

Grade 8 Civics Expectations and Clarification Document for Assessment

Purpose

This document provides additional guidance around the instruction and assessment of the 8th grade standards in the [Massachusetts History and Social Science \(HSS\) Curriculum Framework](#). This guidance is aligned with the assessment expectations of the [Grade 8 Civics MCAS test](#) (currently in development) and is intended to clarify certain components of the grade 8 content standards for assessment purposes. The selected standards **represent a sample** of the standards in the curriculum framework and should **not be** used as a curriculum guide. These standards and corresponding examples were selected based on frequently asked questions from the field and **should not be considered more important than other standards**. The guidelines presented here should be considered in addition to the content and examples listed in the curriculum framework. The information provided in this document is not an exhaustive list of what will be assessed on the 8th grade MCAS test.

Examples of how the Standards for History and Social Science Practice may be integrated with the content standards are included in this guide to support instruction and assessment. Multiple practices may be assessed on MCAS with a particular content standard, even if that practice is not listed in the standard or detailed in this document.

See the [civics resource page](#) for additional curricular resources to support the instruction and assessment of Grade 8 Civics, which includes the [Civics Curriculum Materials Guide](#) and the [Civics Projects Guidebook](#).

This document will be updated as necessary. Contact mcas@doe.mass.edu with questions about this document.

Topic 1. The philosophical foundations of the United States political system [8.T1]

Topic 1.

8.T1.1. Explain why the Founders of the United States considered the government of ancient Athens to be the beginning of democracy and explain how the democratic political concepts developed in ancient Greece influenced modern democracy (e.g., *civic participation, voting rights, trial by jury, legislative bodies, constitution writing, rule of law*).

8.T1.2. Describe the government of the Roman Republic and the aspects of republican principles that are evident in modern democratic governments (e.g., *separation of powers, rule of law, representative government, and the notion of civic duty/common good*).

Additional Guidelines

Students should be able to:

- Explain how the Founders of the U.S. government used ideas from ancient Athens and the Roman Republic governments in the development of the U.S. government.
- Compare and contrast similarities and differences between the Roman Republic and the U.S. republican government designed by the Founders.
- Describe the main difference between a direct democracy and a representative democracy.

Topic 1.

8.T1.3. Explain the influence of Enlightenment thinkers on the American Revolution and framework of the American government (e.g., John Locke, Charles de Montesquieu).

8.T1.4. Explain how British ideas about and practices of government (e.g., *the Magna Carta, the concept of habeas corpus, the Mayflower Compact, self-government, town meetings, the importance of education and literacy, the House of Burgesses, colonial legislatures, the Albany Plan of Union*) influenced American colonists and the political institutions that developed in colonial America.

Additional Guidelines

Students should be able to:

- Analyze John Locke’s concept of “natural rights” and the use of “unalienable rights” in the Declaration of Independence to determine their similarities.
- Apply Charles de Montesquieu’s concept of “separation of powers” to the development of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of the U.S. government.
- Explain that the British Magna Carta influenced ideas about individual rights, due process, and the rule of law, where rulers must also follow the laws.
- Explain that colonial town meetings influenced the development of local government in Massachusetts and were a form of direct democracy.
- Analyze sources and describe the Albany Plan of Union as an influence on the development of federalism and the joining of the individual states under one national government.

Topic 1.

8.T1.5. Analyze the evidence for arguments that the principles of government of the United States were influenced by the governments of Native Peoples (e.g., the Iroquois Confederacy).

Additional Guidelines

Students should be able to:

- Organize information from a primary or secondary source to analyze similarities and differences between the structure of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, also known as the Iroquois Confederacy, during the colonial period and the U.S. government. Examples may include:
 - Both were federalist systems (unions of multiple states/nations for the purpose of common defense).
 - Both convened a representative body to make decisions regarding foreign relations.
 - Representatives to the Haudenosaunee Grand Council were appointed, while representatives to the U.S. Congress were elected.
 - Haudenosaunee society was matriarchal while colonial society excluded women from participating in government.

Topic 2. The development of the United States government [8.T2]

Topic 2.

