Exploring the Social Science of Archaeology
Archaeology is one of the four branches of the social science field of Anthropology.

Anthropology

- Cultural Anthropology
- Physical Anthropology
- Cultural Linguistics
- Archaeology
Anthropologists study humankind and our closest relatives, the primates

Culture
Behavior
Physical characteristics
Social relationships
Language variation
Human evolution
Archaeologists study particular aspects of humankind. Past human cultures.

Material objects from people of the past.
What do archaeologists do?
They dig and collect ...
... and then they examine and interpret.

**Did you know?**
Archaeologists spend about six hours in the lab for every one hour they spend out digging.
Common myths about Archaeology:

- **Myth #1: Archaeologists study dinosaurs or look for fossils.** The study of animals and plants that lived in the past is called Paleontology. Paleontology is part of the natural science of Geology.

- **Myth #2: Archaeologists sell what they find.** Archaeologists are concerned with preserving information about the past. The artifacts they find are an important part of this information. Artifacts are preserved in museums and research institutions for other archaeologists to study in the future, and for display for the public.

- **Myth #3: Archaeologists are only interested in finding artifacts that are worth a lot of money.** Archaeologists look at all the artifacts from a site, whether or not the artifacts might be worth money. Often the smallest, simplest find can be the most important.
Quick Quiz

Would an archaeologist dig for the remains of a Tyrannosaurus Rex?

Click on the correct answer

Yes  No
Quick Quiz Answer

Sorry, the correct answer is “No”.

The Tyrannosaurus Rex is a type of dinosaur. Archaeologists do not study dinosaurs. If you find a dinosaur bone you better call a paleontologist.
Quick Quiz Answer

Good Job! You are correct!

A Tyrannosaurus Rex is a type of dinosaur. Archaeologists do not study dinosaurs. If you have a dinosaur you better call a paleontologist.
There are several different types of Archaeologists

Here are a few examples:

- Prehistoric
- Historic
- Zooarchaeologist
- Archaeobotanist

Michigan State University excavation at the prehistoric Moccasin Bluff Site, Berrien County, Michigan. (Photo by D. Goatley)
Prehistoric Archaeologists

- Use artifacts and other information obtained from archaeological excavations to study people and cultures that did not leave written records.
- Study stone tools, pottery, and other artifacts to learn about technology of the past.
- Use plant and animal remains to learn about the diet of past civilizations.

Stone drills from the Middle Archaic Period, Ca. 5500 to 3000 B.C. from the Quasar Site, Greene County, IL. (Photo by Daniel B. Goatley)
Quick Quiz

Would a prehistoric archaeologist use a **diary** to learn about a culture whose site they have excavated?

Click on the correct answer

**Yes**  **No**
Quick Quiz Answer

Sorry, the correct answer was “No”.

A prehistoric archaeologist studies people who have no written records. A diary is a form of written record of past events. Go on to see which type of archaeologist uses written records.
Quick Quiz Answer

You are correct! Good going!

A diary is a type of written document. Prehistoric archaeologists only study people for which no written records of their culture exists. Go on to see which type of Archaeologist uses written records.
Historic Archaeologists

- Study people and cultures which possess or have left written documents.
- Use artifacts from archaeological excavations, along with written documents, to study the technology, diet, and actions of people who lived in the past.
- Study sites like historic forts, battlefields, or European settlements in the New World.

Old plat maps such as this one of the town of Grafton, Illinois, in 1872 can be used to relocate old houses and other buildings which were built in the past and are no longer standing.
Quick Quiz

Would an historic archaeologist be interested in learning about early European settlements in the New World, like Jamestown?

Click on the correct answer

Yes  No
Yes! Good job!

An historic archaeologist studies people who have written records. Early European settlements like Jamestown have lots of written documentation in the form of diaries, business records, personal letters, and government documents.
Oops! You missed this one.

Early Settlements in America had a variety of written records in the form of diaries, ship’s logs, plat maps, and other papers. An historic archaeologist could use these, along with excavations, to learn more about the early historic people of this country.
Zooarchaeologists

- Study animal bones to learn about the diet of people in the past.
- Determine what the environment near a site was like in the past by studying what animals were used by people at that time.
- Study what types of bones, teeth, and other animal parts people used to make tools.
- Study how and when people began to tame and domesticate animals.

Freshwater mussels and turtle shell from a living surface dating to Ca. 3000 B.C. at the Quasar Site, Green County, Illinois. (Photo by Daniel B. Goatley)
Quick Quiz

Would a zooarchaeologist be interested in fish bones excavated from within a fire pit which dates to A.D. 1000 (1000 years ago)?

Click on the correct answer

Yes  No
Quick Quiz Answer

Good Answer!

Yes! A zooarchaeologist would be very interested in fish bones. They could look at what types of fish people living 1000 years ago were eating.
Quick Quiz Answer

Sorry, that’s incorrect.

In fact, a zooarchaeologist would be very interested in fish bones. They could look at what types of fish people living 1000 years ago were eating.
Archaeobotanists

- Use plant remains from archaeological sites to study what types of plants people were eating in the past.
- Study how people used plants to make tools, houses, and other types of technology.
- Study how people developed agriculture and started to raise crops.

Soil sample from 2000 year old fire pit in which wood charcoal and seeds will be separated from the soil using a water process called flotation. (Photo by Daniel B. Goatley)
Quick Quiz

Would an Archaeobotanist be interested in charred corn fragments found in eastern North America from a site dating to A.D. 500 (1500 years ago)?

Click on the correct answer

Yes  No
Quick Quiz Answer

Good Answer!

Yes! An Archaeobotanist would be very excited about 1500 year old corn fragments in eastern North America. Corn was first being grown west of the Mississippi River between A.D. 0 and 500.
Quick Quiz Answer

Sorry, you didn’t get this one right.

An Archaeobotanist **would** be very excited about 1500 year old corn fragments in eastern North America. Corn was first being grown west of the Mississippi River between A.D. 0 and 500.
Other Archaeology Specialties

- **Lithic Studies**: The study of stone tools and the raw materials used to make them.

- **Ceramic Analysis**: The study of prehistoric and historic pottery.

- **Physical Archaeology**: The study of human remains found in archaeological sites.

Prehistoric pottery fragments from Michigan. (Photo by William A. Lovis)
Archaeology Jobs

- Work with **universities** and colleges teaching and conducting research.

- Work with **museums** to preserve artifacts for future study.

- Work in **cultural resource management** finding and excavating sites before road work or other construction destroys them.

- Work in **state and national parks** to preserve and research known archaeological sites.

Students work at part of Michigan State University’s excavation of the Saints’ Rest Dormitory on the MSU Campus. (Photo by Daniel B. Goatley)
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