

Core Concepts, Competencies and Learning Outcomes of the Study of History: A Statement of the American Historical Association*

Discipline Profile and Core Concepts

History is the study of the human past as it is constructed and interpreted with human artifacts, written evidence, and oral traditions. It requires empathy for historical actors, respect for interpretive debate, and the skillful use of an evolving set of practices and tools.

As an inquiry into human experience, history demands that we consider the diversity of human experience across time and place.

As a public pursuit, history requires effective communication to make the past accessible; it informs and preserves collective memory; it is essential to active citizenship.

As a discipline, history requires a deliberative stance towards the past; the sophisticated use of information, evidence, and argumentation; and the ability to identify and explain continuity and change over time. Its professional ethics and standards demand peer review, citation, and acceptance of the provisional nature of knowledge.

Core Competencies and Learning Outcomes

History students can:

- 1. Build historical knowledge.**
 - a. Gather and contextualize information in order to convey both the particularity of past lives and the scale of human experience.
 - b. Recognize how humans in the past shaped their own unique historical moments and were shaped by those moments.
 - c. Develop a body of historical knowledge with breadth of time and place—as well as depth of detail—in order to discern context.
 - d. Distinguish the past from our very different present.

- 2. Develop historical research methods.**
 - a. Recognize history as an interpretive account of the human past—one that historians create in the present from surviving evidence.
 - b. Collect, sift, organize, question, synthesize, and interpret complex material.
 - c. Practice ethical historical inquiry that makes use of and acknowledges sources from the past as well as the scholars who have interpreted that past.
 - d. Develop empathy toward people in the context of their distinctive historical moments.

- 3. Recognize the provisional nature of knowledge, the disciplinary preference for complexity, and the comfort with ambiguity that history requires.**
 - a. Welcome contradictory perspectives and data, which enable us to provide more accurate accounts and construct stronger arguments.
 - b. Describe past events from multiple perspectives.

- c. Explain and justify multiple causes of complex events and phenomena using conflicting sources.
 - d. Identify, summarize, appraise, and synthesize other scholars' historical arguments.
4. **Apply the range of skills it takes to decode the historical record because of its incomplete, complex, and contradictory nature.**
- a. Consider a variety of historical sources for credibility, position, perspective, and relevance.
 - b. Evaluate historical arguments, explaining how they were constructed and might be improved.
 - c. Revise analyses and narratives when new evidence requires it.
5. **Create historical arguments and narratives.**
- a. Generate substantive, open-ended questions about the past and develop research strategies to answer them.
 - b. Craft well-supported historical narratives, arguments, and reports of research findings in a variety of media for a variety of audiences.
6. **Use historical perspective as central to active citizenship.**
- a. Apply historical knowledge and historical thinking to contemporary issues.
 - b. Develop positions that reflect deliberation, cooperation, and diverse perspectives.

*<https://www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/tuning-the-history-discipline/2016-history-discipline-core> (accessed July 18, 2021).