8.T2.1. Apply knowledge of the history of the American Revolutionary period to determine the experiences and events that led the colonists to declare independence; explain the key ideas about *equality, representative government, limited government, rule of law, natural rights, common good*, and the *purpose of government* in the Declaration of Independence.

Additional Guidelines

Students should be able to:

- Explain that the colonies experienced limited self-government throughout the mid-1700s as many British policies went unenforced.
- Explain that British policies after the French and Indian War (e.g., the Sugar Act, the Stamp Act, the Townsend Acts, the Tea Act, and the Intolerable Acts) were viewed as unjust tyranny by the colonists because the colonists were not represented in the British Parliament, leading to claims of “taxation without representation.”
- Explain that representatives of the colonies met (e.g., the First and Second Continental Congresses) to discuss their response to British policies and ultimately voted to declare independence from Britain.
- Analyze sources to describe how colonists protested British policies through boycotts and resistance efforts that led to early battles between the colonists and British soldiers (e.g., the Boston Tea Party, the battles at Lexington, Concord, and Bunker Hill).
- Construct or complete a timeline that shows a sequence of major events that led colonists to declare independence from Great Britain.

Topic 2.

8.T2.2. Analyze the weaknesses of the national government under the Articles of confederation; and describe the crucial events (e.g., Shays' Rebellion) leading to the Constitutional Convention.

Additional Guidelines

Students should be able to:

- Explain how the structure of the Articles of Confederation led to a weak central government and prompted individuals to call for a new government. Examples may include:
 - Congress lacked the ability to pass national legislation because each state had one vote and nine of the thirteen states were required to agree before a new law could be passed.
 - The national government was unable to collect taxes or pay debts incurred during the American Revolution.
 - The national government did not have a military and was unable to support states during local conflicts such as the armed rebellion in western Massachusetts, led by Daniel Shays, where farmers protested policies that left them unable to repay their debts.
 - There was no national executive or court system that could resolve disputes among the states.

Topic 2.

8.T2.3. Identify the various leaders of the Constitutional Convention and analyze the major issues (e.g., *distribution of political power, rights of individuals, representation and rights of states, slavery*) they debated and how the issues were resolved.

Additional Guidelines

Students should be able to:

- Describe the major issues and different points of view that were debated at the Constitutional Convention, analyze data and graphs about the colonies to draw conclusions, and explain how the issues were resolved within the U.S. Constitution. Examples of these issues and how they were resolved may include:
 - Balancing federal and state power: The U.S. Constitution grants specific powers to the federal government and reserves all other powers to the states and individuals.
 - State representation: Congress is divided into two houses; states have equal representation in the Senate while representation in the House of Representatives is determined by state population as calculated by the census.
 - Powers of the president: The president has powers to act swiftly and decisively, but the president can be removed from office by Congress.
 - Slavery: The Constitutional Convention perpetuated the institution of slavery through decisions made about the Constitution, including the three-fifths clause.

Topic 2.

8.T2.4. Compare and contrast key ideas debated between the Federalists and Anti-Federalists over ratification of the Constitution (e.g., *federalism, factions, checks and balances, independent judiciary, republicanism, limited government*).

Additional Guidelines

Students should be able to:

- Analyze a source and use evidence to explain why some Anti-Federalists were concerned that the rights of minority factions would not be protected under the new Constitution, leading to the incorporation of the Bill of Rights into the Constitution.

- Explain that the Constitution creates a government that is divided into the legislative, executive, and judicial branches, each with their own separate powers enumerated under different articles of the Constitution.
- Describe federalism as a division of power between national and state governments.
- Compare Federalist and Anti-Federalist positions on republican government and the importance of state and local authority. Federalists believed republican government would be preserved under the new Constitution while Anti-Federalists believed that the constitution would govern a nation too large to remain a republic.

Topic 2.

8.T2.5. Summarize the Preamble and each article in the Constitution, and the rights enumerated in the Bill of rights; explain the reasons for the addition of the bill of Rights to the Constitution in 1791.

