

DEFINITIONS OF GEOGRAPHY

The study of the earth's surface as the space within which the human population lives. The word comes from Greek *geo*, the earth, and *graphien*, to write. Perhaps the best known formal definition of the field was provided by the American geographer, Richard Hartshorne, in his "Perspective on the Nature of Geography (1959)": **geography is concerned to provide accurate, orderly and rational description and interpretation of the variable character of the earth's surface.** The last two terms in this definition need some elaboration. By 'variable character' geographers mean the spatial variation that can occur between the character of the earth's surface at one location and another. This variation may occur at all map scales, from the globe itself, say between continent and continent, down to a very local level, say between one district and another within an urban area. By 'earth surface' is meant that rather thin shell. Only about one-thousandth of the planet's circumference thick, that forms the habitat or environment within which the human population is able to survive. (Johnston's Dictionary of Human Geography).

The discipline has many interpretations which might be best understood if they were taken chronologically. Based on the evolution of the discipline with the passage of time, a number of ideologies have come up which has resulted in a number of definitions and connotations of the discipline.

The Free Dictionary by Farlex defines Geography as:

The study of the earth and its features and of the distribution of life on the earth, including human life and the effects of human activity.

The science dealing with the areal differentiation of the earth's surface, as shown in the character, arrangement, and interrelations of such elements as climate, elevation, vegetation, population, and land use.

The scientific study of the Earth's surface and its various climates, countries, peoples, and natural resources.

Wikipedia defines Geography as:

A field of science dedicated to the study of the lands, the features, the inhabitants, and the phenomena of Earth. A literal translation would be "to describe or picture or write about the earth". The first person to use the word "geography" was Eratosthenes (276–194 BC). Four historical traditions in geographical research are spatial analysis of the natural and the human phenomena (geography as the study of distribution), area studies (places and regions), study of the human-land relationship, and research in the Earth sciences. Nonetheless, modern geography is an all-encompassing discipline that foremost seeks to understand the Earth and all of its human and natural complexities—not merely where objects are, but how they have changed and come to be. Geography has been called

"the world discipline" and "the bridge between the human and the physical science". Geography is divided into two main branches: human geography and physical geography.

Merriam Webster's Dictionary defines Geography as:

A science that deals with the description, distribution, and interaction of the diverse physical, biological, and cultural features of the earth's surface. It is a delineation or systematic arrangement of constituent elements.

According to Cambridge dictionaries Online:

Geography is the study of the systems and processes involved in the world's weather, mountains, seas, lakes, etc. and of the ways in which countries and people organize life within an area.

Many famous geographers and non-geographers have attempted to define the discipline in a few short words. The concept of geography has also changed throughout the ages, making a definition for such a dynamic and all-encompassing subject difficult. With the help of Gregg Wassmansdorf, here are some ideas about geography from throughout the ages:

"The purpose of geography is to provide 'a view of the whole' earth by mapping the location of places." - **Ptolemy, 150 BC**

"Synoptic discipline synthesizing findings of other sciences through the concept of Raum (area or space)." - **Immanuel Kant, 1780**

"Synthesizing discipline to connect the general with the special through measurement, mapping, and a regional emphasis." - **Alexander von Humboldt, 1845**

"Man in society and local variations in environment." - **Halford Mackinder, 1887**

"How environment apparently controls human behavior." - **Ellen C. Semple, 1911**

"Study of human ecology; adjustment of man to natural surroundings." - **Harland Barrows, 1923**

"The science concerned with the formulation of the laws governing the spatial distribution of certain features on the surface of the earth." - **Fred Schaefer, 1953**

"To provide accurate, orderly, and rational description and interpretation of the variable character of the earth surface." - **Richard Hartshorne, 1959**

"Geography is both science and art" - **H.C. Darby, 1962**

"To understand the earth as the world of man" - **J.O.M. Broek, 1965**

"Geography is fundamentally the regional or chorological science of the surface of the earth." - **Robert E. Dickinson, 1969.**

Based on all these ideologies and viewpoint it may be concluded that Geography, as a discipline has a variety of interpretations. Based on those viewpoints it may be inferred that it is the study of Earth's landscapes, peoples, places and environments. It is, quite simply, about the world in which we live. Geography is unique in bridging the social sciences (human geography) with the natural sciences (physical geography). Human geography concerns the

understanding of the dynamics of cultures, societies and economies, and physical geography concerns the understanding of the dynamics of physical landscapes and the environment. Geography puts this understanding of social and physical processes within the context of places and regions - recognizing the great differences in cultures, political systems, economies, landscapes and environments across the world, and the links between them. Understanding the causes of differences and inequalities between places and social groups underlie much of the newer developments in human geography.

Geography provides an ideal framework for relating other fields of knowledge. It is not surprising that those trained as geographers often contribute substantially to the applied management of resources and environments.

Geography is, in the broadest sense, an education for life and for living. Learning through geography – whether gained through formal learning or experientially through travel, fieldwork and expeditions – helps us all to be more socially and environmentally sensitive, informed and responsible citizens and employees.

Geography informs us about

- The places and communities in which we live and work
- Our natural environments and the pressures they face
- The interconnectedness of the world and our communities within it
- How and why the world is changing, globally and locally
- How our individual and societal actions contribute to those changes
- The choices that exist in managing our world for the future
- The importance of location in business and decision-making