

What is Anthropology?

What Is Anthropology? – Concise Study Notes

1. Definition

Anthropology – the scientific study of humanity. It investigates **human beings** in all their dimensions: biological, cultural, linguistic, and archaeological, across time and space.

2. Core Objectives

Goal	What It Means
Describe	Document the diversity of human societies, behaviours, and physical traits.
Explain	Identify the causes and processes behind cultural practices, biological variation, and historical change.
Predict	Use patterns from past and present to anticipate future human developments (e.g., health trends, cultural shifts).
Apply	Translate insights into practical solutions (public health, heritage management, policy making).

3. Major Subfields

Subfield	Focus	Typical Methods
Cultural (Social) Anthropology	Contemporary beliefs, customs, institutions, and social organization.	Participant observation, interviews, ethnography.
Biological (Physical) Anthropology	Human evolution, genetics, adaptation, and variation.	Fossil analysis, DNA sequencing, osteology, primatology.
Archaeology	Material remains of past societies (artifacts, architecture, landscapes).	Excavation, dating techniques, GIS, artifact analysis.
Linguistic Anthropology	Language as a cultural and cognitive system.	Audio recordings, discourse analysis, sociolinguistic surveys.

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Sub?field	Focus	Typical Methods
Applied Anthropology (cross?cutting)	Direct use of anthropological knowledge to solve real?world problems.	Program evaluation, community?based research, policy advising.

4. Foundational Concepts

1. **Holism** – Integrating biological, cultural, linguistic, and historical data to understand the whole human experience.
 2. **Cultural Relativism** – Interpreting cultural practices on their own terms, avoiding ethnocentric judgments.
 3. **Ethnography** – In?depth, systematic description of a particular group or community, usually based on long?term fieldwork.
 4. **Evolutionary Perspective** – Viewing cultural and biological change as adaptive processes over time.
 5. **Emic vs. Etic** – *Emic*: insider's viewpoint; *Etic*: outsider's analytical perspective.
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5. Research Process (Typical Steps)

1. **Formulate a Question** – Identify a gap in knowledge or a specific problem.
 2. **Literature Review** – Survey existing research to refine the question.
 3. **Method Selection** – Choose qualitative (e.g., participant observation) or quantitative (e.g., bio?metric analysis) tools.
 4. **Fieldwork / Data Collection** – Gather primary data in the field or laboratory.
 5. **Data Analysis** – Code qualitative material, run statistical tests, compare with comparative samples.
 6. **Interpretation** – Relate findings to broader anthropological theories.
 7. **Dissemination** – Publish articles, present at conferences, produce reports for stakeholders.
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6. Key Theoretical Approaches

Approach	Central Idea	Representative Scholars
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Structural Functionalism	Societies are systems of interrelated parts that maintain stability.	A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, Bronisław Malinowski
Symbolic/Interpretive Anthropology	Meaning is created through symbols and shared interpretations.	Clifford Geertz
Marxist/Political Economy	Material conditions and power relations shape culture.	Eric Wolf, Marvin Harris
Processual Archaeology		