

Historical Contexts

Student Learning Outcome: Students will demonstrate an ability to engage in historical thinking.

The Value of Historical Thinking

Historical thinking is an acquired (learned) form of analytical reasoning that allows students to analyze data from the past and recognize patterns of cause and effect, and action and consequence. It requires factual knowledge of past events and allows students to use that information to infer consequences and to understand the relationship between past action and

present or future action. Moreover, because historical thinking involves a recognition that there are multiple ways of interpreting historical data, it allows for an appreciation of diverse viewpoints on any given topic. However, because it is a fact-based type of analysis, it also teaches students to evaluate arguments and critically assess sources of information.

Supporting Skills

1. Students will describe main actors, primary sources, and/or events in a defined historical period.
2. Students will explain patterns of historical continuity and/or change within a defined historical period.
3. Students will situate historical objects, ideas, attitudes, actions, and/or experiences within a defined historical period.

Course Content Criteria

1. Courses in this category focus on a defined historical period.
2. Courses in this category clearly contextualize the material studied within its social, political, and/or cultural contexts.
3. Courses in this category utilize both primary and secondary historical sources.
4. Courses in this category expose students to the idea that historical thinking comprises analysis grounded in historical evidence.
5. Courses in this category expose students to the idea that historical interpretations are contingent and subject to change as new information becomes available or as perspectives evolve.
6. Courses in this category include an assessment assignment that requires students to demonstrate each of the skills in the Historical Contexts Assessment Rubric (below). This assessment assignment should be one of the following: an objective exam, an essay question on an exam, an essay, or a research paper.

Glossary

1. **Contextualize:** Analyze words, people, actions, objects, or events in terms of the words, people, actions, objects, or events surrounding them.
2. **Defined historical period:** A discrete period of time in a particular geographic space. This period of time could range from a relatively short period of time, such as a year, to a relatively long period of time, such as several centuries. It could also be an event, such as a war; the reign of a particular monarch; the trajectory of a particular movement, such as the Civil Rights movement; or a period of social upheaval, such as the French Revolution. Historical periods can overlap, change gradually, or appear differently depending on the context. The geographic space similarly can range from more circumscribed to broader depending on the topic of the course. The syllabus of the course, and the materials it references, will serve to define the historical period for any given course.
3. **Historical evidence:** A document or artifact, usually a primary historical source, that supports a historical assertion or hypothesis or that fills a gap in existing historical knowledge.
4. **Historical thinking:** A set of critical reasoning skills that allows students to evaluate and analyze primary and secondary historical sources and use them to draw meaningful conclusions about the past.
5. **Primary historical source:** A document or artifact created in the time and place under investigation.
6. **Secondary historical source:** Typically books, articles, criticisms, commentaries, or other documents that use primary sources to make arguments about the past.

Historical Contexts Assessment Rubric

Supporting Skills	Exemplary 4	Accomplished 3	Developing 2	Beginning 1
Describe main actors, primary sources, and/or events in a defined historical period.	Provides detailed and precise description of main actors, sources, and/or events, clearly situating them within a defined historical period. Demonstrates nuanced awareness of boundaries and transitions between periods and defines the historical period explicitly.	Provides clear description of main actors, sources, and/or events with some contextual detail. Demonstrates awareness of period boundaries, though period definition or transitions may be less explicit.	Provides a general description of main actors, sources, and/or events with limited context. May vaguely reference the historical period without explicitly defining or connecting transitions.	Provides incomplete or illogical description of main actors, sources, or events, with little or no reference to historical period definition or transitions.
Explain patterns of historical continuity and/or change within a defined historical period.	Analyzes patterns of continuity and change with precision and depth, showing how transitions define the movement between periods. Incorporates multiple perspectives and, when appropriate, makes meaningful cross-period or cross-disciplinary comparisons.	Explains patterns of continuity and / or change with clarity and some degree of depth and precision; makes an attempt to define and explain boundaries or transitions between periods.	Identifies continuity and change in general terms, with limited or superficial reference to transitions or boundaries of the relevant period.	Provides minimal or unconvincing explanation of continuity and change, with no reference to transitions or period definition.
Situate historical objects, ideas, attitudes, actions, and/or experiences within a defined historical period.	Clearly and effectively situates objects, ideas, attitudes, actions, or experiences within their period with detailed contextualization, explicitly defining the period; clearly articulates connections between the ideas, attitudes, and/or actions described and their context.	Generally situates objects, ideas, attitudes, actions, or experiences within their period with some detail and contextualization; articulates, although not fully, connections between the ideas, attitudes, and/or actions described and their context.	Provides partial contextualization of objects, ideas, attitudes, actions, or experiences. Makes a minimal attempt to draw connections between the ideas, attitudes, and/or actions described and their context. .	Clearly struggles to situate historical objects, ideas, attitudes, actions, and/or experiences within a defined historical period.