

Why is it necessary and helpful to study the context of prior history

[History](#)



There is not a single person who can say they have not learned from their mistakes or past experiences. When a child touches a hot stove and burns their hand, they quickly learn not to do it again and have a memory of experience that will help them make better choices in the future. This is probably why it is said “ we get wiser as we get older”. The same concept can be applied to studying history. By taking others experiences and analyzing the outcome, one could save themselves from making a mistake or causing embarrassment.

The importance of studying and understanding history but also learning from it is pertinent to hopefully making more informed decision in the present and the future. It has been said many times that history is studied so that mistakes are not repeated from the past, although this can be true it is also too simple. If so much knowledge of the past has been collected and learned over the centuries, then things like war, poverty, injustice and immorality should not exist.

It is also too simple to say the past can predict the future, although it is a nice idea, history can only help guide our future. Alternatively, a well-rounded understanding of history can uncover all that is the present. “ History requires us to think outside of our own experiences in time and place, and thus fosters empathetic thinking, greater appreciation of diversity, and understanding of the relationship between context and judgment” (The National History Center, 2013).

Understanding history most importantly offers a different, possibly better, perspective on the present situations and one’s ability to break down these situations and make informed choices. History can be thought of as <https://assignbuster.com/why-is-it-neccessary-and-helpful-to-study-the-context-of-prior-history/>

something set in stone and never changing; but history, like memories is actually forever changing. Although the dates and statistics may not change, how they are interpreted can and will vary. Years after, a situation may look a little different and take on a new meaning; a failure may seem like a blessing in disguise, a win may later seem not as great.

Historians are always at work reevaluating the past, asking new questions, examining new sources and finding new meanings in old documents in order to bring the perspective of new knowledge and experience for a better understanding of the past (McNeill, 2013). Access to the past is indirect and largely ruled by artifacts and remains left behind by the people who lived it. As a student, resources most valuable about history would be primary and secondary sources. Examples of these would be diaries, letters, speeches, journals, public records, newspapers, news film footage, pictures, paintings, and chroniclers' and historians' interpretations of past events.

Primary sources for example would be, among others, diaries and journals from people who actually witnessed an incident/event. Secondary sources for instance would be history textbooks, written by someone not present at the time of event but that have painstakingly studied and interpreted primary sources. Secondary sources are interpreted from that person's individual perspective, so two different secondary sources may have slightly different conclusions. Both types of sources contain inimitable information, and have their time and place for usefulness.

Studying history creates a view through the eyes of others, allowing people to place situations in an appropriate context in the present. Although a firm grasp on the past does not assure avoidance of its failures and mistakes, <https://assignbuster.com/why-is-it-necessary-and-helpful-to-study-the-context-of-prior-history/>

understanding the past and its patterns improves one's ability to analyze the present and make better predictions of future outcomes. As William Lund said, " We study the past to understand the present; we understand the present to guide the future. " The study of history is an ongoing process that is ever changing but always valuable.