congress passed a series of Reconstruction Acts. All the former Confederate states, except one, were placed under military control. These acts also required each state to accept the 14th and 15th Amendments, which granted political and voting rights to African American men. It was under these conditions that the remaining Confederate states returned to the Union.

Question:

Which event in the passage happened *second*?

- A Civil and political rights were granted to African American men.
- B Radical Republicans in Congress took control of Reconstruction.
- C President Lincoln proposed mild conditions for states to rejoin the Union.
- D Radical Republicans and President Johnson disagreed over Reconstruction policies.

3 The effect of different social studies concepts on an argument or point-of-view

All social studies authors have a point of view and purpose for what they write.

You'll be asked to:

- Analyze how events and situations shape the author's point of view
- Evaluate whether the author's evidence is factual, relevant, and sufficient
- Make judgments about how different ideas impact the author's argument

For example, an author might present their point of view that non-violent approaches are the most effective way to impact government policy. They could present evidence from the movement to resist British rule in India, led by Mohandas Gandhi, alongside evidence from the American civil rights movement in the United States, led by Martin Luther King, Jr.

Example Questions

The effect of different social studies concepts on an argument or point-of-view

Much of the 20th century was marked by conflict between the ideas of communism and capitalism.

Question:

Which term is associated with the ideas of communism?

- A profit motive
- B private property
- C classless society
- D competitive market

4 Identifying bias and propaganda in social studies readings

You'll be asked to identify when a social studies reading uses bias or propaganda.

Sometimes authors promote their point of view by appealing to a reader's emotions. They can use loaded language (words that trigger emotions) to lead the reader to the author's point of view.

For example, during the Cold War, as tensions rose between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, many Americans worried that communism could destroy American society. This worry was fueled by writings describing communism as an "iceberg that could sink America" or as "purgatory under Communism."

Example Questions

Identifying bias and propaganda in social studies readings**Question:**

Which publication is the *best* example of propaganda?

- A a website that lists the federal taxes paid by individuals at different income levels
- B a newspaper article that quotes a senator who argues that federal income taxes are too high
- C a wartime cartoon that claims American citizens who fail to pay taxes are helping the enemy
- D a pamphlet written by a socialist group that describes the history of taxes on wealthy American citizens

Applying Mathematical Reasoning in Social Studies



1 Using data presented in visual form, including maps, charts, graphs, and tables

Data can be represented in many different visual forms, including charts, tables, graphs, maps, photographs, and cartoons.

You'll be presented with data in visual form and will be asked to:

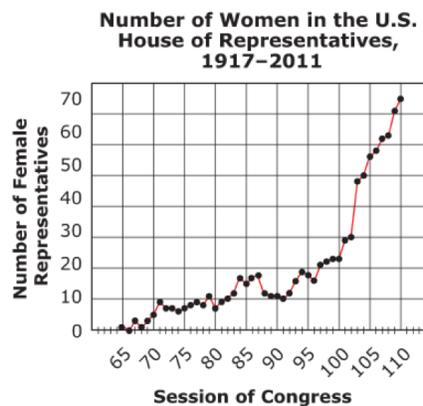
- Make sense of information that is presented in different ways
- Analyze information from maps, tables, charts, photographs, and political cartoons
- Represent textual data into visual form (charts, graphs, and tables)
- Interpret, use, and create graphs with appropriate labeling, and use the data to predict trends

For example, a line graph can show the population growth of a city before and through the Industrial Revolution. You may be asked to predict future growth for the city.

Example Questions

Using data presented in visual form, including maps, charts, graphs, and tables

The information in the graph is from the U.S. Senate website.



Question:

Which session of Congress had *twice* as many women representatives as the 101st session?

- A 104th
- B 106th
- C 108th
- D 110th

2 Dependent and independent variables

A variable is simply a person, place, or thing you are trying to measure. Some variables impact other variables.

You'll be presented with a graph showing independent and dependent variables, and will be asked to analyze and show how they are related to each other.