Additional Guidelines

Students should be able to:

- Explain key ideas about the U.S. government in the Preamble such as that the government is created by the people and for the people to establish a system of laws to preserve people’s liberties and freedoms.
- Describe how the Constitution is organized, with the function of each branch of government described in the first three articles.
- Explain that the Bill of Rights was added to the Constitution to prevent the national government from abusing its powers and served as a compromise to guarantee that states would ratify the Constitution.
- Describe how the Bill of Rights, especially the First Amendment, includes the right to free speech, the right to protest, and the right to religious freedom, and how these rights have influenced the United States over time.

Topic 3. The institutions of United States government [8.T3]

Topic 3.

8.T3.1. Distinguish the three branches of government (separation of powers):

- Congress as the legislative branch
- the Presidency and the executive agencies as the executive branch and
- the Supreme Court and other federal inferior courts as the judicial branch

8.T3.2. Examine the interrelationship of the three branches (the checks and balance system).

- **Congress:** enumerated powers, general powers, limits on power, checks on other two branches; roles of political parties in the organization of congress; roles within the legislative branch, such as the Speaker of the House, the President of the Senate, minority party leaders; the system for accomplishing legislation, including committees, hearings and legislative procedures
- **the Presidency:** roles, powers and limits, checks on the other two branches, role of the Cabinet, such as the vice President, Attorney General and Secretaries of State, Defense, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security; executive departments and agencies (such as the Department of Education, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, or the Food and Drug Administration), and branches of the military
- **the Supreme Court:** role and powers, checks on other two branches, lower courts

8.T3.3. Describe the respective roles of each of the branches of government.

Additional Guidelines

Students should be able to:

- Describe the role of the legislative branch in the federal government. Examples of this role may include:
 - Congress has the general power to write, debate, and pass bills.
 - Congress's enumerated powers include approving the federal budget, declaring war, and regulating interstate commerce.
 - Congress can check another branch of government by approving or rejecting executive nominations, overriding a presidential veto, amending the Constitution, and impeaching the president and federal judges.
 - Leadership positions in Congress, such as the Speaker of the House and majority/minority leaders, are determined by which political party holds the most seats in each house. This influences which bills are debated and voted upon.
- Describe the role of the executive branch in the federal government. Examples of this role may include:
 - The executive branch, which includes the president, the cabinet, and executive agencies, has the power to execute (carry out) and enforce laws.
 - The president has the power to nominate federal judges, cabinet secretaries, and ambassadors.
 - The president has the power to issue executive orders, conduct foreign policy, and command the armed forces.
 - The president can check the power of other branches of government by signing bills into law, vetoing bills, and nominating federal justices.
 - The president is a member of a political party. The party's platform often influences a president's decisions and policy priorities.
- Describe the role of the judicial branch in the federal government. Examples of this role may include:
 - The judicial branch includes federal courts, federal judges, the Supreme Court, and Supreme Court justices.
 - The judicial branch interprets laws through judicial review and decides cases that involve more than one state.
 - The Supreme Court can check the power of another branch of government by declaring laws and executive orders unconstitutional.
- Complete a diagram showing how legislation moves through the legislative and executive branches to become a law and describe the role of the judicial branch in reviewing laws.
- Complete a diagram showing how a federal case moves through the lower courts (e.g., district courts and the U.S. Court of Appeals) to the Supreme Court.
- Evaluate a source to distinguish between the actions of individuals or groups within the legislative, executive, and judicial branches.

Topic 3.

8.T3.4. Explain the process of elections in the legislative and executive branches and the process of nomination/confirmation of individuals in the judicial and executive branches.

- **Elections: running for legislative office (U.S. Representative – unlimited two-year terms, U.S. Senator – unlimited six-year terms), or executive office (President – two four-year terms and Vice President – unlimited four-year terms) and the function of the Electoral College in Presidential elections**
- **Nomination by the President and confirmation by Congress: Supreme Court justices and Secretaries/agency heads in the executive branch)**

8.T3.5. Describe the role of political parties in elections at the state and national levels.

