

Introduction to Anthropology

Introduction to Anthropology – Study Notes

1. What Is Anthropology?

- **Definition:** The scientific study of humanity—its origins, development, diversity, and commonalities—across time and space.
 - **Core Question:** *What does it mean to be human?*
 - **Scope:** Biological, cultural, linguistic, and archaeological dimensions.
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2. Major Sub?Fields

Sub?field	Focus	Key Methods	Typical Topics
Cultural (Social) Anthropology	Contemporary human societies, beliefs, practices, institutions	Participant observation, interviews, ethnography	Kinship, religion, economics, politics
Archaeology	Past human societies through material remains	Excavation, artifact analysis, dating techniques	Settlement patterns, technology change, trade networks
Biological (Physical) Anthropology	Biological evolution of humans and our relatives	Fossil analysis, genetics, primatology, osteology	Human evolution, adaptation, forensic identification
Linguistic Anthropology	Relationship between language and culture	Audio recordings, discourse analysis, comparative linguistics	Language change, sociolinguistics, language ideology

Note: Many anthropologists work **interdisciplinarily**, blending methods from two or more sub?fields.

3. Foundational Concepts

1. **Holism** – Understanding humans by integrating biological, cultural, linguistic, and archaeological evidence.

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2. **Cultural Relativism** – Interpreting cultural practices within their own context rather than through one's own cultural lens.
 3. **Ethnocentrism** – The tendency to view one's own culture as the standard; a bias anthropologists strive to avoid.
 4. **Emic vs. Etic Perspectives**
 - *Emic*: Insider's view (how participants understand their world).
 - *Etic*: Outsider's analytical view (researcher's theoretical interpretation).
 5. **Evolutionary Theory** – Explains biological change over deep time (natural selection, genetic drift) and cultural evolution (diffusion, innovation, adaptation).
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4. Research Process in Anthropology

1. **Formulating a Question** – Identify a gap or problem (e.g., "How do ritual practices shape social cohesion in X community?").
 2. **Literature Review** – Survey existing ethnographies, archaeological reports, biological data.
 3. **Method Selection**
 - *Fieldwork*: Long-term immersion, participant observation.
 - *Laboratory*: DNA sequencing, radiocarbon dating.
 - *Comparative*: Cross-cultural databases (e.g., Ethnographic Atlas).
 4. **Data Collection** – Notes, recordings, artifacts, biological samples.
 5. **Analysis** – Coding qualitative data, statistical tests, comparative typologies.
 6. **Interpretation** – Relate findings to theory (e.g., structuralism, symbolic anthropology).
 7. **Presentation** – Articles, monographs, museum exhibits, public outreach.
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5. Key Theoretical Approaches

Approach	Main Idea	Representative Scholars
Structural Functionalism	Societies are systems of interrelated parts that maintain stability.	A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, Bronisław Malinowski
Cultural Materialism	Material conditions (environment, technology) shape culture.	Marvin Harris
Symbolic / Interpretive Anthropology	Meaning is constructed through symbols and shared interpretations.	Clifford Geertz, Victor Turner
Processual Archaeology	Emphasizes scientific, systems-based explanations of past behavior.	Lewis Binford