

World History Final Exam Review

Everything on a typical World History final, one unit at a time: the facts, causes and effects you need, the mix-ups that cost the most points, and three practice questions per unit with answers. Start with the quick checks to find your weak units, then use the linked lessons and the timeline to fix them.

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What’s on the World History final

Most World History courses that start in ancient times reach the Age of Exploration, around 1500 to 1600, by December, so the first semester covers early civilizations through exploration and the second covers revolutions, industrialization, the world wars and the Cold War. Many grade 10 courses, often called Modern World History, start around 1500 or later and spend the whole year on the Semester 2 units instead. Check your syllabus and study the units your class actually covered.

Unit	Usually on	Lessons
1. Early civilizations: Mesopotamia & Egypt	Semester 1	Ancient Egypt
2. Ancient Greece & Rome	Semester 1	Ancient Greece, Ancient Rome
3. The Middle Ages	Semester 1	Covered here
4. Renaissance & Reformation	Semester 1	The Renaissance
5. The Age of Exploration	Semester 1	The Age of Exploration
6. Revolutions & the Industrial Revolution	Semester 2	Covered here
7. World War I	Semester 2	World War I
8. World War II & the Holocaust	Semester 2	World War II, The Holocaust
9. The Cold War	Semester 2	The Cold War

A two-week study plan

DAY 14

Find your weak units

Do the quick checks for all 9 units without notes. Mark each unit solid, shaky or lost. This tells you where your study time goes.

DAYS 13–6

Fix the lost and shaky units, one a day

Start with the units you marked lost, then shaky. For each one, read the must-know list, work through the linked lesson, and redo that unit's quick checks until you get all three right.

DAYS 5–3

Mixed practice

Finals mix eras and topics together, so practice that way: answer quick checks from different units in random order, and explain how events connect across units.

DAY 2

Timeline and key terms

Put the major events of each unit in order on a timeline, and say each key term and person out loud with why they matter.

DAY 1

Light review and sleep

Redo only the questions you missed before. Then stop: a full night of sleep helps your memory more than a late cram session.

UNIT 1 • SEMESTER 1

Early civilizations: Mesopotamia & Egypt

MUST KNOW

- Farming (the Neolithic Revolution) let people settle down. The first civilizations grew in river valleys, where floods left fertile soil and extra food let people take on specialized jobs.
- A civilization has cities, an organized government, religion, social classes, specialized workers, writing, and art and architecture.
- Mesopotamia, "the land between the rivers," lay between the Tigris and Euphrates in the Fertile Crescent. The Sumerians built city-states, ziggurat temples and the earliest known writing, cuneiform, pressed into clay.
- Hammurabi's Code (Babylon, about 1750 BCE) was one of the first written law codes: "an eye for an eye," with punishments that depended on social class.
- Egypt depended on the Nile, whose floods came at about the same time every year. Pharaohs ruled as god-kings, pyramids served as their tombs, and Egyptians believed in many gods and an afterlife, which is why they mummified the dead.
- Egyptians wrote in hieroglyphics. The Rosetta Stone, found in 1799, carried the same text in hieroglyphics and Greek, which let scholars decode the script.

COMMON MISTAKES

- Mixing up the writing systems. Cuneiform (wedge-shaped marks on clay) was Mesopotamian; hieroglyphics (picture symbols) were Egyptian.
- Mixing up the rivers. Mesopotamia had the Tigris and Euphrates, whose floods were hard to predict; Egypt had the Nile, whose floods were regular and predictable.