Additional Guidelines

Students should be able to:

- Describe the process of national elections, including primaries, national conventions, and the electoral college.
- Analyze a map or chart to determine the outcome of an election.
- Complete a diagram showing the nomination and confirmation process for federal justices or cabinet secretaries.
- Explain how political parties influence elections by recruiting qualified candidates, raising money, advertising, announcing nominees at party conventions, and encouraging voter registration and participation.
- Explain that voters can choose to join a political party and vote for candidates in a primary election to determine which candidate in the party will run in the general election. Voters can also choose to become an independent voter by not joining a political party.

Topic 4. Rights and responsibilities of citizens [8.T4]

Topic 4.

8.T4.1. Explain the different ways one becomes a citizen of the United States.

8.T4.2 Describe the rights and responsibilities of citizens (e.g., *voting, serving as a juror, paying taxes, serving in the military, running for and holding elected office*) as compared to non-citizens.

Additional Guidelines

Students should be able to:

- Explain that all residents of the United States are protected by local, state, and federal laws, which they must follow, and are responsible for paying taxes.
- Explain that U.S. citizens have additional rights such as being able to vote in federal elections, run for or hold an elected office, and serve as jurors in a trial.

Topic 4.

8.T4.3. Distinguish among civic, political, and private life.

8.T4.4. Define and provide examples of fundamental principles and values of American political and civic life (e.g., *liberty, the common good, justice, equality, tolerance, law and order, due process, rights of individuals, diversity, civic unity, patriotism, constitutionalism, popular sovereignty, and representative democracy*).

Additional Guidelines

Students should be able to:

- Explain that civic and political life includes activities that affect the community and government (e.g., voting, volunteering or advocating in support of a community issue, running for office) whereas private life activities focus on personal interests (e.g., sports, hobbies).
- Analyze a historical event and describe how fundamental principles and values are reflected within the event.

Topic 4.

8.T4.5. Describe how a democracy provides opportunities for citizens to participate in the political process through elections, political parties, and interest groups.

8.T4.6. Evaluate information related to elections (e.g., policy positions and debates among candidates, campaign financing, campaign advertising, influence of news media and social media, and data relating to voter turnout in elections).

Additional Guidelines

Students should be able to:

- Analyze campaign materials to construct or support a claim about a candidate or public policy.
- Evaluate the reliability or point of view of a source related to a campaign or candidate.
- Analyze a map or data chart to explain voter behaviors.
- Explain how individuals influence the political process and public policies and take informed action by voting in elections, supporting candidates, volunteering or donating money to political campaigns, joining political parties, and joining interest groups to advocate for a public policy.

Topic 4.

8.T4.7. Apply knowledge of the meaning of leadership and the qualities of good leaders to evaluate political leaders at the community, the state, and national levels.

8.T4.8. Explain the importance of individuals working cooperatively with their elected leaders.

8.T4.9. Explain the importance of public service, and identify career and other opportunities in public service at the local, state, and national levels.

Additional Guidelines

Students should be able to:

- Explain that effective political leaders demonstrate leadership qualities (such as, courage, integrity, and determination) and collaborate with others to create policies that balance competing interests and provide for the common good.
- Describe how individuals can take informed action to work with elected leaders to influence political and social change.
- Explain that public service includes all jobs in local, state, and national government (for example, firefighters, teachers, state and federal government employees, military personnel, and elected officials) and that public servants help implement government programs that support the community.

Topic 4.

8.T4.10. Analyze issues involving liberty in conflict with equality or authority, individual rights in conflict with the common good, or majority rule in conflict with minority rights.

8.T4.11. Examine the varied understandings of the role of elected representatives and discuss those who have demonstrated political courage or those whose actions have failed to live up to the ideals of the Constitution.

8.T4.12. Examine the role of political protest in a democracy.

8.T4.13. Examine the influence of public and private interest groups in a democracy, including policy research organizations (e.g., Pew Research Center, Brookings Institute, Heritage Foundation) in shaping debate about public policy.

Additional Guidelines

Students should be able to:

- Evaluate a law or public policy issue to explain how democratic governments balance competing ideas and make decisions where liberty may be restrained to protect equal rights or where individual rights may be limited to benefit the common good.
- Analyze how a political protest movement and interest groups can influence how individuals and elected officials understand an issue and create change.
- Explain that policy research organizations collect and analyze data that is often used by interest groups or government agencies to influence how voters and elected officials make decisions about an issue.

