

# [Differences between essentialism and perennialism](https://assignbuster.com/differences-between-essentialism-and-perennialism/)

Perennialists believe that the focus of education should be the ideas that have lasted over centuries. They believe the ideas are as relevant and meaningful today as when they were written. They recommend that students learn from reading and analyzing the works by history’s finest thinkers and writers. Essentialists believe that when students study these works and ideas, they will appreciate learning. Similar top perennialism, essentialism aims to develop students’ intellectual and moral qualities. Perennialist classrooms are also centered on teachers in order to accomplish these goals. The teachers are not concerned about the students’ interests or experiences. They use tried and true teaching methods and techniques that are believed to be most beneficial to disciplining students’ minds. The perennialist curriculum is universal and is based on their view that all human beings possess the same essential nature. Perennialists think it is important that individuals think deeply, analytically, flexibly, and imaginatively. They emphasize that students should not be taught information that may soon be outdated or found to be incorrect. Perennialists disapprove of teachers requiring students to absorb massive amounts of disconnected information. They recommend that schools spend more time teaching about concepts and explaining they are meaningful to students.

Perennial means “ everlasting,” like a perennial flower that comes up year after year. Espousing the notion that some ideas have lasted over centuries and are as relevant today as when they were first conceived, Perennialism urges that these ideas should be the focus of education. According to Perennialists, when students are immersed in the study of those profound and enduring ideas, they will appreciate learning for its own sake and become true intellectuals.

For Perennialists, the aim of education is to ensure that students acquire understandings about the great ideas of Western civilization. These ideas have the potential for solving problems in any era. The focus is to teach ideas that are everlasting, to seek enduring truths which are constant, not changing, as the natural and human worlds at their most essential level, do not change. A Perennialist views nature, human nature, and the underlying principles of existence as constant. The principles of knowledge are enduring. Truth never changes

Teaching these unchanging principles is critical. Humans are rational beings, and their minds need to be developed. Thus, cultivation of the intellect is the highest priority in a worthwhile education. The demanding curriculum focuses on attaining cultural literacy, stressing students’ growth in enduring disciplines. The loftiest accomplishments of humankind are emphasized- the great works of literature and art, the laws or principles of science.

The study of philosophy is thus a crucial part of the Perennialist curriculum. Perennialists regard essentialism, and its view that knowledge stems primarily from the empirical findings of scientists, as undermining the importance of our capacity to reason as individuals; that is, to think deeply, analytically, flexibly, and imaginatively.

Perennialists emphasize, though, that students should not be taught information that may soon be obsolete or found to be incorrect because of future scientific and technological findings.

Perennialists criticize the vast amount of discrete factual information that educators traditionally have required students to absorb. Perennialists urge schools to spend more time teaching about concepts and explaining how these concepts are meaningful to students. Particularly at the high school and university levels, Perennialists decry undue reliance on textbooks and lectures to communicate ideas. Perennialists suggest that a greater emphasis be placed on teacher-guided seminars, where students and teachers engage in Socratic dialogues, or mutual inquiry sessions, to develop an enhanced understanding of history’s most timeless concepts.

In addition, Perennialists recommend that students learn directly from reading and analyzing the Great Books. These are the creative works by history’s finest thinkers and writers, which Perennialists believe are as profound, beautiful, and meaningful today as when they were written. Perennialists lament the change in universities over the centuries from places where students (and teachers) pursued truth for its own sake to mere glorified training grounds for the students’ careers.

They believe that there is a common core of knowledge that needs to be transmitted to students in a systematic, disciplined way. The emphasis in this conservative perspective is on intellectual and moral standards that schools should teach. The core of the curriculum is essential knowledge and skills and academic rigor. Schooling should be practical, preparing students to become valuable members of society. It should focus on facts-the objective reality out there–and “ the basics,” training students to read, write, speak, and compute clearly and logically. Schools should not try to set or influence policies.

A Perennialist asks, “ What are the essential things a student must know?” Within a Perennialist curriculum, activities are tied to the past and not to what is “ essential” right now. The Perennialist values the past but he or she likes the back to basics movement inasmuch as the basics are the learnings of the great minds of the past.

Students should be taught hard work, respect for authority, and discipline. Teachers are to help students keep their non-productive instincts in check, such as aggression or mindlessness.

For the Perennialist, a great education is a study of the classics. A Perennialist teacher holds fast to a constant curriculum and holds fast to concrete materials that define what he or she will teach (rather than assessing the class and meeting the students’ needs).

