



How Do Historians Think about Time?

Did You Know?

Archaeologists sometimes use **BP**, meaning "before present," instead of CE and BCE when dating artefacts and events. BP covers a span of time up to 1950.

Historians use a system for numbering years based on dividing time into the Common Era and Before Common Era. Dates from year 0 to the present time are indicated by the use of the term Common Era or CE. Dates before year 0 are indicated by the use of the term Before Common Era or BCE.

Many historians divide the past into four major eras, or periods of years. This helps them organize their understanding of the past. It is important to note that the beginning and ending dates of the eras are not exact.

Historians classify societies as Pre-History, Ancient, Middle Ages, or Modern based on the evidence they find.

Pre-History

The Pre-History era covers the longest period of time. It begins with the start of human existence and continues to approximately 3000 BCE. Written records of past events do not exist for this era because writing had not yet been invented. Historians and archaeologists research this era by studying artefacts.

Ancient

The Ancient era begins in approximately 3000 BCE and lasts until approximately 500 CE. For some groups of people, this era begins with the first written records of human history.

Middle Ages

This era begins in approximately 500 CE and lasts until 1500 CE. During this period, the way of life in many societies changed a great deal compared to how people had lived during the Ancient era.

Modern

The Modern era is from 1500 CE to the present. The rapid development of technologies in the early part of this era brought changes to every group's way of life.

Tool Kit

Historians and archaeologists do not always know the exact date when dating an event or an artefact, so they put a "c" before the date. The letter "c" stands for "circa" and means "around the time of."