

# Department of Defense

(Sources: *Pre-K -12 Social Studies Standards; Grade Level Scope and Sequence; DoDEA Course Descriptions 2002-03, Department of Defense Education Activity*)

---

## The five criteria: An overview

---

| Are the essentials of a civic core specified clearly? | Are the topics teachable within the allotted timeframe? | Do the documents provide a scope and sequence? | Is the essential content required of all students? | Are the important facts and ideas presented coherently across subjects? |
|---|---|--|--|---|
| ☆   | ☆   | ★  | ★  | ☆   |

---

Standards that largely meet the criteria are designated with a full star [★]; standards that partially meet the criteria are designated with a half star [☆]; and standards that do not meet the criteria are designated with an empty star [☆].

### Summary:

Drafted to be in close alignment with the National Council for the Social Studies' 1994 *Curriculum Standards for Social Studies: Expectations of Excellence*, the DOD's standards suffer all the shortcomings of the NCSS documents.

In regard to Criterion #1, the standards contain no specific, required topics from which a common core of learning could be derived. This lack of specificity as to curriculum content and student understanding means that the standards are also not truly "teachable," as required by Criterion #2. Technically speaking, Criteria #3 and #4 are met and partially met respectively, by a list of grade-by-grade course descriptions. Yet even these are so vague as to be of limited utility at the classroom level. As to Criterion #5, the NCSS's ten "theme" areas (see below) are repeated rigidly across all courses and grade levels. Unfortunately, this does nothing to lessen the documents' overall feeling of incoherence, but only acts to scatter the substance of each subject area, particularly in regard to history and politics.

### Particulars:

Without regard to subject or grade level, each of the NCSS's ten themes automatically appears as a subhead for each course and are presumably given equal weight:

- SS1. Citizenship
- SS2. Culture
- SS3. Time, continuity, and change
- SS4. Space and place
- SS5. Individual development and identity
- SS6. Individuals, groups, and institutions
- SS7. Production, distribution and consumption
- SS8. Power, authority, and governance
- SS9. Science, technology, and society
- SS10. Global connections

Specific courses of study are described for the middle and high school years:

- Grade 5. U.S. History, Pre-Columbian to the Present

- Grade 6. Ancient and Medieval Civilizations
- Grade 7. World Geography
- Grade 8. U.S. History, Pre-Columbian to 1877
- Grade 9. World Regions/Cultures
- Grade 10. World History, Middle Ages to the Present
- Grade 11. U.S. History, 1877 to the Present
- Grade 12. United States Government and Electives from Anthropology, Economics, Psychology, Sociology, Contemporary Issues and Asian Culture

Because the ten themes govern everything, however, most topics do not relate to course titles. In grade five, teachers are asked to cover the entire sweep of U.S. history, from at least the fifteenth century to today. Under the theme of “time, continuity, and change,” four items are listed. Under civics (SS8/power, authority, and government), another four topics are named, making eight out of 39 for the grade. Under history, not a single event, idea, person, or turning-point is listed. For example, item one is “Trace changes over time in the history of the United States and identify reasons for the change.” Civics, also without specifics, starts with “Explain how and why laws and governments have changed.” The 31 other topics under the other eight themes are all equally abstract (e.g., under citizenship/SS1, “Demonstrate that different situations call for different forms of action;” under culture/SS2, “Compare commonalities and differences among cultures;” under SS6/individuals, groups, and institutions, “Identify how groups and institutions promote the common good;” under global connections/SS10, “Identify factors that contribute to cooperation among societies”).

Standards for a grade six course on ancient and medieval civilizations suffers from similar problems. Under the history/SS3 and citizenship/SS1 subheads, there are five items (out of a total the 36 for the course). Again, not one specific appears, nothing on the major religions; on China, India, Greece, Rome; nothing on feudalism, the Magna Carta, or the origins of limited government. One history item is “Analyze social change resulting from social conflict.” A citizenship item is “Analyze the qualities needed for successful leadership.” Under SS1/citizenship: “Participate in activities with a variety of persons from diverse backgrounds;” SS2/culture: “Explain the interaction between culture and religion;” and SS5: “Describe the conflict between one’s personal values and society’s values” are all so vague and broad as to be useless for guiding classroom instruction.