A great proponent of Perennialism is Mortimer Adler, Professor of Philosophy at Columbia University. He wrote the Paidea Proposal. His basic tenant is that an individual learns best by studying the classics. The Paideia program seeks to establish a course of study that is general, not specialized; liberal, not vocational; humanistic, not technical. Only in this way can it fulfill the meaning of the words “ paideia” and “ humanities,” which signify the general learning that should be in the possession of every human being.”

The child should be taught certain basic subjects that will acquaint him/her with the world’s permanencies: English, languages, history, mathematics, natural sciences, the fine arts, and philosophy. The child should learn reading and writing, how to speak and how to listen. He is a social being and lives in a community of men. Thus he must use his reason — his powers of rationality – to communicate with other men. The three Rs ARE important.

Perennialists hold that subject matter should be the center of the curriculum. They feel that greater educational opportunities have lowered standards in the schools. They are particularly critical of the progressives who have placed emphasis on the interests of the child and teaching through activity and freedom. Education should introduce the pupil to the universal concerns of mankind thorough the study of the great works of literature, philosophy, history, and science. Such works represent man’s finest insights into his own nature. The insights presented in these works are eternal. They do not change; they are never dated. In this way, s/he learns truths that are more important than any s/he could find by dipping into this or that in the contemporary scene, or by pursing his own interests.

Education requires hard work and effort. If the student is interested in the subject, well and good, but if not, s/he still must be required to do the tasks. After all, the student does not know what s/he will need in the future. Motivation is fine, and if the teacher can provide it, well and good, but if not, the student must work at the task regardless.

Discipline in the classroom is essential to learning. A noisy classroom is not a desirable place for learning to take place. Order is vital. Students cannot always think of the future. Consequently, teachers and parents must help students overcome their desire for immediate ends and direct them to future objectives. Self-discipline is fine, but most of the times it is insufficient. Adults therefore must give direction. The classroom is teacher-centered. The teacher as a professional is far more likely to know what her students will need to know in the future than do they. S/he is responsible for the education and intellectual growth of his/her students. Education requires the mastery of content, of subject matter.

Education requires mental discipline. Study is hard work. Concentration and effort is required. Students must therefore being culturated in the process.

Essentialism

Educational essentialism is an educational philosophy whose adherents believe that children should learn the traditional basic subjects and that these should be learned thoroughly and rigorously. An essentialist program normally teaches children progressively, from less complex skills to more complex.

An Essentialist will usually teach some set subjects similar to Reading, Writing, Literature, Foreign Languages, History, Mathematics, Science, Art, and Music. The teacher’s role is to instill respect for authority, perseverance, duty, consideration, and practicality. Essentialism strives to teach students the accumulated knowledge of our civilization through core courses in the traditional academic disciplines. Essentialists aim to instill students with the “ essentials” of academic knowledge, patriotism, and character development. This traditional approach is meant to train the mind, promote reasoning, and ensure a common culture.

Essentialism tries to instill all students with the most essential or basic academic knowledge and skills and character development. Essentialists believe that teachers should try to embed traditional moral values and virtues such as respect for authority, perseverance, fidelity to duty, consideration for others, and practicality and intellectual knowledge that students need to become model citizens. The foundation of essentialist curriculum is based on traditional disciplines such as math, natural science, history, foreign language, and literature. Essentialists frown upon vocational courses. In the essentialist system, students are required to master a set body of information and basic techniques for their grade level before they are promoted to the next higher grade. The content gradually moves towards more complex skills and detailed knowledge. Essentialists argue that classrooms should be teacher-oriented. The teacher should serve as an intellectual and moral role model for the students. The teachers or administrators decide what is most important for the students to learn with little regard to the student interests. The teachers also focus on achievement test scores as a means of evaluating progress. The essentialist classroom is centered on students being taught about the people, events, ideas, and institutions that have shaped American society. Essentialists hope that when students leave school, they will not only possess basic knowledge and skills, but they will also have disciplined, practical minds, capable of applying lessons learned in school in the real world. Essentialism is different from what Dewey would like to see in the schools. Students in this system would sit in rows and be taught in masses. The students would learn passively by sitting in their desks and listening to the teacher. An example of essentialism would be lecture based introduction classes taught at universities. Students sit and take notes in a classroom which holds over one hundred students. They take introductory level courses in order to introduce them to the content. After they have completed this course, they will take the next level course and apply what they have learned previously. English 101 and English 102 are a specific example of essentialism.