

## Chapter 1

# Taking a Quick Glance at the GED Social Studies Test

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**T**he GED test offers high-school dropouts, people who leave school early, and people who were educated outside the United States an opportunity to earn the equivalent of a United States (U.S.) high-school diploma without the need for full-time attendance in either day or night school. The GED test is a recognized standard that makes securing a job or college placement easier.

The GED test complies with current 12th-grade standards in the United States and meets the College and Career Readiness Standards for Adult Education. The GED test also covers the Common Core Standards used in most states. These standards are based on the actual expectations stated by employers and postsecondary institutions.

The GED test measures whether you understand what high-school seniors across the country have studied before they graduate. Employers need better-educated employees. In addition, some colleges may be uncertain of the quality of foreign credentials. The GED provides those assurances. When you pass the GED test, you earn a high-school equivalency diploma. That can open many doors for you, perhaps doors that you don't even know exist at this point.

You're permitted to take the GED test in sections, so you can take the Reasoning Through Language Arts (RLA), Math, Science, and Social Studies tests in separate testing sessions. This flexibility enables you to focus your studies and practice on one section of the test at a time, and this book supports your efforts to do just that.

Ready to get started? This chapter gives you the basics of the GED Social Studies test: how the test is administered, what the Social Studies test section looks like, how to schedule the test (including whether you're eligible), and how your score is calculated (so you know what you need to focus on to pass).

## *Knowing What to Expect: The GED Test Format*

A computer administers the GED test. That means that all the questions appear on a computer screen, and you enter all your answers into a computer with a keyboard and mouse. You read, evaluate, analyze, and write everything on the computer. Even when drafting an

essay, you don't use paper. Instead, the test centers provide you with an erasable tablet. If you know how to use a computer and are comfortable with a keyboard and a mouse, you're ahead of the game. If not, practice your keyboarding. Also, practice reading from a computer screen, because reading from a screen is very different from reading printed materials. At the very least, you need to get more comfortable with computers, even if that means taking a short course at a local learning center. In the case of the GED test, the more familiar you are with computers, the more comfortable you'll feel taking the computerized test.



Under certain circumstances, the sections are available in booklet format as a special accommodation. Check with the GED Testing Service to see what exceptions are acceptable.

The computer-based GED test allows for speedy detailed feedback on your performance. When you pass (yes, we said *when* and not *if*, because we believe in you), the GED Testing Service provides both a diploma and a detailed transcript of your scores, similar to what high-school graduates receive. They're now available online at [www.gedtestingservice.com](http://www.gedtestingservice.com) within a day of completing the test. You can then send your transcript and diploma to an employer or college. Doing so allows employers and colleges access to a detailed outline of your scores, achievement, and demonstrated skills and abilities. This outline is also a useful tool for you to review your progress. It highlights those areas where you did well and areas where you need further work. If you want to (or have to) retake the test, these results will provide a detailed guide to what you should work on to improve your scores. Requests for additional copies of transcripts are handled online and also are available within a day.

## Reviewing the GED Social Studies Test

The Social Studies test is scheduled for 90 minutes. You have 65 minutes to answer the multiple-choice and fill-in-the-blank questions and 25 minutes to write your Extended Response (an essay). You get no break between the two sections of the test and can't transfer time from one section to the other. Here's a breakdown of what you'll see on this test:

- ✓ **Multiple-choice, drag-and-drop, hot spot, and fill-in-the-blank questions:** The source text and data for these question types varies. For about half of the questions you get one source item, such as a graph or text, followed by a single question. Other items present a single source item as the basis for several questions. In either case, you need to analyze and evaluate the content presented to you as part of the question. The test items evaluate your ability to answer questions by using reasoning and analytical skills. The information for the source materials comes from primary and secondary sources, both text and visual. That means you need to be able to "read" charts, tables, maps, and graphs as well as standard text materials.
- ✓ **Extended Response:** In this part of the Social Studies test, you're presented with two source texts, usually a quote and a longer passage. You are required to analyze how the issues expressed represent an enduring issue in American history.

The content of the Social Studies test is drawn from these four areas:

- ✓ **Civics and government:** The largest part (about 50 percent of the test) focuses on civics and government. These items examine the development of democracy from ancient times to modern days. Other topics include how civilizations change over time and respond to crises.
- ✓ **American history:** American history makes up 20 percent of the test. It covers all topics from the pilgrims and early settlement to the American Revolution, the Civil War, World Wars I and II, the Vietnam War, and current history — all of which involve the United States in one way or another.

