

What "counts" in AP U.S. History? What is success in this class?

"Not everything that counts can be counted and not everything that can be counted counts"
—Albert Einstein

Dear students and parents,

Welcome to AP U.S. History! I am looking forward to an exciting and challenging year in U.S. history—a year in which all of you become successful historians. I know that as AP students, you have high expectations of yourself and of this class, and that you want to do well— I share these goals with you. To further our success, I wanted to share with you what "counts" in my classroom. One thing to keep in mind is that success can be measured in many different ways. While we both want A's on tests, there are other important facets to learning that make a student successful.

Attitude is everything! Be willing to try new activities, work with people you've never spoken to, and be a part of the class. AP U.S. History is a challenging subject— each student in this class brings a unique perspective to our collective understanding— that includes YOU! To be successful, you will need to take an active role in discussions and activities on a daily basis. Be yourself—don't be afraid to let your sense of humor and personality shine.

Effort goes a long way. Or as some people say, "you get what you give". True learning takes effort, and on a simple level, that means being prepared. Be in class on time with all of your materials every day. Follow through on your assignments—really *read* the assigned pages, don't skim for the answer. Be thoughtful with responses—don't rush or leave homework for the last minute. Importantly—NEVER MAKE EXCUSES—take responsibility if your effort does lag (which we all do sometimes ☺). Keep in mind that effort doesn't always mean an A—but success does mean doing your best.

Think! Being called a thinker is the highest compliment in my book. History is complicated, and really learning it requires complex thinking. Thinkers ask questions—Why? How? What if? Thinkers also problem-solve—history is full of names, dates, and facts that can seem useless and boring—think about what I like to call the “so what?” factor—why is it significant? Being successful requires active thinking and questioning.

Mistakes-learn from them. Everybody stumbles—it is unreasonable to assume you will always be perfect, but what you choose to do with your disappointments can determine future success. Take the time to read comments on papers, look over mistakes on tests—learn to see grades for what they are—indicators of learning or performance on a given task—not a judgment of you. If you are feeling overwhelmed, confused, or unhappy with your performance, please come see me—I am always here to help you. I really respect students who care enough to ask questions and learn from their mistakes.

I can't wait to get to know all of you this year—I know it is going to be a good one!

- Ms. Swanson