

# 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. 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 5	Accomplished 4	Developing 3	Beginning 2	Absent 1
<b>Describe main actors, primary sources, and/or events in a defined historical period.</b>	Masterfully describes main actors, sources, and/or events from a defined historical period.	Proficiently describes main actors, sources, and/or events from a defined historical period.	Acceptably describes main actors, sources, and/or events from a defined historical period.	Minimally describes main actors, sources, and/or events from a defined historical period.	Is unable to describe main actors, sources, and/or events from a defined historical period.
<b>Explain patterns of historical continuity and/or change within a defined historical period.</b>	Masterfully explains patterns of continuity and/or change within a defined historical period.	Proficiently explains patterns of continuity and/or change within a defined historical period.	Acceptably explains patterns of continuity and/or change within a defined historical period.	Minimally explains patterns of continuity and/or change within a defined historical period.	Is unable to explain patterns of continuity and/or change within a defined historical period.
<b>Situate historical objects, ideas, attitudes, actions, and/or experiences within a defined historical period.</b>	Masterfully situates historical objects, ideas, attitudes, actions, and/or experiences within a defined historical period.	Proficiently situates historical objects, ideas, attitudes, actions, and/or experiences within a defined historical period.	Acceptably situates historical objects, ideas, attitudes, actions, and/or experiences within a defined historical period.	Minimally situates historical objects, ideas, attitudes, actions, and/or experiences within a defined historical period.	Is unable to situate historical objects, ideas, attitudes, actions, and/or experiences within a defined historical period.