The GED Social Studies Test

What is the GED social studies test like? You’ll have 50 multiple choice questions to answer in 70 minutes. That means, on average you’ll have about 1¼ minutes per question. The social studies test will ask you questions based on both readings and visual materials. About 40% of the questions, or 20 questions, will be about a reading of 200 words or less. Another 40% (20 questions) will be about visual materials, like maps, charts and graphs, diagrams, cartoons, or pictures. The final 20% (10 questions) will have a combination of text and images. Map reading, understanding charts and graphs, and interpreting diagrams and pictures are all important skills for the social studies test, but these skills are not difficult to learn.

Often, several questions will be grouped together to apply to one text or image, but overall you’ll have more, shorter texts than on the reading test. Most often, there will be one or two questions about a particular short text, chart, map, or picture. A good plan is to aim at finishing one question per minute. That will leave plenty of time to go back to more difficult questions at the end of the test.

The social studies test covers 25% National (U.S. or Canadian) History (12–13 questions), 15% World History (7–8 questions), 15% Geography (7–8 questions), 25% Civics and Government
(12–13 questions), and 20% Economics (10 questions). That’s a lot of material to cover, and not very many questions. The test doesn’t try to check your knowledge of details of historical events, because it can’t. The area it covers is too broad. Anyone might have a broad knowledge of social studies and still be missing an important piece of information about a Civil War battle, so it would be unfair to test people on facts and dates. The social studies test addresses the bigger issues—whether you have a background of understanding against which to read, analyze and interpret information in all these different areas.

Your context for understanding social studies is more important than the details. The GED social studies test is 60% international and 40% national (U.S. or Canada, depending on where you’re taking the test). That means you need a background of thinking about the whole world, not just your own country or local area. Reading about world news can give you a good background for thinking about global issues.

You’ll also need to understand a few important historical documents. In the U.S., you’ll find questions about the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, and landmark Supreme Court cases. In Canada, you’ll find questions about the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

You’ll also find at least one practical document on the social studies test. That means a tax form, voter guide, political speech, or some other document that is important to you, as a citizen. This practical document shows how the big, global and national issues of civics or economics affect individuals like you.
Having a context and background to understand important social studies concepts is one part of the GED test. The other part is having the thinking skills to answer questions about social studies readings or visual information. The thinking skills on the social studies test are broken down into the following categories:

* About 10 questions (20%) will be **comprehension** questions. These questions want to know if you understood what you read. You’ll use skills like restating, summarizing, and inferring.

* About 10 questions (20%) will be **application** questions. These questions want to know if you can apply what you read about to a new situation. You’ll need to understand general principles and examples of those principles.

* About 20 questions (40%) will be **analysis** questions. These questions want to know if you can understand facts and opinions, make conclusions and relate conclusions to supporting statements and assumptions, recognize persuasive information and evaluate arguments, understand biases and viewpoints, and recognize cause and effect.

* About 10 questions (20%) will be **evaluation** questions. These questions want to know if you can evaluate information (by its source, objectivity, accuracy, and appropriateness), compare and contrast, and understand how values and beliefs affect decisions.