- ✓ **Economics:** Economics makes up about 15 percent of the test. The economics portion examines basic theories, such as supply and demand, the role of government policies in the economy, and macro- and microeconomic theory.
- ✓ **Geography and the world:** This area also makes up 15 percent of the test. The areas with which you need to become familiar are very topical: sustainability and environmental issues, population issues, and rural and urban settlement. Other topics include cultural diversity and migration and those issues that are of universal and not national concern.



You're not expected to be a historian or a civics professor. You won't be asked to identify state capitals, identify the key issues that triggered the Civil War, or name the ships that Christopher Columbus sailed to the New World. All the information you need to answer the questions is provided in the reading passages, maps, graphs, questions, and other material provided on the test. Only the Extended Response requires some prior outside knowledge. However, even on the rest of the test, knowing something about these topics and key historical events, terminology, and concepts helps a great deal in understanding the material presented on the test. That means you can answer the questions correctly and faster in the limited time you're given.

For more about what's covered on the GED Social Studies test, check out Chapter 2.

## *It's a Date: Scheduling the Test*

To take the GED test, you schedule it based on the available testing dates. Each state or local testing center sets its own schedule for the GED test, which means that your state decides how and when you can take each section of the test. In some states, you're required to pass the GED Ready Test before taking the actual test; in others you're not. It also determines how often and how soon after failing a section you can retake it. Some states have a waiting period and additional charge for retakes. The GED Testing Service limits you to three retakes a year, but individual states may allow more. The fee for each retake varies by state. How different test centers administer the test also varies. Because the test is taken on a computer, many testing centers allow you to schedule an individual appointment. Your test starts when you start and ends when your allotted time expires. Other centers administer the test to groups on specific schedules. The test centers are small computer labs, often containing no more than 15 seats, and actual testing facilities are located in many communities in your state.

You book your appointment through the GED Testing Service ([www.gedtestingservice.com](http://www.gedtestingservice.com)). Your local GED test administrator can give you all the information you need about scheduling the test. In addition, local school districts and community colleges can provide information about local test centers in your area.



Sending a specific question or request to the GED Testing Service site may come with a charge for the service. To save money, you're better off asking a person at your local testing center. That way, you don't have to pay for the privilege of asking a question, and your answer will be based on rules and conditions specific to your area.

The following sections answer some questions you may have before you schedule your test date, including whether you're even eligible to take the test, when you can take the test, and how to sign up to take the test.

## Determining whether you're eligible

Before you schedule your test, make sure you meet the requirements to take the GED test. You're eligible to apply to take the GED test only if

- ✔ **You're not currently enrolled in a high school.** If you're currently enrolled in a high school, you're expected to complete your diploma there. The purpose of the GED test is to give people who aren't in high school a chance to get an equivalent high-school diploma.
- ✔ **You're not a high-school graduate.** If you're a high-school graduate, you should have a diploma, which means you don't need to take the GED test. However, you can use the GED as proof of up-to-date skills and show that you're ready for further education and training.
- ✔ **You meet state requirements regarding age, residency, and the length of time since leaving high school.** Check with your local GED test administrator to determine your state's requirements concerning these criteria. Residency requirements are an issue, because you may have to take the test in a different jurisdiction, depending on how long you've lived at your present address.

## Being aware of when you can take the test

If you're eligible, you can take the GED test whenever you're prepared. You can apply to take the GED test as soon as you want. Just contact your local testing center or [www.gedtestingservice.com](http://www.gedtestingservice.com) for a test schedule. Pick a day that works for you.



You can take all four sections of the GED test together, but that's seven hours of intense testing. To relieve the burden, the test is designed so that you can take each section separately, whenever you're ready. In most areas, you can take the test sections one at a time, even in the evening or on weekends, depending on the individual testing center. If you pass one test section, that section of the GED test is considered done no matter how you do on the other sections. If you fail one section, you can retake that section of the test. The scheduling and administration of the test and retakes vary from state to state, so check with the GED Testing Service site or your local high-school guidance office.

Because the test starts when you're ready and finishes when you've used up the allocated time, you should be able to take it alone and not depend on other people. For you, that means you may be able to find locations that offer the testing in evenings or on weekends as well as during regular business hours. Even better, because you don't have to take the test with a group, you may be able to set an individual starting time that suits you.

