

# Texas

(Sources: *Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for Kindergarten-Grade 12, Social Studies and Economics (TEKS)*, 1997, Texas Education Agency, and *Objectives and TEKS Student Expectations for TAAS II, for statewide assessment in 2003*)

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## The five criteria: An overview

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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:

On Criterion #1, the TEKS document does well. Topics are generally clear, specific, and important. From them, a common core of learning for citizenship can be drawn, but only with great effort and, given state testing, great risk. Criterion #2 is far from met; topics in history and civics overflow the available teaching time, and in most grades teachers confront numerous standards and benchmarks from other social studies subjects. On Criterion #3, the documents set a course sequence: U.S. history in grades five, eight, and eleven; grade six studies “peoples and places of the contemporary world” in 13 world regions, of which all of Europe is only one; grade seven, Texas history, repeats the year-long grade four course. World history appears in high school, as do world geography, government, and economics. On Criterion #4, minimum Texas graduation requirements do not include world history; world geography is the option. But in the face of state testing, districts are said to be moving to the “recommended” or “distinguished achievement” tracks, which require both subjects. On Criterion #5, items in economics, geography, and government “strands” in each grade are generally well related to the historical eras under study.

### Particulars:

There are four added “strands” at each grade: culture; science, technology, and society; citizenship; and social studies skills. The first two would be better taught with history, and the third with government. Social studies skills are often cumbersome and repeated grade after grade, often without regard for students’ ages or the topics at hand. The effect of multiple strands, each with its own standards, benchmarks, and subtopics, is the near-burial of crucial matters in history and government.

In grade five’s survey of U.S. history to the present, history itself has only five standards of 27, and sixteen benchmarks of 87. Under its benchmarks are such broad subtopics as “changes in society” in the Industrial Revolution and “world wars.” Grade eight U.S. history to 1877 has only nine standards (of 32) and 34 benchmarks (of 108), but some 110 subtopics, including “arguments for and against” ratifying the Constitution. The high school course, since 1877, has only 27 history benchmarks (in a total of 92), but multiple subtopics within broad

benchmarks (e.g., “analyze economic issues such as industrialization, the growth of railroads, the growth of labor unions, farm issues, and the rise of big business”, and “evaluate the impact of Progressive Era reforms” and “trace the historical development of the civil rights movement in the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries.” To teach these well, plus 65 added benchmarks from six other strands, is simply not possible in a single school year.

Despite many sweeping benchmarks, U.S. history courses leave out such matters as the forces behind Reconstruction’s collapse, the ensuing plight of ex-slaves, the factors in our rapid industrialization, Populism and its issues, the debate over imperialism, the work of Theodore Roosevelt, and American isolationism between World Wars I and II.

Even more serious problems lie in world history. High school world history standards and benchmarks rightly include the main ideas, events, and institutions of Western civilization, but world history is still not required for graduation and it appears nowhere in middle school. In ten standards and 26 benchmarks, history alone has at least 150 major subtopics to teach its “overview of the entire history of mankind,” approaching one for each day in the school year. This alone is too much for one year, even if the three standards and fifteen benchmarks for social studies skills were ignored, not to mention the fourteen standards and 40 benchmarks in other strands.

Many of the course’s 81 benchmarks are extremely broad, embodying many separate topics requiring at least a week’s work (e.g., “compare historical origins, central ideas, and the spread of major religious and philosophical traditions, including Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism;” “summarize the fundamental ideas and institutions of Western civilization that originated in Greece and Rome;” “identify causes and evaluate effects of major political revolutions since the 17th century, including the English, American, French, and Russian revolutions;” “identify and explain causes and effects of World Wars I and II, including the rise of Nazism/fascism in Germany, Italy, and Japan; rise of communism in the Soviet Union; and Cold War”).

Still left out, however, are the fall of Athens, Rome’s Republic, and the Roman Empire; the ideas and politics of the Reformation; “natural law” in the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment; the central nineteenth-century ideologies and political, economic, and social reforms; the crushing of political moderates by Bolsheviks and Nazis; the roots of 1930s appeasement; the United Nations, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The *Objectives and TEKS Student Expectations* are items chosen from the 1997 TEKS document as eligible for state tests. At first glance, they seem to do what most standards writers do not do: set priorities. But their U.S. history/civics items are too many and world history items are all but absent. For the grade eleven exit-level test for students who have taken world history or world geography, history has but one benchmark of 24. No benchmark cited above is included. The scope and quality of topics chosen for the “eligible” lists, here as in other states, are of course crucial, for they will supercede the original standards documents as teachers are pressed to focus their courses to fit the tests. These selected “objectives” imply that world and Western history are not important for the education of Texas citizens.

Texas standards, then, are both overstuffed and incomplete for civic education, with history and civics squeezed by six other strands. World history, which carries Western civilization with it, is absent from the middle schools. And the high school course itself cannot be covered, much less engagingly taught, in the time schools have. In the 1997 document, the raw material of non-U.S. history is at hand, but some of it must be assigned to a prior grade and all of it prioritized and refined by teachers and scholars who know the subject and the time available to teach it.