

Study guide for the midterm exam

Bring one or two 8 ½ x 11 (large size) blue books. The midterm is worth 20% of the course grade, or 200 points. It covers all of the readings and lecture material prior to the test. The test calls for written answers that range from a phrase or sentence to perhaps a few paragraphs.

Some questions will come from this study guide. Others will not, but will be similar in style. This guide covers some important highlights, but it is not a list of everything you should know. You should understand the material covered in the readings and lectures.

I look for clear, logical arguments supported by specific examples and evidence where appropriate. When a question has several parts, address them all. Don't just mention concepts; explain them fully, showing that you understand the answer, the issues, and the evidence.

Suggestions for studying: Review the readings, lecture notes, and slides. Identify the important points and arguments of each. For each point, recognize the arguments and evidence that suggest that it is true (or not!). Also think about how the claim fits into a larger argument, that is, what it implies, why it matters, and why the author brings it up.

1. In our first reading, Toynbee explained a reason why the study of history is useful. Summarize his argument and the particular case that brought it to his attention.
2. Explain what is meant by narrative, and the claim that history is narrative. Explain how the narrative quality of history makes it a selective, biased, and somewhat artificial view of the past.
3. Who was Ibn Khaldun, roughly when and where did he live, and what are some of the important ideas he proposed about the field or practice of history?
4. What are some essential characteristics of the field of history, as opposed to literature, anthropology, etc.? That is, what defines history as it is practiced today?
5. What is a Grand Narrative, and what is a Grand Theory? Explain and illustrate with at least one example of each other than Diamond's views in *Guns, Germs, and Steel*.
6. Explain and contrast historical particularism and social evolutionism (social evolution theory).
7. What is Great Man theory, and what arguments have historians in the last century or two used to suggest that it is not a good approach to understanding past events?
8. Briefly explain the social evolution theories of Ibn Khaldun, Spengler, Toynbee, Marx and Engels, and Diamond. (A single midterm question would probably not ask for all of these.)
9. What is a primary source, and what is a secondary source?
10. What is the implied Grand Narrative and the explicit Grand Theory of *Guns, Germs, and Steel*?
11. What point was Diamond trying to make with his discussion of Polynesia? How does evidence from Polynesia support his claims?
12. According to Diamond, what were the proximate causes for Pizarro's capture of Atahualpa and conquest of Peru? Why did the Spanish have these advantages over the Inkas, and not vice versa?

13. Roughly when and how did humans first reach Australia? Roughly when and how did they first reach the New World? Explain and assess two contrasting views of the New World case.
14. What are megafauna extinctions? Discuss two possible cases, and why Diamond thinks they may be important for understanding later history.
15. Explain why there are generally only minor differences in wealth among foragers, while there may be significant differences in wealth among farmers.
16. How is the transition from foraging to farming thought to have affected society? Consider not only how people got their food, but also their settlements, social relations, health and population trends, etc. Explain the reasoning and/or evidence for these effects.
17. Discuss foraging and food production in terms of yield per acre and yield per hour of labor. What are some implications of these basic facts about foraging and food production?
18. What is domestication? Discuss some actions by humans that would have tended to cause it.
19. What is surplus, and why is it important in understanding the origins of complex society?
20. What plants and animals were domesticated by early Neolithic people of the Fertile Crescent?
21. What does Diamond mean by “preemptive domestication”, and what does he infer about rates of diffusion of ideas in different regions based on the presence of absence of it?
22. Describe the Natufian culture, the process that apparently led Natufians at Tell Abu Hureyra to become committed to agriculture, and some evidence that supports this story.
23. Why, according to Diamond, did food production become attractive to foragers earlier in the Fertile Crescent than anywhere else? Explain.
24. Explain why, according to Diamond, disease contributed to Eurasian dominance over other societies, rather than helping to defend other societies against Eurasian intruders. Were there any exceptions to this pattern? Explain.
25. Why, according to Diamond, did practices of food production spread more rapidly in Eurasia than in Australia, the New World, or Africa?
26. Describe the site of Göbekli Tepe and why it presents a challenge to standard ideas about the development of complex society.
27. Describe and contrast the sites of Asikli Höyük and Çatal Hüyük. Discuss the subsistence base and nature of the societies thought to have existed at these sites. How do these sites support and conflict with standard ideas about the development of complex society?
28. Explain and contrast “blueprint copying” and “idea diffusion”. Illustrate with examples of writing systems.
29. Where did writing develop independently? How was that development related to food production?