AP Human Geography Unit 1 Notes: Thinking Geographically

There's a huge amount of information to digest as you prepare for the AP Human Geography Exam. We've compiled concise unit summaries and key terms to help you organize your thoughts and prepare for the AP Human Geography test. Read on for our summary and key terms for AP Human Geography Unit 1.

AP Human Geography Unit 1 Summary

Human geography is the study of human activities on Earth's surface. Since the first scholars began studying geography some 3,000 years ago, the field has matured into an important and wide-ranging area of academic and applied research. One thing that binds all geographers together is the spatial perspective. Looking at Earth from a spatial perspective means looking at how objects, processes, and patterns change over the earth's surface. Geographers describe these variations by creating visual representations of spatial data in the form of maps. All maps are based on a projection. They have a characteristic scale and resolution. All maps use symbols to depict spatial information. Geographers use a diverse set of concepts, tools, technologies, and mathematical equations to study places, regions, and the processes that link them. In general, places that are closer to each other in absolute distance tend to interact more. However, the interaction among places is also determined by the size of each place, their level of connectivity, and the diffusion processes that carry information and cultural traditions from one place to another.

AP Human Geography Unit 1 Key Terms

- **Absolute distance:** A distance that can be measured with a standard unit of length, such as a mile or kilometer.
- **Absolute location:** The exact position of an object or place, measured within the spatial coordinates of a grid system.
- **Accessibility:** The relative ease with which a destination may be reached from some other place.
- **Aggregation:** To come together into a mass, sum, or whole.
- **Anthropogenic:** Human-induced changes on the natural environment.
- **Azimuthal projection:** A map projection in which the plane is the most developable surface.
- **Breaking point:** The outer edge of a city's sphere of influence, used in the law of retail gravitation to describe the area of a city's hinterlands that depend on that city for its retail supplies.
- **Cartograms:** A type of thematic map that transforms space such that the political unit with the greatest value for some type of data is represented by the largest relative area.
- **Cartography:** The theory and practice of making visual representations of Earth's surface in the form of maps.

- **Choropleth map:** A thematic map that uses tones or colors to represent spatial data as average values per unit area.
- **Cognitive map:** An image of a portion of Earth's surface that an individual creates in his or her mind. Cognitive maps can include knowledge of actual locations and relationships among locations as well as personal perceptions and preferences of particular places.
- **Complementarity:** The actual or potential relationship between two places, usually referring to economic interactions.
- **Connectivity:** The degree of economic, social, cultural, or political connection between two places.
- **Contagious diffusion:** The spread of a disease, an innovation, or cultural traits through direct contact with another person or another place.
- **Coordinate system:** A standard grid, composed of lines of latitude and longitude, used to determine the absolute location of any object, place, or feature on Earth's surface.
- **Cultural ecology:** Also called *Nature-Society Geography*, the study of the interactions between societies and the natural environments in which they live.
- **Cultural landscape:** The human-modified natural landscape specifically containing the imprint of a particular culture or society.
- **Distance Decay Effect:** The decrease in interaction between two phenomena, places, or people as the distance between them increases.
- **Dot maps:** Thematic maps that use points to show the precise locations of specific observations or occurrences, such as crimes, car accidents, or births.
- **Earth system science:** A systematic approach to physical geography that looks at the interaction between Earth's physical systems and processes on a global scale.
- **Environmental geography:** The intersection between human and physical geography, which explores the spatial impacts humans have on the physical environment and vice versa.
- **Expansion diffusion:** The spread of ideas, innovations, fashion, or other phenomena to surrounding areas through contact and exchange.
- **Formal region:** Definition of regions based on common themes such as similarities in lan- guage, climate, land use, etc.
- **Friction of distance:** A measure of how much absolute distance affects the interaction between two places.
- **Fuller projection:** A type of map projection that maintains the accurate size and shape of landmasses but completely rearranges direction such that the four cardinal directions— north, south, east, and west—no longer have any meaning.
- **Functional region:** Definition of regions based on common interaction (or function), for example, a boundary line drawn around the circulation of a particular newspaper.
- **Geographic Information Systems (GIS):** A set of computer tools used to capture, store, transform, analyze, and display geographic data.
- **Geographic scale:** The scale at which a geographer analyzes a particular phenomenon—for example, global, national, census tract, neighborhood, etc. Generally, the finer the scale of analysis, the richer the level of detail in the findings.

- **Geoid:** The actual shape of Earth, which is rough and oblate, or slightly squashed. Earth's diameter is longer around the equator than along the north-south meridians.
- **Global Positioning System (GPS):** A set of satellites used to help determine location anywhere on Earth's surface with a portable electronic device.
- **Gravity Model:** A mathematical formula that describes the level of interaction between two places, based on the size of their populations and their distance from each other.
- **Hierarchical diffusion:** A type of diffusion in which something is transmitted between places because of a physical or cultural community between those places.
- **Human geography:** The study of the spatial variation in the patterns and processes related to human activity.
- **International Date Line:** The line of longitude that marks where each new day begins, centered on the 180th meridian.
- **Intervening opportunity:** If one place has a demand for some good or service and two places have a supply of equal price and quality, the supplier closer to the buyer will represent an intervening opportunity, thereby blocking the third from being able to share its supply of goods or services. Intervening opportunities are frequently used because transportation costs usually decrease with proximity.
- **Isoline:** A map line that connects points of equal or very similar values.
- **Large scale:** A relatively small ratio between map units and ground units. Large-scale maps usually have higher resolution and cover much smaller regions than small-scale maps.
- **Latitude:** The angular distance north or south of the equator, defined by lines of latitude or parallels.
- **Law of Retail Gravitation:** A law stating that people will be drawn to larger cities to conduct their business since larger cities have a wider influence on the surrounding hinterlands.
- **Location charts:** On a map, a chart or graph that gives specific statistical information about a particular political unit or jurisdiction.
- **Longitude:** The angular distance east or west of the Prime Meridian, defined by lines of longitude, or meridians.
- **Map projection:** A mathematical method that involves transferring Earth's sphere onto a flat surface. This term can also be used to describe the type of map that results from the process of projecting. All map projections have distortions in area, direction, distance, or shape.
- **Map scale:** The ratio between the size of an area on a map and the actual size of that same area on Earth's surface.
- **Mercator projection:** A true conformal cylindrical map projection, the Mercator projection is particularly useful for navigation since it maintains accurate direction. Mercator projections are famous for their distortion in area that makes landmasses at the poles appear oversized.
- **Meridian:** A line of longitude that runs north-south. All lines of longitude are equal in length and intersect at the poles.

