



The Four General Education Lenses

Each time we approach a question or project, we are informed by certain perspectives, or “lenses.” At any given time, we are looking through multiple lenses, but often, one may be more dominant than the others. Throughout your academic journey, these lenses coincide with disciplines or fields of study. Here at SNHU, we’ve prioritized four of these lenses: humanities, history, the sciences, and the social sciences. Professionals in these fields all ask questions in order to gain information, but they may ask them in different ways that will help them examine different aspects of a topic. We can think of these as four different telescopes, and each lens has different characteristics. Thus, depending on the lens we are looking through, the cultural artifacts we encounter—the constructed items that convey the benchmarks of a particular culture or social group—will tell a different story.

The Humanities

At the core of the humanities is human creativity, and they explore the things that humanity creates and how they offer insight into the way people experienced their present, interacted with their culture, and comprehended abstract concepts and big questions about humanity’s place in the universe. The humanities broaden perspectives and promote an understanding of multiple experiences, cultures, and values through various mediums of creative human expression—such as literature, fine art, dance, photography, philosophy and religion, film and television, music, even the internet and social media—many of which are taught as separate academic disciplines. Within the humanities, both the artist’s (or creator’s) intent and audience reception of a creative artifact are considered to help understand cultural values and why they matter. They celebrate cultural diversity while also highlighting cultural similarity. View these brief videos for more on the lens of the humanities:

Video: [What Are the Humanities and Why Are They Important? \(CC\)](#) (1:53)

This closed caption video gives the viewer an overview of the importance of the study of humanities in higher education.

Video: [Humanities](#) (3:22)

This video gives the viewer a visual representation of what the humanities are.

- A captioned version of this video is available: [Humanities \(CC\)](#)

History

Many of us are familiar with history as being a list of dates, events, and people to memorize, but history is so much more than simply dates and memorizing facts. Your primary exposure to history could have been in grade school required classes or in documentaries about subjects you find interesting. There is so much more to history, however. History tells the stories of our past to help us better understand how we got to the present. In addition to dates, events, and people, history encompasses firsthand accounts of experiences that include artifacts from an era (tools, clothes, toys, etc.), letters or diaries from people who lived during a certain time, documents from a time period, photographs, and, when possible, interviews with people who lived through the events that historians study. Together, these historical remnants help write a story of a particular time, which is then folded into the stories of history we are living and making today. View these brief videos for more on the lens of history.

Video: [Thinking Like a Historian \(CC\)](#) (8:47)



This closed captioned video uses the idea of developing a “story” and using cause and effect to give an overview of ways to think like a historian.

Video: [What Is History For? \(CC\)](#) (4:13)

This closed captioned video helps the viewer understand the importance of studying history and not just focusing on “current events”.

Video: [What Is Historical Thinking \(CC\)](#) (7:41)

This closed captioned video discusses five aspects of historical thinking to get an accurate picture of what has happened in the past.

The Natural and Applied Sciences

The natural and applied sciences study the physical world to help us better understand ourselves and our place in nature, and nature’s role in shaping us. The natural sciences include fields such as biology, chemistry, and physics, while the applied sciences include STEM-related fields such as mathematics and technology. Together these fields explore the questions and curiosities humans have been pondering for ages, and scientists often develop questions and use a scientific process—the scientific method—to describe, predict, and observe the natural world. This method of developing and researching hypotheses can also be applied to the other lenses as a way to organize the questions one might ask to gain a deeper understanding of our world and experiences. View these brief videos for more on the natural and applied sciences:

Video: [The Scientific Method](#) (4:05)

This video provides the viewer with an overview of the scientific method and how it is used.

- A captioned version of this video is available: [The Scientific Method \(CC\)](#)

Video: [What is Science?](#) (2:01)

This video provides the viewer with information about what science is and what we can learn from it.

- A captioned version of this video is available: [What Is Science? \(CC\)](#)

Video: [Scientific Literacy - Neil deGrasse Tyson](#) (2:52)

This video, narrated by Neil deGrasse Tyson, describes scientific thinking.

- A captioned version of this video is available: [Neil deGrasse Tyson Describes Scientific Thinking \(CC\)](#)

The Social Sciences

As people are social beings, social science is the study of society and the relationships between people. Subjects included in this lens are psychology, sociology, anthropology, political science, economics, and geography. This study of human behavior and interaction can sometimes overlap with the humanities lens, which also studies different cultures. Studying society, culture, and human relationships will lead us to an understanding of how people live and how to improve our lives. Social scientists use a variety of methods to arrive at conclusions within this lens, such as interviews, participant observation, and primary and secondary sources. The social sciences can also intersect with the other lenses. For instance, like for the history lens, social scientists may look at the past to gain an understanding of the social relationships that took place. How did we interact? How did we work together? Asking questions similar to these has given us the opportunity to evaluate causes and effects related to people in our



society. Consider how the social science lens helps us interact with the world around us and uses cultural artifacts to make changes in our lives to promote better living or promote interactions we normally would not have with others. View these brief videos for more on social science:

Video: [An Animated Introduction to Social Science \(CC\)](#) (4:35)

This closed captioned video gives the viewer an overview of the different aspects of the social sciences including anthropology, political sciences, sociology, psychology, and geography

Video: [What Is Social Science? Part 1 \(CC\)](#) (2:50)

This closed captioned video is part one of a two part series on an in-depth explanation of the social sciences.

Video: [What Is Social Science? Part 2 \(CC\)](#) (2:37)

This closed captioned video is part two of a two part series on an in-depth explanation of the social sciences.