

Planning to Build: Unpacking USHC 1 for Assessment and Instruction

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When designing instruction aligned to the U.S. History EOCEP, the first and most important move is to understand the historical thinking required by the standard, not just what content it includes, but what historical thinking it requires students to demonstrate. For Standard 1 of the 2019 South Carolina Social Studies College-and-Career Ready Standards (SCSSCCR), that intent is deeply connected to the development of American Republicanism and federalism through the lens of the Atlantic World.

But identifying the historical thinking is only the beginning. To design coherent, evidence-centered instruction, teachers should intentionally connect:

- the indicator's Historical Thinking Skill,
- a high-leverage instructional anchor,
- the required Depth of Knowledge (DOK),
- the essential content identified in the South Carolina U.S. History Alignment Guide,
- the Performance Level Descriptors (PLDs), and
- the EOCEP item types students will encounter.

This article demonstrates how these planning components work together to transform a U.S. History standard into coherent, evidence-centered instruction and assessment.

Step 1: Identify the Historical Thinking Skill

Each USHC indicator includes a code such as “CC,” “CX,” “CE,” or “P,” or “E.” These represent the historical thinking skill the student is expected to use:

- CO = Comparison
- CE = Causation
- P = Periodization
- CX = Contextualization
- CC = Continuities and Changes
- E = Evidence

Note: All six historical thinking skills are represented in the indicators within Standard 1. While this module provides deeper examples for a few, teachers should plan to engage with the full range of skills, each of which reflects a distinct type of student reasoning and task complexity.

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Understanding these skills helps determine both the instructional focus and the type of reasoning students must demonstrate.

For example:

- A **CO** indicator emphasizes comparing developments across regions or eras.
- A **CE** task will center on relationships between causes and effects.
- A **P** task focuses on defining and evaluating historical eras and turning points.
- A **CX** indicator will expect students to explain how historical developments fit into broader historical contexts.
- A **CC** indicator requires students to analyze how things change or stay the same across time.
- An **E** indicator will involve analyzing and drawing conclusions from primary and/or secondary sources.

Example: USHC.1.CX asks students to contextualize the development of republican ideas within the Atlantic World. This isn't a recall task, it requires identifying conditions, influences, and relationships.

Historical thinking determines the type of reasoning students must develop. Every planning decision that follows should intentionally support that thinking.

Step 2: Select an Instructional Anchor

An instructional anchor is the central organizing focus for learning. It provides coherence by connecting historical thinking, content, instruction, and assessment around a meaningful historical idea. After identifying the historical thinking required by the indicator, select an instructional anchor that organizes learning around that thinking. A well-chosen instructional anchor helps students investigate meaningful historical questions, developments, and ideas while creating coherence across instruction and assessment.

Depending on the indicator, an instructional anchor might be:

- a turning point
- a historical development
- a compelling historical question
- a historical problem
- a recurring theme
- a constitutional principle

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- a case study

Planning Tip: Choose the instructional anchor before designing learning experiences or selecting instructional strategies. The anchor gives purpose to every lesson, source, discussion, and assessment.

Step 3: Determine the Required DOK

Next, consider what **Depth of Knowledge (DOK)** is required by the indicator:

Remember that DOK describes the cognitive demand of the task rather than its level of difficulty.

- DOK 1: Recall facts, names, or dates
- DOK 2: Classify, summarize, compare, or interpret
- DOK 3: Reason, justify, analyze cause/effect, or evaluate multiple sources

Planning Tip: Most EOCEP items require students to demonstrate DOK 2 or DOK 3 thinking. Plan learning experiences that give students repeated opportunities to practice that level of reasoning before they encounter it on an assessment.

Step 4: Use PLDs to Guide Instruction

The Performance Level Descriptors (PLDs) describe what it looks like when a student:

- **Does Not Meet**
- **Minimally Meets**
- **Meets**
- **Exceeds** expectations on a particular indicator

PLDs help you:

- Write learning targets
- Differentiate through supports and scaffolds.
- Give feedback with precision

PLDs should guide instructional planning from the beginning of a lesson, not simply be used to evaluate performance at the end.

