

## IDS The Four General Education Lenses

As you have learned in previous classes, each liberal arts area has a different outlook or “lens” that it uses to study the world. Professionals who work in the fields of social science, natural science, humanities, and history 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. It is important to note that each lens allows one to think about a topic in a different way and, therefore, 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 Social Sciences**

As people are social beings, social science is the study of society and the relationships between people. This study of human behavior and interaction can sometimes “overlap” with the humanities lens, which 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 both primary and secondary sources to arrive at conclusions within this lens. Social science careers include a wide variety of fields such as sociology, anthropology, psychology, and many more. Social science can also intersect with other lenses, such as the lens of history, where we look to the past to gain an understanding of social relationships that took place. How do we interact? How do 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 interacts 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 this brief video for more on social science: [An Animated Introduction to Social Science](#) (4:35).

### **The Natural Sciences**

Natural science is the study of the physical world and includes fields such as chemistry, biology, and physics, as well as other STEM-related disciplines like technology and mathematics. Natural scientists develop questions and use a specific process of describing, predicting, and observing the natural world. Often, the natural sciences are led by the scientific method, which can be adapted from the science field and applied to other lenses. Think about how you can apply this method to, say, the evaluation of a cultural artifact normally viewed through the humanities lens. Consider how the natural sciences make commentary on our daily lives and the use of technology. Do you have a cell phone that you use daily? How does society comment on the changes happening in the scientific realms that affect us each day? View this brief video from IDS 100 for more on the natural sciences: [The Scientific Method](#) (4:05).

### **History**

Many of us are familiar with history as being a list of dates to memorize, but history is so much more than simply dates and memorizing facts. History is the study of events that occurred in the past. Historians use primary sources. These are first-hand accounts of experiences that include artifacts from an era (such as hats that people used to wear), letters from people who lived during a certain time, documents from a time period, photographs, and firsthand accounts of people who lived through the events that historians study. Consider how analyzing a cultural artifact provides us with knowledge of how things used to be and how they have changed due to what we have learned from history. View this brief video for more on the lens of history: [Thinking Like a Historian](#) (8:47).

### **The Humanities**

The humanities are the study of cultures around the world and give us the opportunity to discuss similarities and differences between these cultures. The humanities broaden perspective and promote an understanding of multiple experiences, cultures, and values through various mediums of creative human expression—such as literature, fine art, dance, photography, literature, and philosophy—that explore the process of how people understand and represent the human experience. As such, professionals in the field of humanities use primary sources. Professionals in the humanities might ask about cultural values and why they matter. Could you set aside your own values to look objectively at another culture? In the humanities, you might ask how art was made and what cultural aspects it represents. What were the artists trying to convey about their culture or the period of time they lived in (the latter being an example of how the lenses of humanities and history can overlap)? The humanities lens looks at different forms of art to express culture and the human experience. The humanities also provide the opportunity to reflect on the impact of science (the sciences) on human culture. What do we learn about ourselves and society when we engage with an artifact through this lens? View this brief video for more on the lens of the humanities: [What Are the Humanities and Why Are They Important?](#) (1:53)