

Unit 1 Cheat Sheet: Thinking Geographically

AP® Human Geography · Unit 1 Review · Topics 1.1 to 1.7

The big idea: Every unit asks the same two questions: where is it, and why is it there? That way of looking at the world is the spatial perspective. Unit 1 is only about 8 to 10 percent of the multiple-choice section, but its skills (reading maps and data, naming the scale, describing a pattern) show up on every FRQ.

How to use it: Fill in the blank version from memory first, then check it here. Star anything you missed. Those are your review targets.

KEY TERMS

Maps (Topic 1.1)

Reference map	Shows where things are: boundaries, roads, and place names.
Thematic map	Shows the spatial pattern of one kind of data.
Choropleth	Areas shaded by a data value (median income by county).
Dot distribution	Each dot stands for a set number of something, so clusters stand out.
Graduated symbol	Bigger symbols mean bigger amounts.
Isoline	Lines connect points of equal value (elevation, temperature).
Cartogram	Places resized to match a data value (countries sized by population).
Map projection	A way to flatten the round Earth. Every one distorts shape, area, distance, or direction.
Map scale	Map distance compared with distance on Earth: a ratio, a scale bar, or words.

Geographic data (Topics 1.2 and 1.3)

Field observation	Collecting data in person: interviews, surveys, photos, and sketches.
Remote sensing	Collecting data about Earth's surface from a distance, by satellite or aircraft.
GPS	Satellites that pinpoint an exact (absolute) location.
GIS	Software that stacks layers of data (roads, flood zones, income) to show how they relate.
Census data	Official counts of people and their characteristics.
Uses of data	Governments draw districts and plan schools, businesses pick store sites, and map apps raise privacy questions.

Spatial concepts (Topic 1.4)

Absolute location	A fixed point, such as latitude and longitude or a street address.
Relative location	A place described in relation to other places ("two hours north of Atlanta").
Place	The human and physical features that make a location unique.
Space	The area between places.
Flows	Movements of people, goods, money, and ideas between places.
Distance decay	The farther apart two places are, the less they interact.
Time-space compression	Technology cuts the time it takes to connect places, weakening distance decay.
Pattern	How things are arranged: clustered, dispersed, linear, or random.
Density	How many per unit of area (people per square mile).

People and the environment (Topic 1.5)

Environmental determinism	The environment controls how societies develop. Rejected today: too simple, and it was used to justify colonialism.
Possibilism	The environment sets limits; people choose how to adapt and reshape it.
Sustainability	Meeting today's needs without harming future generations' ability to meet theirs.

Scale and regions (Topics 1.6 and 1.7)

Scale of analysis	The level you study: global, regional, national, or local.
Formal region	Shares a trait throughout, like a language or climate (the Sahara).
Functional region	Organized around a node, linked by connections (a subway system).
Perceptual (vernacular) region	Exists in people's minds; its borders are fuzzy and disputed ("the South").
Regional boundaries	Drawn by people, so regions can overlap, change, and be contested.

MAP PROJECTIONS: WHAT EACH KEEPS AND GIVES UP

PROJECTION	KEEPS	GIVES UP	GOOD FOR
Mercator	Direction and local shape	Size near the poles	Navigation, web street maps
Gall-Peters	Relative size (area)	Shape	Comparing the size of countries
Robinson	Nothing perfectly	A little of everything	General world maps
Equal Earth	Relative size (area)	Some shape near the edges	World maps that keep size
Azimuthal equidistant (polar)	Distance and direction from the center	Shape and size far from the center	Polar maps, air routes

DON'T CONFUSE THESE

Large scale vs. small scale	Large scale is zoomed in: a small area, lots of detail, and a smaller number after the colon (1:5,000). Small scale shows a big area with little detail (1:10,000,000).
Map scale vs. scale of analysis	Map scale compares map distance with real distance. Scale of analysis is the level you study, from local to global.
Formal vs. functional region	A shared trait makes a formal region. A node and its connections make a functional region.
Determinism vs. possibilism	"The environment forced them" is determinism. "People adapted with technology" is possibilism.
Absolute vs. relative location	Coordinates and addresses are absolute. "Next to" and "north of" are relative.
GPS vs. GIS vs. remote sensing	GPS finds a location. GIS layers and analyzes data. Remote sensing collects data from above.
Quantitative vs. qualitative data	Quantitative data is numbers you can count or measure. Qualitative data is descriptions, photos, interviews, and stories, which can show what the numbers miss.

EXAMPLES TO KNOW COLD

John Snow's cholera map (London, 1854)	He mapped victims' homes and the water pumps, and the deaths clustered around one pump. Shows the power of data, distance decay, and scale (citywide totals hid it).
Greenland vs. Africa on a Mercator map	Greenland looks about as big as Africa, but Africa is about 14 times larger. Every projection distorts something.
The Netherlands and Las Vegas	Dikes and pumps turned land under the sea into farmland, and a desert city grew on piped-in river water. Possibilism, with a sustainability cost.
Income at two scales	A country's average income can rise while some rural towns get poorer. Patterns change with the scale of analysis.
Two grandparents	You visit the one 10 minutes away more often than the one 1,000 miles away (distance decay), unless video calls close the gap (time-space compression).

FRQ: HOW UNIT 1 SHOWS UP

PROMPT SAYS	WHAT TO DO	Likely Unit 1 FRQ angles
Identify	Name it. No explanation needed.	- Define a geospatial tool (remote sensing, GPS, GIS) and explain how it helps solve a real problem. - Describe what a map or projection shows, and what it distorts or leaves out. - Explain why a place is a formal, functional, or perceptual region. - Explain how a pattern changes at a different scale of analysis. - Explain how technology changes distance decay. - Explain the degree to which an example shows possibilism.
Define	Give the meaning of the term.	
Describe	Give its key features or details.	
Explain	Say how or why, and connect the cause to the result ("because," "which leads to").	
Compare	Give a similarity or a difference between two things.	
Explain the degree to which	Pick low, moderate, or high, then explain why.	FRQ rules: Answer at the scale the question names. Write in complete sentences (lists and outlines do not earn credit). If a part asks for one example, only your first one is scored.