Topic 5. The Constitution, Amendments, and Supreme Court decisions [8.T5]

Topic 5.

8.T5.1. Explain why the “necessary and proper” clause and why it is often referred to as the “elastic clause.”

Additional Guidelines

Students should be able to:

- Explain that the “necessary and proper” clause grants Congress the flexibility to expand its powers and create new laws that affect areas beyond those explicitly listed in the Constitution. This allows the federal government to respond to new issues as the needs of the country change.

Topic 5.

8.T5.2. Explain the historical context and significance of changes in the Constitution, including key amendments.

Examples of amendments include the:

- 14th Amendment (1868): citizenship rights, equal protection of laws**
- 19th Amendment (1920): women’s rights to vote in federal and state elections**
- 26th Amendment (1971): lowering the voting age from 21 to 18 in federal elections**

8.T5.3. Analyze the Constitutional issues that caused the Civil War and led to the eventual expansion of the power of the Federal government and individual rights.

Additional Guidelines

Students should be able to:

- Explain that the Constitution includes an amendment process to make changes to the document which allows government laws to change over time.
- Analyze a primary or secondary source related to the passage of the 14th, 19th, or 26th Amendments and use the source to describe how these amendments expanded civil rights.
- Explain that the 14th Amendment expanded the federal government’s ability to protect civil rights by placing limits on states’ power.
- Explain that the Constitution, as originally written, left the issue of slavery unsettled, leading to the Civil War.

- Explain that the abolition of slavery, the extension of citizenship to include all people born in the United States, and the expansion of the right to vote after the Civil War were all changes that made the United States more aligned with the ideals of a free and democratic society.

Topic 5.

8.T5.4. Explain the historical context and significance of laws enacted by Congress that have expanded the civil rights and equal protection for race, gender, disability (e.g., the 1964 Civil Rights Act, 1965 Voting Rights Act, 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), and explain how evolving understanding of human rights has affected the movement for civil rights for all.

Additional Guidelines

Students should be able to:

- Explain that civil rights laws are intended to protect individuals from unfair treatment by the state and federal government and private entities.
- Analyze a primary or secondary source to evaluate the impact of a federal law on the expansion of individual civil rights.
- Analyze or complete a timeline to describe limitations on or expansions of civil rights over time.

Topic 5.

8.T5.5. Explain the principle of judicial review established in *Marbury v. Madison* (1803) and explain how cases come before the Supreme Court, how cases are argued, and how the Court issues decisions and dissents.

8.T5.6. Research, analyze, and report orally or in writing on one area (a, b, or c, below)* in which Supreme Court decisions have made significant changes over time in citizens' lives.

- Interpretations of freedoms of religion, assembly, press, petition, and speech under the First Amendment
- Interpretations of the due process clause and the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment
- Interpretations in cases where individual rights and perceived community or national interests were in conflict

*See the *HSS Curriculum Framework* for examples of relevant Supreme Court cases.

Additional Guidelines

Students should be able to:

- Describe judicial review as the Supreme Court's power to declare federal and state laws or actions unconstitutional.
- Explain that to reach the Supreme Court, a case must either go through the appeals process in the lower courts OR be a case where the Supreme Court has original jurisdiction such as a dispute between two different states.
- Analyze a primary or secondary source related to a Supreme Court decision and explain how the decision affected or may affect individuals living in the United States.

Topic 6. The structure of Massachusetts state and local government [8.T6]

Topic 6.

8.T6.1. Compare and contrast the functions of state government and national government.

8.T6.2. Describe the provisions of the United States Constitution and the Massachusetts Constitution that define and distribute powers and authority of the federal or state government.

8.T6.3. Distinguish among the enumerated and implied powers in the United States Constitution and the Massachusetts Constitution.

8.T6.7. Contrast the responsibilities of government at the federal, state, and local levels (e.g., protection of individual rights and the provision of services such as law enforcement, welfare payments, and the building and funding of schools).