QUICK CHECK

1.1 Why did the first civilizations develop in river valleys?

1.2 What was Hammurabi's Code, and why did writing laws down matter?

1.3 How did the Rosetta Stone help historians?

UNIT 2 · SEMESTER 1

Ancient Greece & Rome

MUST KNOW

- Greece was made up of independent city-states. Athens developed direct democracy, where citizens voted on laws themselves, but only free adult men were citizens; Sparta was a military state.
- The Greeks united to defeat Persia (Marathon, 490 BCE; Salamis, 480 BCE), then fought each other in the Peloponnesian War (431 to 404 BCE), which Sparta won. Socrates, Plato and Aristotle shaped Western philosophy.
- Alexander the Great conquered an empire from Greece to India and spread Greek culture, starting the Hellenistic period.
- Rome went from monarchy to republic (509 BCE) to empire. The republic had two elected consuls, a Senate and citizen assemblies, and plebeians won written laws, the Twelve Tables.
- Julius Caesar became dictator and was assassinated in 44 BCE. His adopted heir Augustus became the first emperor in 27 BCE and began the Pax Romana, about 200 years of relative peace.
- The Western Roman Empire fell in 476 CE from invasions, economic trouble and weak, unstable government. The Eastern (Byzantine) Empire lasted until 1453. Rome left behind Latin, law, roads, aqueducts and the spread of Christianity.

COMMON MISTAKES

- Calling Athens a republic or Rome a direct democracy. Athens had direct democracy (citizens vote on laws); the Roman Republic had representatives (citizens elect officials who govern).
- Saying Julius Caesar was the first Roman emperor. He was dictator; Augustus was the first emperor.
- Saying all of Rome fell in 476 CE. Only the Western Empire fell then; the Byzantine Empire lasted almost another thousand years.

QUICK CHECK

2.1 How was Athenian democracy different from democracy in the United States today?

2.2 Why did Roman plebeians demand the Twelve Tables?

2.3 Give two causes of the fall of the Western Roman Empire.

UNIT 3 · SEMESTER 1

The Middle Ages

MUST KNOW

- Feudalism filled the gap left by Rome: kings and lords granted land (fiefs) to vassals in exchange for loyalty and military service. Under manorialism, serfs worked a lord's land in return for protection.
- The Roman Catholic Church was the most powerful institution in Western Europe. Monasteries preserved learning, and the pope crowned Charlemagne emperor in 800.
- The Byzantine Empire kept Roman law alive in Justinian's Code. In 1054 the Great Schism split Christianity into the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches.
- Islam began in Arabia in the early 600s with the prophet Muhammad and spread quickly. Muslim scholars, as in Baghdad, preserved Greek learning and advanced math, medicine and astronomy.
- The Crusades (starting in 1096) were Christian campaigns to take the Holy Land. They did not hold it for long but increased trade and contact with the Muslim world.
- The Magna Carta (1215) made the English king subject to the law. The Black Death (1347 to 1351) killed roughly a third or more of Europe's people and weakened feudalism.

COMMON MISTAKES

- Mixing up feudalism and manorialism. Feudalism is the political and military deal between lords and vassals; manorialism is the economic system of the manor, where serfs farmed the land.
- Saying the Magna Carta created democracy. It mainly protected the rights of nobles, but it set the idea that even the king must obey the law.

QUICK CHECK

3.1 Describe the relationship between a lord and a vassal.

3.2 How did the Black Death weaken feudalism?

3.3 Why is the Magna Carta important to later governments?

Renaissance & Reformation

MUST KNOW

- The Renaissance ("rebirth") began in Italian city-states such as Florence, fueled by trade wealth, rich patrons like the Medici family, and Roman ruins close at hand.
- Humanism revived Greek and Roman learning and focused on human potential and this life. Artists such as Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo used linear perspective and anatomy to make art look real.
- Gutenberg's printing press with movable type (about 1440) made books cheaper and spread ideas much faster.
- In 1517, Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses attacking the sale of indulgences. He taught that salvation comes through faith alone and that the Bible, not the pope, is the highest authority. His followers became Protestants.
- John Calvin taught predestination in Geneva. Henry VIII broke with Rome and made himself head of the Church of England (1534) after the pope refused to annul his marriage.
- The Catholic Church answered with the Counter-Reformation: the Council of Trent reformed abuses and restated Catholic beliefs, and the Jesuits spread Catholic education and missions.

COMMON MISTAKES

- Saying Luther set out to start a new church. He wanted to reform the Catholic Church; the split came after he was excommunicated in 1521.
- Mixing up the Renaissance and the Reformation. The Renaissance was a movement in art and learning; the Reformation was a religious split. The printing press connected them.