For example, a graph can show the number of people and the food consumption in a town. The number of people is the independent variable. The number of people that will impact the food consumption is the dependent variable. More people will result in more food consumption.

Example Questions

Dependent and independent variables

This excerpt is from an article published by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

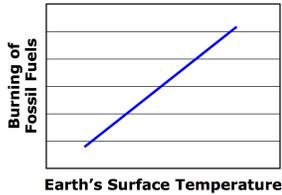
Since the Industrial Revolution began around 1750, human activities have contributed substantially to climate change by adding CO₂ and other heat-trapping gases to the atmosphere. These greenhouse gas emissions have increased the greenhouse effect and caused Earth's surface temperature to rise. The primary human activity affecting the amount and rate of climate change is greenhouse gas emissions from the burning of fossil fuels. . . .

Human activities currently release over 30 billion tons of CO₂ into the atmosphere every year. The resultant build-up of CO₂ in the atmosphere is like a tub filling with water, where more water flows from the faucet than the drain can take away.

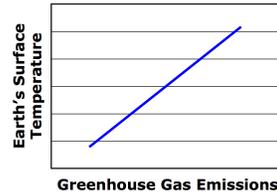
Question:

Which graph represents the relationship discussed in the excerpt?

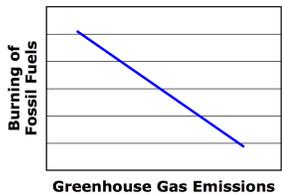
A



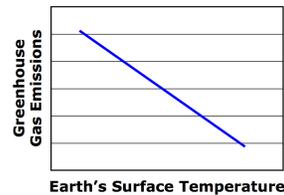
B



C



D



3 Correlation versus causation

You'll be asked to recognize the difference between correlation and causation between events.

For example, you may be presented with a passage describing the significant growth of a city. The passage could include facts about industrial innovations, including the assembly line and factories. You may also be presented with information about medical advancements.

You'll use the data provided to determine the direct relationship (causation) between the industrial innovations and urban population growth. However, there may not be evidence of a direct relationship between the medical advancements and urban population growth (a correlation).

Example Questions**Correlation versus causation****Rebellion in the Thirteen Colonies**

In 1775, tensions were high between Britain and the American Colonies. The French and Indian War ended more than a decade before, but its effects had not ceased.

The French and Indian War brought the colonies together in unexpected ways. Having fought in and helped to win the war, Americans experienced a new sense of unity, apart from Britain. Also, the war increased British debts. To help pay these debts, Parliament placed new taxes on the colonies.

Outraged that they were expected to bear the cost of a war that had started in Europe, colonists protested. Some simply refused to pay taxes to a parliament in which they had no representation. In response, Britain sent additional soldiers and tensions increased. American Patriots prepared for war.

In April 1775, the Crown sent troops to Massachusetts to locate Patriot leaders and stockpiled weapons. At Lexington and Concord British troops and American militia exchanged gunfire. The Revolutionary War had begun.

Question:

Which statement represents a cause-and-effect relationship?

- A Because the colonists refused to pay the new taxes, they prepared for war.
- B Because Britain had accumulated war debts, it imposed new taxes on the colonists.
- C Because they had fought in the French and Indian War, colonists refused to pay taxes.
- D Because colonists protested taxes, British soldiers fired on them at Lexington and Concord.

4 Using statistics in social studies

You'll be asked to find the mean, median, mode, and range of a data set.

For example, you may be presented with the population of all of the counties in a state. You may be asked to calculate the mean, median, mode, and range of the populations of the state's counties.

Example Questions**Using statistics in social studies**

The information in the table is from the United Nations.

Largest Urban Areas By Population, 2007

Urban Area	Estimated Population (millions)
1. Tokyo, Japan	35.6
2. Mexico City, Mexico	19.0
3. New York, United States	19.0
4. Mumbai, India	18.9
5. São Paolo, Brazil	18.8

Question:

What is the range in the population of the five urban areas in the table? You may use the calculator.

- A 9.5 million
- B 16.8 million
- C 19.0 million
- D 22.26 million

