

First Words: Glossary of Prehistory Terminology

Modern humans existed for over a hundred thousand years. But, written history has only been available for about six thousand years. The time before is known as prehistory, which we can still learn about in a range of ways. The lives of actual cave people make up a large part of the history of human existence. It's important to learn about where we came from, partially to discover how we became who we are today.

There are many basic terms used when we study [prehistory](#). Let's delve right in.

Agriculture is the science of raising crops and breeding animals. Humans learning to grow plants and raise animals for food, clothing, and other purposes was an important step in establishing human civilization.

Agricultural Revolution is another name for the Neolithic Revolution.

Anthropology is the study of the origins and development of people and their societies. **Anthropologists** are people who study anthropology.

Archeology is the study of ancient human cultures. **Archeologists** are those who study archeology. They study prehistorical times.

Artifacts are items such as a weapon, tools, pieces of pottery, or other objects that remain from a civilization that no longer exists. They provide insights into how the people there lived.

Cave painting is [art](#) that is found in caves throughout the world that were drawn by prehistorical humans. Art is a form of "writing" we have to learn about their lives.

Ceramic (Greek for "pottery") is any substance made hard by means of firing it up at very high temperatures. Early humans used **pottery** (vessels to hold things) made up of fired clay. We can learn about early humans by the types of ceramics they used.

Civilization is the stage of human social and cultural development and organization that has certain fundamental aspects considered necessary for an advanced society. Human civilization is often considered to have begun during the Agricultural Revolution.

Clans are a small human societal group that is based on **kinship** (family connections). Prehistorical humans lived in clans of around thirty to fifty people.

Clovis is a place in New Mexico that gives its name to a prehistorical people that lived around 12000 BCE. They left behind distinctive spear points known as "Clovis points."

Cro-Magnons were an early version of humans named after a cave in France where their skeletal remains were first found. They lived about ten to forty thousand years ago.

Culture is a way of life. It is a set of learned beliefs, behaviors, and values that guide everyday living. Culture sometimes is used to describe a special advanced level of culture such as opera.

Domesticate (from Latin meaning "belonging to the house") means to tame animals and raise plants for human use. Animals and plants are no longer merely collected from the wild.

Flint is a type of rock that was used to make tools. Flint spearheads were an early human technology used for hunting and [protection](#).

Fossils are plants or animals that have been preserved in rock for a very long period of time. Fossils enable us to learn about living things from the distant past.

Homo sapiens ("thinking man") are you and me. They are modern-day humans.

Humanoids are modern humans or members of an early group of human-like ancestors of modern humans. Examples would include Neanderthals and Cro-Magnon Man.

Hunters and gathers are people who hunt (hunters) and gather wild plants (gatherers) for survival. They do not rely on growing their own plants and raising their own animals.

Ice Ages are periods of time when there is an extended drop in the Earth's temperature. The last ice age ended about 11500 BCE. Ice ages make it hard to grow crops and raise animals.

Neanderthals are an extinct early form of humans. They lived until around 40000 BCE and are named from a region in Germany where their bones were first found. They were "[cave people](#)."

Neolithic Revolution ("New Stone Age") was the transformation of a hunter-and-gatherer existence to an [agricultural society](#). It took place about ten thousand years ago and led to the first civilizations and written history. It is also known as the Agricultural Revolution.

Nomads are people who move from place to place. Nomads move to seek out new sources of food, shelter, and safety.

Prehistory is the period of human existence before written history. It took place until around six thousand years ago. Prehistory still had a lot of actual human history!

Stone Age was a period of time when people used stones for human tools. It is broken down into three main parts: the **Paleolithic** ("Old Stone Age"), **Mesolithic** ("Middle Stone Age"), and **Neolithic** ("New Stone Age"). It took place about 2.5 million years to 5000 years ago.

Technology is practical knowledge that is used to make tools and other things useful for human civilization. Some examples of early technology are making fire and ceramic pottery.

Woolly mammoths were very large and hairy [elephant](#)-like creatures that lived until around four thousand years ago. Early humans used them for food and their bones and tusks as tools.