QUICK CHECK

4.1 Why did the Renaissance begin in Italy?

4.2 What practice did Martin Luther attack in the 95 Theses?

4.3 How did the printing press help the Reformation spread?

The Age of Exploration

MUST KNOW

- Europeans explored for "God, gold and glory": spreading Christianity, getting rich, and finding a sea route to Asian spices that avoided Muslim and Italian middlemen.
- New technology made long voyages possible: the caravel, the magnetic compass and the astrolabe. Portugal's Prince Henry the Navigator sponsored early voyages along Africa.
- Portugal reached Asia by sailing around Africa (Dias rounded the Cape of Good Hope in 1488; da Gama reached India in 1498). Columbus, sailing for Spain, reached the Americas in 1492, and Magellan's expedition first sailed around the world (1519 to 1522).
- Spanish conquistadors conquered the Aztec Empire (Cortés, 1521) and the Inca Empire (Pizarro, 1530s). Diseases like smallpox killed most of the Native population.
- The Columbian Exchange moved plants, animals and diseases both ways: corn, potatoes and tomatoes went to Europe; horses, cattle, wheat and smallpox came to the Americas.
- As Native populations collapsed, Europeans turned to the Atlantic slave trade, forcing millions of Africans across the ocean on the Middle Passage to work on plantations.

COMMON MISTAKES

- Reversing the Columbian Exchange. Horses and cattle came from Europe to the Americas; corn and potatoes went from the Americas to Europe.
- Saying conquistadors won mainly because of guns. Disease killed far more people, and thousands of Native allies who opposed the Aztecs fought alongside Cortés.

QUICK CHECK

5.1 Name one item that went from the Americas to Europe and one that went from Europe to the Americas.

5.2 Why did Europeans want an all-water route to Asia?

5.3 What caused most of the deaths among Native peoples after 1492?

Revolutions & the Industrial Revolution

MUST KNOW

- Enlightenment thinkers used reason to question old authority: Locke (natural rights to life, liberty and property; government by consent), Montesquieu (separation of powers), Rousseau (the social contract) and Voltaire (freedom of speech and religion).
- The French Revolution began in 1789. Causes included government debt, an unfair tax burden on the Third Estate, high bread prices and Enlightenment ideas. The storming of the Bastille (July 14, 1789) and the Declaration of the Rights of Man followed.
- The revolution turned radical in the Reign of Terror (1793 to 1794) under Robespierre. Napoleon seized power in 1799, crowned himself emperor in 1804, spread the Napoleonic Code, and was finally defeated at Waterloo in 1815.
- Revolutions spread to Latin America: enslaved people in Haiti rose up in 1791 and, led at first by Toussaint Louverture, won independence in 1804. Simón Bolívar later led independence movements in South America.
- The Industrial Revolution began in Britain in the late 1700s. Britain had coal and iron, rivers and ports, money to invest, colonies for markets, and workers pushed off farms. Textiles came first, then the steam engine improved by James Watt.
- Industry brought fast-growing cities, factory work, child labor and pollution. Responses included labor unions and reform laws, capitalism (Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, 1776) and socialism and communism (Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 1848).

COMMON MISTAKES

- Mixing up Locke and Montesquieu. Locke wrote about natural rights and consent of the governed; Montesquieu argued for separating power into branches.
- Saying the Industrial Revolution started in the United States. It started in Britain and spread to Europe and the U.S. later.
- Getting the order wrong: American Revolution (1775 to 1783), then the French Revolution (1789), then the Haitian Revolution (1791 to 1804), then most Latin American independence wars (1810s and 1820s).

QUICK CHECK

6.1 Why did the Industrial Revolution begin in Britain?

6.2 Who was the Third Estate, and why were they angry in 1789?

6.3 What idea did Montesquieu contribute to modern government?

UNIT 7 • SEMESTER 2

World War I

MUST KNOW

- Long-term causes: militarism, alliances, imperialism and nationalism (M.A.I.N.). The immediate trigger was the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to Austria-Hungary's throne, in Sarajevo on June 28, 1914.
- The Allies (France, Britain, Russia, later Italy and the U.S.) fought the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria).
- On the Western Front, trench warfare caused years of stalemate. Machine guns, poison gas, tanks, airplanes and submarines made the war deadlier than any before it; battles like Verdun and the Somme (1916) cost hundreds of thousands of lives.
- In 1917 the Russian Revolution brought Lenin's Bolsheviks to power, and Russia left the war in 1918. The United States entered in 1917, and the fighting ended with the armistice of November 11, 1918.
- The Treaty of Versailles (1919) forced Germany to accept blame for the war, pay reparations, give up land and colonies, and limit its military. It also created the League of Nations.
- Four empires collapsed: the German, Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman and Russian. Many Ottoman lands in the Middle East became mandates run by Britain and France.