Additional Guidelines

Students should be able to:

- Analyze a scenario to describe and compare the powers of a state government and the federal government.
- Organize information from multiple sources to explain the similarities and differences between the U.S. and Massachusetts constitutions.
- Summarize powers of Congress enumerated in Article 1, Section 8 of the U.S. Constitution (such as, the power to tax, the power to regulate commerce) and identify related implied powers.

Topic 6.

8.T6.4. Compare core documents associated with the protection of individual rights, including the Bill of Rights, the 14th Amendment to the United States Constitution, and Article 1 of the Massachusetts Constitution.

8.T6.5. Explain why the Tenth Amendment to the United States Constitution is important to state government and identify the powers granted to states by the Tenth Amendment and the limits to state government outlined in it.

8.T6.6. Identify additional protections provided by the Massachusetts Constitution that are not provided by the U.S. Constitution.

Additional Guidelines

Students should be able to:

- Explain how the protection of individual rights has increased over time, including Article 1 of the Massachusetts Constitution and amendments to the U.S. Constitution.
- Explain that the Tenth Amendment reserves powers for the states and allows states to make their own laws and have jurisdiction over state residents.
- Describe the relationship between the Tenth Amendment and the concept of federalism.
- Describe the right to a free public education and a clean environment as additional protections provided by the Massachusetts Constitution that are not provided by the U.S. Constitution.

Topic 6.

8.T6.8. Explain the leadership structure of the government of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the function of each branch

- a. the executive branch (governor and agencies)
- b. the legislative branch (state representatives and state senators)
- c. courts of law (Supreme Judicial Court, lower court system)

8.T6.9. Give examples of tax-supported facilities and services provided by the Massachusetts state government and by local governments.

8.T6.10. Explain the major components of local government in Massachusetts, including the roles and functions of mayors, city councils, and school committees in cities; town managers, select boards, representative and open town meetings and school committees, in towns, and courts and sheriff's departments in counties.

Additional Guidelines

Students should be able to:

- Use information from a source to describe the roles of executive (e.g., mayor, select board, or town manager), legislative (e.g., city councils, town meetings), and judicial (e.g., courts and sheriff's departments) functions in local government.
- Describe multiple examples of tax-supported facilities and services provided by local governments such as libraries, schools, parks and recreation, fire protection, emergency services, and public works.

Topic 7. Freedom of the Press and News/Media Literacy [8.T7]

Topic 7.

8.T7.1. Explain why freedom of the press was included as a right in the first Amendment to the United States Constitution and in Article 16 of the Massachusetts Constitution; explain that freedom of the press means the right to express and publish views on politics and other topics without government sponsorship, oversight, or censorship.

8.T7.2. Give examples of how a free press can provide competing information and views about government and politics.

Additional Guidelines

Students should be able to:

- Analyze sources to help explain that during the colonial period, British authorities prohibited colonists from publishing information that criticized the British government and that these publications helped gain support for independence during the American Revolution.
- Explain that the Founders of the U.S. government thought a free press was essential because a democratic government depends upon an informed citizenry to function.

Topic 7.

8.T7.3. Explain the different functions of news articles, editorials, editorial cartoons, and "op-ed" commentaries.

8.T7.4. Evaluate the benefits and challenges of digital news and social media to a democratic society.

8.T7.5. Explain methods for evaluating information and opinion in print and online media (e.g., determining the credibility of news articles; analyzing the messages of editorials and op-ed commentaries; assessing the validity of claims and sufficiency of evidence).

8.T7.6. Analyze the point of view and evaluate the claims of an editorial, editorial cartoon, or op-ed commentary on a public policy issue at the local, state, or national level (e.g., a mayoral or school committee decision, an action by a state legislature or Governor, a vote in Congress or an action by the President).

Additional Guidelines

Students should be able to:

- Describe ways to evaluate the claims of an editorial, editorial cartoon, or op-ed commentary on a public policy issue, including characteristics (author, message, audience, purpose, evidence, and what other sources say about the information) of each.
- Organize information to determine which evidence may be used to support or oppose the point of view expressed in an editorial, editorial cartoon, or op-ed.
- Compare and contrast advantages and disadvantages of digital news and social media. An advantage includes informing many community members about current events and a disadvantage includes the possibility of spreading false information in a short amount of time.