Readyward
Make up ground, intelligently.

AP Human Geography

FREE LAST-MINUTE CHEAT SHEET

Read a unit, cover it, then explain one concept with an example. This is a selective refresher, not full exam preparation.

01 Thinking geographically

Regions: formal = shared measurable trait; functional = organized around a node; perceptual = shared impressions.

Scale: a large-scale map shows a smaller area in greater detail. Analysis scale = local, regional, national, or global.

Spatial tools: GIS analyzes spatial layers; GPS locates; remote sensing collects remotely. Every projection distorts.

Possibilism: environments constrain; people adapt. Distance decay: interaction weakens with distance.

02 Population & migration

Density: arithmetic = people / total land; physiological = people / arable land; agricultural = farmers / arable land.

Natural increase (%): (crude birth rate - crude death rate) / 10, for rates per 1,000; excludes migration.

DTM: 1: high births/deaths; 2: deaths fall, rapid growth; 3: births fall, growth slows; 4: both low; proposed 5: births below deaths. Broad pyramid base = many young people.

Migration: push drives away; pull attracts. Forced = compelled; chain = follows social connections.

03 Culture & diffusion

Relocation: migrants carry a trait. **Expansion:** a trait spreads from its origin.

Expansion types: contagious = person-to-person spread; hierarchical = via influential people/places; stimulus = an idea spreads in adapted form.

Religion: universalizing religions seek converts; ethnic religions are tied to a people/place.

Culture changes: acculturation adopts traits; assimilation loses distinct identity; syncretism blends traditions.

04 Politics & territory

State: sovereign political territory. **Nation:** people with shared identity. Multinational = multiple nations in one state; stateless nation = no sovereign state of its own.

Forces: centripetal unifies; centrifugal divides. Devolution transfers central power to regions.

Governance: unitary = central authority; federal = national/regional division of power.

Boundaries: antecedent predates major settlement; superimposed = externally imposed; relict = obsolete but visible. Gerrymandering shapes districts for political advantage.

Land use & development

05 Agriculture & rural land

Subsistence vs. commercial: household food vs. sales. Intensive = more labor/capital per area; extensive = larger areas, fewer inputs per area.

Von Thunen: market outward: dairy/market gardening, forest, grains/field crops, ranching. Perishability/transport shape rings. Assumes uniform land, one market.

Green Revolution: high-yield seeds, irrigation, chemical inputs boost output; can raise costs, inequality, environmental damage.

Land surveys: township-and-range = grid; metes-and-bounds = irregular landmarks; long-lot = strips along a river/road.

06 Cities & urban land

Urbanization: rising urban population share. Suburbanization moves functions/people outward; gentrification brings investment/wealthier residents and possible displacement.

Urban models: Burgess = concentric rings; Hoyt = sectors; Harris-Ullman = multiple nuclei. Simplified patterns, not universal layouts.

Rank-size: nth city population is about largest city / n. Primate city = urban dominance; megacity = at least 10 million people.

Central place: threshold = customers needed; range = travel distance. Sprawl can increase car dependence/infrastructure costs.

07 Industry & development

Sectors: primary = extraction; secondary = manufacturing; tertiary = services; quaternary = information/research; quinary = top decisions.

Measures: GDP = domestic production; GNI = resident income; HDI = health, education, income. Averages hide inequality.

Models: Rostow = stages toward mass consumption; Wallerstein = unequal core/semiperiphery/periphery relations; dependency = reliance on dominant economies.

Location: Weber = transport, labor, agglomeration (clustering benefits). Offshoring = abroad; outsourcing = another company.

Apply it on the exam

Format: 60 multiple-choice questions / 60 minutes / 50%; 3 free-response questions / 75 minutes / 50%. Fully digital in Bluebook. Unit 1 = 8-10% of MCQs; each other unit = 12-17%.

Maps/data: check the legend, units, date, and geographic scale. Name a pattern and cite specific evidence; association alone does not prove causation.

Free response: identify = name; describe = give traits; explain = show how/why. Answer each labeled part. Connect the concept to the given place, data, or scenario.

Sources & scope: College Board course/CED and exam guidance. Geography reference: People, Places, and Cultures, R. Huston / R. A. Dastrup, CC BY 4.0; definitions condensed and rephrased. Reviewed Oct. 12, 2026.
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