If circumstances dictate that you must take the paper version of the test, you'll probably have to forgo the flexibility afforded by the computer. Check well in advance to see what the rules are for you.



You can also apply to take the test if you're not prepared, but if you do that, you don't stand a very good chance of passing. If you do need to retake any section of the test, use your time before your next test date to get ready. The GED Testing Service offers a discounted retake up to twice a year, but these promotions change. Some states include free retakes in the price of the test. Check with the GED Testing Service or your state about any special discounts that may be available. To save time and money, prepare well before you schedule the test. Refer to the later section "Knowing what to do if you score poorly on one or more tests" for details.

## Are special accommodations available?

If you need to complete the test on paper or have a disability that makes it impossible for you to use the computer, your needs can be accommodated. However, other specifics apply: Your choice of times and testing locations may be much more restricted, but times to complete a test may be extended. Remember also that the GED testing centers will ask for documentation of the nature of the accommodation required.

The GED testing centers make every effort to ensure that all qualified people have access to the tests. If you have a disability, you may not be able to register for the tests and take them the same week, but, with some advanced planning, you can probably take the tests when you're ready. Here's what you need to do:

- ✔ Check with your local testing center or check out [www.gedtestingservice.com/testers/accommodations-for-disability](http://www.gedtestingservice.com/testers/accommodations-for-disability).
  - ✔ Contact the GED Testing Service or your local GED test center and explain your disability.
  - ✔ Request any forms that you have to fill out for your special circumstances.
  - ✔ Ensure that you have a recent diagnosis by a physician or other qualified professional.
- ✔ Complete all the proper forms and submit them with medical or professional diagnosis.
  - ✔ Start planning early so that you're able to take the tests when you're ready.

Note that, regardless of your disability, you still have to be able to handle the mental and emotional demands of the test.

The GED Testing Service in Washington, D.C., defines specific disabilities, such as the following, for which it may make special accommodations, provided the disability severely limits your ability to perform essential skills required to pass the GED test:

- ✔ Medical disabilities, such as cerebral palsy, epilepsy, or blindness
- ✔ Psychological disabilities, such as schizophrenia, major depression, attention deficit disorder, or Tourette's syndrome
- ✔ Specific learning disabilities, including perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia

## Signing up

When you're actually ready to sign up for the test, follow these steps:

### 1. Contact your local GED test administrator to make sure you're eligible.

Refer to the earlier section "Determining whether you're eligible" for some help.

### 2. Ask the office for an application (if needed) or an appointment.

### 3. Complete the application (if needed).

### 4. Return the application to the proper office, with payment, if necessary.

The fees vary state by state, so contact your local administrator or testing site to find out what you have to pay to take the tests. In some states, low-income individuals may be eligible for financial assistance.

**Note:** You can also do all of this online, including submitting the payment, with your computer, tablet, or smartphone. Go to [www.gedtestingservice.com](http://www.gedtestingservice.com) to start the process.



Never send cash by mail to pay for the GED test. Most local administrators have payment rules and don't accept cash.

## *Working with unusual circumstances*

If you feel that you may have a special circumstance that prevents you from taking the GED test on a given day, contact the GED test administrator in your area. If, for example, the test is going to be held on your Sabbath, the testing center may make special arrangements for you.



When applying for special circumstances, keep the following guidelines in mind:

- ✓ Document everything in your appeal for special consideration.
- ✓ Contact the GED test administrator in your area as early as you can.
- ✓ Be patient. Special arrangements can't be made overnight. The administrator often has to wait for a group with similar issues to gather so he can make arrangements for the entire group.
- ✓ Ask questions. Accommodations can be made if you ask. For example, special allowances include extended time for various disabilities, large print and Braille for visual impairments, and considerations for age (for individuals older than 60 who feel they may have a learning disability).

## *Taking the GED Test When English Isn't Your First Language*

English doesn't have to be your first language for you to take the GED test. The GED test is offered in English, Spanish, and French. If you want to take the test in Spanish or French, contact your local GED test administrator to apply. Individuals who speak other languages as their first language, however, must do the test in English. If you're in that category, the GED Testing Service recommends that you take an English as a Second Language (ESL) competency test before taking the GED test.