COMMON MISTAKES

- Treating the assassination as the only cause. It was the spark; the M.A.I.N. causes explain why one murder became a world war.
- Saying Franz Ferdinand was German. He was the heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary.

QUICK CHECK

7.1 How did the alliance system turn a regional conflict into a world war?

7.2 Why did the Western Front become a stalemate?

7.3 Name two ways the Treaty of Versailles punished Germany.

World War II & the Holocaust

MUST KNOW

- Causes: anger over Versailles, the Great Depression, and the rise of totalitarian dictators (Mussolini in Italy, Hitler in Germany from 1933, Stalin in the Soviet Union) and of military rulers in Japan, which invaded Manchuria in 1931.
- Britain and France tried appeasement at Munich (1938). After the Nazi-Soviet Pact (August 1939), Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, using blitzkrieg ("lightning war"). France fell in 1940, and Germany invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941.
- The Axis Powers (Germany, Italy, Japan) fought the Allies (Britain, France, the Soviet Union from 1941, the United States from December 1941, China and others).
- Turning points: Midway (1942) in the Pacific and Stalingrad (1942 to 1943) in the east. The Allies landed at Normandy on D-Day (June 6, 1944); Germany surrendered in May 1945 and Japan in August 1945 after the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.
- The Holocaust was the systematic murder of six million Jews by Nazi Germany, which also killed Roma, disabled people and others. Persecution escalated step by step: laws like the Nuremberg Laws (1935), Kristallnacht (1938), ghettos, mass shootings, then death camps such as Auschwitz.
- After the war, the Nuremberg Trials held Nazi leaders responsible for crimes against humanity, the United Nations was founded (1945), and the U.S. and the Soviet Union emerged as superpowers.

COMMON MISTAKES

- Thinking the Holocaust began with the death camps. It built up over years, from laws and boycotts to violence, ghettos and mass shootings, before the death camps.
- Mixing up the sides. The Axis was Germany, Italy and Japan; the Soviet Union fought with the Allies after Germany invaded it in 1941.
- Calling Pearl Harbor a turning point. It brought the U.S. into the war; the turning points were victories like Midway and Stalingrad.

QUICK CHECK

8.1 Why did the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939 matter?

8.2 Why is the Battle of Stalingrad considered a turning point?

8.3 What did the Nuremberg Trials establish?

The Cold War

MUST KNOW

- The Cold War (1947 to 1991) pitted the U.S. (democracy and capitalism) against the Soviet Union (communism and one-party rule). It was "cold" because the two never fought each other directly; Churchill said an "iron curtain" had divided Europe.
- The U.S. followed containment: the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan, the Berlin Airlift (1948 to 1949) and NATO (1949). The Soviets formed the Warsaw Pact (1955).
- Communists led by Mao Zedong won China's civil war in 1949. The superpowers backed opposite sides in proxy wars in Korea (1950 to 1953), Vietnam (ended with a communist victory in 1975) and Afghanistan.
- The nuclear arms race led to mutually assured destruction (MAD). The Cuban Missile Crisis (1962) brought the world closest to nuclear war, and the Space Race ran from Sputnik (1957) to the Moon landing (1969).
- After World War II, many colonies in Asia and Africa won independence, such as India in 1947 after Gandhi's nonviolent campaign.
- Gorbachev's reforms, glasnost (openness) and perestroika (economic restructuring), opened up the Soviet system. The Berlin Wall fell in 1989, and the Soviet Union dissolved in 1991.

COMMON MISTAKES

- Dating the Berlin Wall to the Berlin Airlift. The airlift was in 1948 to 1949; the wall went up in 1961 and fell in 1989.
- Mixing up NATO and the Warsaw Pact. NATO was the U.S.-led Western alliance; the Warsaw Pact was the Soviet-led alliance in Eastern Europe.
- Swapping glasnost and perestroika. Glasnost means openness, more freedom of speech; perestroika means restructuring the economy.