- **Natural landscape:** The physical landscape or environment that has not been affected by human activities.
- **Parallel:** An east-west line of latitude that runs parallel to the equator and that marks distance north or south of the equator.
- **W. D. Pattison:** Geographer who claimed that geography drew from four distinct traditions: the earth-science tradition, the culture-environment tradition, the locational tradition, and the area-analysis tradition.
- **Perceptual region:** Highly individualized definition of regions based on perceived commonalities in culture and landscape.
- **Peters Projection:** An equal-area projection purposely centered on Africa in an attempt to treat all regions of Earth equally.
- **Physical geography:** The realm of geography that studies the structures, processes, distributions, and changes through time of the natural phenomena of Earth's surface.
- **Preference map:** A map that displays individual preferences for certain places.
- **Prime meridian:** An imaginary line passing through the Royal Observatory in Greenwich, England, that marks the 0° line of longitude.
- **Projection:** The system used to transfer locations from Earth's surface to a flat map.
- **Proportional symbols map:** A thematic map in which the size of a chosen symbol—such as a circle or triangle—indicates the relative magnitude of some statistical value for a given geographic region.
- **Ptolemy:** Roman geographer-astronomer, author of Guide to Geography, which included maps containing a grid system of latitude and longitude.
- **Qualitative data:** Data associated with a more humanistic approach to geography, often collected through interviews, empirical observations, or the interpretation of texts, artwork, old maps, and other archives.
- **Quantitative data:** Data associated with mathematical models and statistical techniques used to analyze spatial location and association.
- **Reference map:** A map type that shows reference information for a particular place, making it useful for finding landmarks and for navigation.
- **Region:** A territory that encompasses many places that share similar physical and/or cultural attributes.
- **Regional geography:** The study of geographic regions.
- **Relative distance:** A measure of distance that includes the costs of overcoming the friction of absolute distance separating two places. Relative distance often describes the amount of social, cultural, or economic connectivity between two places.
- **Relative location:** The position of a place relative to the places around it.
- **Relocation diffusion:** The diffusion of ideas, innovations, behaviors, and so on from one place to another through migration.
- **Remote sensing:** The observation and mathematical measurement of Earth's surface using aircraft and satellites. The sensors include photographic images, thermal images, multispectral scanners, and radar images.
- **Resolution:** A map's smallest discernible unit. If, for example, an object has to be one kilometer long in order to show up on a map, that map's resolution is one kilometer.

- **Robinson Projection:** A projection that attempts to balance several possible projection errors. It does not maintain area, shape, distance, or direction completely accurately, but it minimizes errors in each.
- **Carl Sauer:** Geographer from the University of California at Berkeley who defined the concept of cultural landscape as the fundamental unit of geographical analysis. This landscape results from the interaction between humans and the physical environment. Sauer argued that virtually no landscape has escaped alteration by human activities.
- **Sense of Place:** Feelings evoked by people as a result of certain experiences and memories associated with a particular place.
- **Site:** The absolute location of a place, described by local relief, landforms, and other cultural or physical characteristics.
- **Situation:** The relative location of a place in relation to the physical and cultural characteris- tics of the surrounding area and the connections and interdependencies within that system; a place's spatial context.
- **Small scale:** A map scale ratio in which the ratio of units on the map to units on Earth is quite small. Small-scale maps usually depict large areas.
- **Spatial diffusion:** The ways in which phenomena, such as technological innovations, cultural trends, or even outbreaks of disease, travel over space.
- **Spatial perspective:** An intellectual framework that looks at the particular locations of a specific phenomenon, how and why that phenomenon is where it is, and, finally, how it is spatially related to phenomena in other places.
- **Sustainability:** The concept of using Earth's resources in such a way that they provide for people's needs in the present without diminishing Earth's ability to provide for future generations.
- **Thematic layers:** Individual maps of specific features that are overlaid on one another in a Geographical Information System to understand and analyze a spatial relationship.
- **Thematic map:** A type of map that displays one or more variables—such as population or income level—within a specific area.
- **Time-Space Convergence:** The idea that distance between some places is actually shrinking as technology enables more rapid communication and increased interaction among those places.
- **Topographic maps:** Maps that use isolines to represent constant elevations. If you took a topographic map out into the field and walked exactly along the path of an isoline on your map, you would always stay at the same elevation.
- **Transferability:** The costs involved in moving goods from one place to another.
- **Visualization:** Use of sophisticated software to create dynamic computer maps, some of which are three dimensional or interactive.