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Example: For USHC.1.CC, a student who *Meets* expectations can describe and explain the evolution of debates over the proper role of the central government and neutrality in foreign affairs from 1789 to 1815. Students demonstrating increasingly sophisticated historical reasoning might analyze continuities and changes in those debates using evidence and multistep thinking to draw conclusions about turning points such as the development of the Two-Party System, the Alien and Sedition Acts, the Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions, and the Election of 1800.

Planning Tip: Consult the SC Alignment Guide to identify the specific historical content associated with each indicator. This ensures that your lesson focuses on the right events, developments, and concepts.

Step 5: Design Coherent Instruction

Once you've identified the historical thinking, selected an instructional anchor, examined the DOK expectations, identified the essential content in the South Carolina U.S. History Alignment Guide, and considered the PLDs, you're ready to design coherent instruction.

Ask:

- What historical thinking do I want students to demonstrate?
- What instructional anchor will best organize that thinking?
- What content supports that thinking?
- What level of complexity is required?
- What assessment evidence will best demonstrate this historical thinking?

Example: Unpacking a Standard

Indicator: USHC.1.CX

Contextualize significant republican developments within North America's connection to the Atlantic world.

- **Historical Thinking Skill:** Contextualization
- **Instructional Anchor:** Compelling Question: How did English political traditions influence the development of American republicanism?
- **Content Focus:** Mayflower Compact (from SC Alignment Guide)
- **DOK:** 2–3

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- **Possible Learning Experience:** Analyze excerpts from the Mayflower Compact alongside selections from the English Bill of Rights and John Locke to investigate how English political traditions influenced colonial self-government.
- **Possible Assessment Evidence:** Evidence-Based Selected Response comparing the influence of English political traditions and Enlightenment ideas on the development of American republicanism.
- **Intended Student Thinking:** Explain how English political traditions influenced the development of American republicanism by placing the Mayflower Compact within its broader Atlantic context.

PLD-Aligned Learning Progression:

- **Developing Toward Proficiency:** Explain the purpose of the Mayflower Compact as an early form of colonial self-government.
- **Meeting Expectations:** Describe how the Mayflower Compact was influenced by British political traditions such as common law and representative government.
- **Increasingly Sophisticated Historical Reasoning:** Contextualize the Mayflower Compact by analyzing its connection to British traditions and Enlightenment ideas, and comparing it to other colonial developments. Use evidence and multistep reasoning to justify how it reflects early American republicanism.

How Students Build Historical Reasoning

Sophisticated historical reasoning develops through intentionally sequenced thinking rather than a single complex question. One possible progression for a contextualization task looks like this:

1. Identify the core ideas in the document.
2. Analyze connections to British and Enlightenment political thought.
3. Compare it with other colonial developments.
4. Synthesize these ideas into a coherent claim about American political identity.
5. Use primary and/or secondary sources to support claims.
6. Draw a conclusion about how the development contributed to the evolution of American republicanism.

This is not just a deeper question; it is a scaffolded intellectual task that mirrors EOCEP expectations.

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Quick Recap of Planning Steps

Use the following five-step planning process whenever you unpack a U.S. History indicator.

1. **Identify the Thinking Skill** – What kind of reasoning does the indicator require? (e.g. Contextualization)
2. **Select an Instructional Anchor** – What organizing approach will best help students develop that historical thinking?
3. **Determine the Required DOK**– Is this a DOK 1 recall task or DOK 2-3 reasoning task?
4. **Use the PLDs to Guide Instruction** – What does it look like when a student does not meet, meets, or exceeds expectations, and how will you use that information to plan supports?
5. **Design Coherent Instruction** – How will historical thinking, content, assessment, and differentiation work together to support student learning?

Final Thought

When planning begins with historical thinking, every instructional decision becomes more intentional. Historical thinking, instructional anchors, content, instruction, assessment, differentiation, and purposeful instructional strategies work together to create coherent learning experiences that help students think like historians. Planning to build means constructing coherent, evidence-centered instruction that begins with intentional unpacking and ends with students equipped to reason, communicate, and think like historians.