QUICK CHECK

9.1 What was the purpose of the Marshall Plan?

9.2 What is a proxy war? Give an example.

9.3 How did Gorbachev's reforms help end the Cold War?

Answer key

Unit 1: Early civilizations: Mesopotamia & Egypt

1.1 Rivers gave water for crops, floods left fertile soil, and the rivers served as highways for trade. Extra food let some people stop farming and become priests, artisans and rulers.

1.2 An early written law code from Babylon. Written laws let people know the rules and punishments ahead of time instead of depending on a ruler's mood.

1.3 It had the same message in hieroglyphics and Greek. Because scholars could read the Greek, they could work out the hieroglyphics and finally read Egyptian records.

Unit 2: Ancient Greece & Rome

2.1 Athens used direct democracy, where citizens voted on every law, and only free adult men could take part. The U.S. is a representative democracy with far broader citizenship.

2.2 Before they were written down, laws were known only to patrician officials, who could interpret them unfairly. Published laws applied to everyone.

2.3 Any two: invasions by Germanic peoples, economic problems such as heavy taxes and inflation, unstable leadership and civil wars, and an empire too large to defend.

Unit 3: The Middle Ages

3.1 The lord gave the vassal land (a fief) and protection; the vassal gave the lord loyalty and military service.

3.2 So many people died that workers were scarce. Surviving peasants could demand wages or leave the manor, which loosened the ties that held serfs to the land.

3.3 It established that the ruler is not above the law, an idea later built into the English Bill of Rights and the U.S. Constitution.

Unit 4: Renaissance & Reformation

4.1 Italian city-states were rich from trade, wealthy patrons paid for art and learning, and ancient Roman ruins and texts were close at hand.

4.2 The sale of indulgences, payments that the Church said would reduce punishment for sins.

4.3 Luther's writings and Bibles in everyday languages could be printed quickly and cheaply, so his ideas reached thousands of readers before the Church could stop them.

Unit 5: The Age of Exploration

5.1 Americas to Europe: corn, potatoes, tomatoes or cacao. Europe to the Americas: horses, cattle, pigs, wheat or smallpox.

5.2 Spices and silk came overland through Muslim and Italian traders, who raised the price at every step. A sea route meant buying directly and keeping the profit.

5.3 Diseases such as smallpox and measles, which Native peoples had never been exposed to and had no immunity against.

Unit 6: Revolutions & the Industrial Revolution

6.1 It had plenty of coal and iron, rivers and ports for transport, money to invest, colonies as markets, and a supply of workers moving from farms to towns.

6.2 Everyone who was not clergy or nobility, the vast majority of the French people. They paid most of the taxes but could be outvoted by the other two estates in the Estates-General.

6.3 Separation of powers: dividing government into legislative, executive and judicial branches so no one group holds all power.

Unit 7: World War I

7.1 When Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia, Russia backed Serbia, Germany backed Austria-Hungary, and France and Britain were drawn in, so within weeks most of Europe was at war.

7.2 Machine guns, artillery and barbed wire made defense far stronger than attack, so armies dug trenches and charges across no man's land gained little ground.

7.3 Any two: the war guilt clause, heavy reparations, loss of territory and all its colonies, and strict limits on its army and navy.

Unit 8: World War II & the Holocaust

8.1 It promised the Soviet Union would not fight Germany, so Hitler could invade Poland without facing a war on two fronts. The two powers secretly agreed to divide Poland.

8.2 A whole German army was destroyed and surrendered in early 1943, and after that the Soviet army mostly pushed Germany back toward Berlin.

8.3 That individual leaders can be tried and punished for crimes against humanity, and that "following orders" is not a defense.

Unit 9: The Cold War

9.1 To rebuild Western Europe's economies after World War II with American aid, so that poverty would not make communism attractive.

9.2 A war where the superpowers back opposite sides instead of fighting each other directly. Examples: Korea, Vietnam or the Soviet war in Afghanistan.

9.3 Glasnost let people criticize the government and perestroika loosened the economy. Without force to hold it together, Eastern Europe broke away in 1989 and the Soviet Union dissolved in 1991.