

Chronology (from the Greek word *chronos*, which means "time"): the science of measuring time in fixed periods, dating events and periods, and placing them in order.

In your study of history this year, you will learn to think "chronologically"—that is, in order of the time sequence of events. The timeline will help you to think chronologically. Here is some basic information about the chronology on which the timeline is based.



BC and AD, or BCE and CE?

The calendar that is used in the Western world was developed in Europe during the Middle Ages. This calendar is used by most of the world in order to have a common way of discussing dates. The Western calendar measures years from the year in which Jesus Christ was thought to have been born (Year 1). The years that are before Year 1 are referred to as "Before Christ" or **BC**. The years after Year 1 are referred to as **AD**, an abbreviation for the Latin term *Anno Domini*, which means "in the year of the lord." AD years are counted forward from Year 1; BC years are counted backward from Year 1. This means that 500 BC was farther back in time (or earlier) than 200 BC.

In recent years, historians have begun to use the abbreviation **BCE** (*Before the Common Era*) to replace BC, and **CE** (*Common Era*) to replace AD. Often, the AD dates are not followed by any initials at all. The BCE/CE system was adopted to be more inclusive of other cultures, by not making reference to the Christian religion in the dating system. (Also, some people now believe that Jesus Christ was actually born in the year 7 AD, and not in the year 1!)



Throughout history, societies have invented various ways of measuring and recording the passage of time. Most calendars count the years from an important event in that society (e.g., in Western Europe, the birth of Jesus Christ). The Chinese calendar measures time from the reign of the Yellow Emperor (which corresponds to the year 2698 BCE in the Western calendar). The Islamic calendar numbers years from the year when the prophet Muhammad fled from Mecca (which corresponds to the year 622 CE in the Western calendar). The year 2000 in the Western calendar is therefore 4698 in the Chinese calendar and 1421 in the Islamic calendar. Also, the number of days in a year varies from calendar to calendar. For example, Mayan society developed a complex calendar based on a year that was only 260 days long.

A point to remember when you refer to centuries on the timeline:

When you celebrate your 10th birthday, you are beginning the 11th year of your life. In the same way, the year 1500 is the beginning of the 16th century.