Grade seven easily could be a wasted year for exploring issues important to democracy, presenting geography alone, as though the other social studies subjects did not exist. The history theme has one item: “Use key concepts to explain, analyze, and show connections among patterns of change.” A civics item is: “Compare how dissent and related forms of citizen actions influence public policy.” And SS9/science, technology, and society asks: “Describe the influence of culture on scientific and technological advancements.”

The grade eight U.S. history course, pre-Columbus to 1877, lists only five topics under the history theme (out of a total of 40), none specific. There are also five topics listed under civics, with one specific, the Constitution: “Explain how and why the Constitution has been interpreted to exclude certain groups from its protection and rights.” Under SS1/citizenship, teachers and students are urged to, “Display tolerance for all cultures.”

This jumble of rigidly imposed themes, unrelated to the specific content to be taught, persists through high school. Standards for a ninth grade course on “World Regions/Cultures” provide no historical context for the regions and cultures being studied and, thus, no coher-

ence or perspective to students.

These problems are most troublesome in the two critical high school courses, tenth-grade world history, Middle Ages to the present, and eleventh-grade U.S. history since 1877. The latter is a common grade eleven course which, if content is sensibly selected, can be taught in both depth and breadth. But the former is not teachable with any level of depth at all. In no other advanced society do schools try to squeeze such a broad sweep of ideas, institutions, and human life into a single year.

Unfortunately, the standards offer little to teachers as they try to figure out how best to proceed. Of the 35 topics listed for grade ten, history gets only three items, all vague: (a) "Explain the historical development of forms of governments;" (b) "Describe how the perception of time affects culture and society;" (c) "Trace the evolution and evaluate the historical significance of oppressed groups and minorities." Six quasi-specific topics peep out from under the other themes: under culture/SS2: "Compare the accomplishments of the Renaissance with similar movements in other cultures." Under power, authority, and governance/SS8: "Outline the evolution of power and influence of world organizations (e.g., NATO, UN, OPEC, ANZUS, Warsaw Pact)."

Of the 41 topics to be covered in grade eleven, only four are listed under history: (a) "Explain the cycle of reform philosophies in United States society;" (b) "Trace perceptions of government as they change over time;" (c) "Discuss the increase in awareness of minority problems;" (d) "Show the impact of given historical events on the social fabric of the United States." A few details crop up under civics: "Summarize the impact of domestic and international efforts to promote peace (e.g., Nye Committee, League of Nations, United Nations, and Sovereignty Debate)" and "Describe how position, doctrines, and the alliance systems expanded governmental authority (e.g., Truman Doctrine, Marshall Plan, NATO, SEATO)." And under SS9/science, technology, and society, we find, "Discuss the need for governmental regulation of science and technology (e.g., FAA, AEC, FCC)."

In place of the specific people, ideas, events, crises, debates, and turning-points that teachers are expected to teach and students are expected to know, the standards offer sweeping, general questions that would require weeks of hard study before one could begin to answer them honestly, if they are answerable at all. In grade eleven, under SS2/culture, we find: "Discuss the philosophical move from self-reliance to reliance on the government," and under SS4/space and place: "Discuss the effects of the philosophy of the frontier." Under production, distribution and consumption/SS7, we get: "Examine how economic flux contributes to civil unrest" and under global connections/SS10: "Explain and propose solutions to global problems."

Broad questions of interpretation which promote the critical use of knowledge are indispensable to effective history and civics teaching. But unless standards writers grapple with the difficult job of identifying which people, ideas, and events are most worth students' attention, each teacher is forced to guess what is most important for students to know and interpret. The only thing preventing the students of different teachers from learning a vastly different curriculum is that a single commercial textbook has been approved for each course and grade level. On their own, the Department of Defense's social studies standards offer little help.