

Characteristics of Civilizations

The civilizations you studied in Unit 1 each demonstrated the five characteristics that historians use to define a civilization.

Advanced Cities

Cities were key features of the ancient civilizations. These cities were more than just collections of people. They were also centers of political, economic, and religious life.

Specialized Workers

Surpluses of food allowed people to specialize in jobs outside of agriculture. Specialized workers such as artisans, traders, and soldiers strengthened and expanded civilization.

Complex Institutions

Complex institutions such as law codes, religion, and an economy were another characteristic of ancient civilizations. They organized, united, and helped civilizations to prosper.

Record Keeping and Writing

Each civilization developed a system of writing. Rulers could record laws. Priests could write down important religious dates and the rituals to follow. Merchants could record transactions. Eventually, people used the writing system to record their thoughts and ideas, creating literature and written history.

Advanced Technology

The civilizations developed new ways of doing work and new materials to work with, such as metals and pottery. They also developed tools like calendars to make their world more orderly.

	Indus Valley	Mesopotamia	China	Ancient Egypt	Palestine
Advanced Cities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planned cities had neatly laid-out streets and fortified areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cities had central temples called ziggurats. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cities had massive earthen walls for protection. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cities had power over the surrounding lands. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phoenicians were busy port cities. Jerusalem had a large temple.
Specialized Workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Artisans made various goods, which traders exchanged with other peoples. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Priests, warriors, scribes, artisans, and farmers all had special tasks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Warriors defended the land. Artisans made beautiful and useful items. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rulers, officials, priests, and wealthy land-owners led society. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phoenicians carried goods. Israelite religious leaders had influence.
Complex Institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rulers organized the work of laying out the cities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Priests and then kings ran the cities. Rulers created written law codes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rulers organized workers to build canals and city walls. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pharaohs ordered people to build elaborate tombs. Priests ran large temples. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Israelites developed the belief in one god. They saw the land as a gift from God.
Record Keeping and Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The system of writing has not yet been deciphered. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cuneiform was the world's first system of writing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The writing system helped unify peoples with different languages because characters stood for ideas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hieroglyphic writing had symbols that stood for ideas and for sounds. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Phoenician alphabet became the basis of other alphabets.
Advanced Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engineers made sophisticated buildings and plumbing systems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sumerians invented the wheel, the sail, and the plow, and discovered how to make bronze. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Chinese refined bronze casting technology and valuable silk cloth production. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advances were made in engineering, astronomy, and medicine. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phoenicians built ships with advances such as the steering oar and the

SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Charts

- Synthesizing** How important was religion to these civilizations?
- Analyzing Motives** How did the Chinese system of writing contribute to the spread of Chinese civilization?