If English, Spanish, or French isn't your first language, you must decide whether you can read and write English as well as or better than 40 percent of high-school graduates because you may be required to pass an English as a Second Language (ESL) placement test. If you write and read English well, prepare for and take the test (either in English or in Spanish or French). If you don't read or write English well, take additional classes to improve your language skills until you think you're ready. An English Language Proficiency Test (ELPT) is also available for people who completed their education in other countries. For more information about the language component of the GED test, check out [www.gedtestingervice.com/testers/special-test-editions-spanish](http://www.gedtestingervice.com/testers/special-test-editions-spanish) and [www.gedtestingervice.com/testers/special-test-editions-french](http://www.gedtestingervice.com/testers/special-test-editions-french).

In many ways, the GED test is like the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) comprehension test. If you've completed the TOEFL test with good grades, you're likely ready to take the GED test. If you haven't taken the TOEFL test, enroll in a GED test-preparation course to see whether you have difficulty understanding the subjects and skills assessed on the test. GED test courses provide you with some insight into your comprehension ability, along with a teacher to discuss your skills and struggles.

## Websites that can help you plan to take the GED test

The Internet is a helpful and sometimes scary place. Some websites are there to help you in your GED test preparation, while others just want to sell you something. You have to know how to separate the good from the bad. Here are a couple of essential ones (most are accessible through [www.gedtestingservice.com](http://www.gedtestingservice.com)):

- ✓ [adulted.about.com/od/gettingyourged/a/statedged.htm](http://adulted.about.com/od/gettingyourged/a/statedged.htm) is a website that links to the GED test eligibility requirements and testing locations in your state.
- ✓ [usaeducation.info/Tests/GED/International-students.aspx](http://usaeducation.info/Tests/GED/International-students.aspx) is a site that explains GED test eligibility for foreign students.

If you're curious and want to see what's out there, type "GED test" into any search engine and relax while you try to read about 22 million results, ranging from the helpful to the helpless. We suggest leaving this last activity until after you've passed the tests. As useful as the Internet can be, it still provides the opportunity to waste vast amounts of time. And right now, you need to spend your time preparing for the test — and leave the rest for after you get your diploma.

## Taking Aim at Your Target Score

To pass the GED Social Studies test, you need to score a minimum of 150 on a scale of 100 to 200, and you must pass all other subjects of the test to earn your GED. If you achieve a passing score, congratulate yourself: You've scored better than at least 40 percent of today's high-school graduates, and you're now a graduate of the largest virtual school in the country. And if your marks are in the honors range (score of 170 or more), you're ready for college or career training.



Be aware that some colleges require scores higher than the minimum passing score. If you plan to apply to postsecondary schools or some other form of continuing education, check with their admissions offices for the minimum admission score requirements.

The following sections address a few more points you may want to know about how the GED test is scored and what you can do if you score poorly on one or more of the test sections.

### *Identifying how scores are determined*

Correct answers may be worth one, two, or more points, depending on the item and the level of difficulty. The Extended Response (also known as the essay) is scored separately. However, the Extended Response is only part of the RLA and Social Studies sections. On each test section, you must accumulate a minimum of 150 points.



Because you don't lose points for incorrect answers, make sure you answer all the items on each test. After all, a guessed answer can get you a point. Leaving an answer blank, on the other hand, guarantees you a zero. The information and practice in this book provides you with the knowledge and skills you need to answer most questions on the Social Studies section with confidence and to narrow your choices when you're not quite sure which answer choice is correct.

## *Knowing what to do if you score poorly on one or more tests*

If you discover that your score on the GED Social Studies test is less than 150, start planning to retake the test — and make sure you leave plenty of time for additional study and preparation.



As soon as possible after obtaining your results, contact your local GED test administrator to find out the rules for retaking the failed section of the test. Some states may ask that you wait a certain amount of time and/or limit the number of attempts each year. Some may ask that you attend a preparation course and show that you've completed it before you can retake the GED test. Some may charge you an additional fee. However, you need to retake only those sections of the test that you failed. Any sections you pass are completed and count toward your diploma. Furthermore, the detailed evaluation of your results will help you discover areas of weakness that need more work before repeating any section of the test.

One advantage of taking the GED test on a computer is that you can receive, within a day, detailed feedback on how you did, which includes some specific recommendations of what you need to do to improve your scores.

No matter what score you receive on your first round of the section, don't be afraid to retake any section that you didn't pass. After you've taken it once, you know what you need to work on, and you know exactly what to expect on test day.