

# Sumerian language

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Sumerians Contribution Have you ever thought of where math, writing, and governments were invented? The Sumerians invented math, science, writing, and astronomy. The Sumerians were the first civilization on earth. Around 4,000 B. C. E the people called Sumerians moved into Mesopotamia, located between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in the Middle East. The Sumerians built massive city walls, Ziggurats (similar to pyramids but used for worshipping), canals, etc. Many people don't know about how greatly the Sumerians have contributed to our society.

Looking at math, writing, and governments we will see how the Sumerians have influenced today's society. First of all, Sumerians were the first to invent math. The Sumerians used a "sexagesimal system," which basically means that everything based on the number 60 (Krupp). The mathematician Duncan J. Melville from St. Lawrence University said that "the system is striking for its originality and simplicity." The reasons why the Sumerians picked 60 as their base remains unknown; however, the idea was developed from an earlier, "More complex system known from 3200 B. C. in which the positions in a number alternated between 6 and 10 as bases. For a system that might seem even more deranged, if it weren't so familiar, consider this way of measuring length with four entirely different bases: 12 little units, called inches, make a foot, 3 feet make a yard, and 1,760 yards make a mile. Over a thousand years, the Sumerian alternating-base method was simplified into the sexagesimal system, with the same symbol standing for 1 or 60 or 3,600, depending on its place in the number, [...] just as 1 in the decimal system denotes 1, 10 or 100, depending on its place" (Wade).

Then later on Babylonians adopted the system and used it to calculate time: the "1: 12: 33" on a computer clock means 1 (x 60 squared) seconds + 12 (x 60) seconds + 33 seconds, which we still use today. This is the reason why modern day civilization measures an hour in 60 minutes and 1 minute in 60 seconds. The sexagesimal system enabled the Sumerians to calculate roots, multiply into millions, and use fractions. Modern-day math still uses aspects of this system (Wade).

Next, according to the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, writing emerged in many different cultures throughout the ancient world, it wasn't the creation of one people; however, the Sumerians are credited with inventing the earliest form of writing around 3,500 B.C.E. The Sumerians writings on stone tablets started off as just simple pictures and pictograms that represented objects or ideas (see Figure 1). Soon after the Sumerians simplified the pictograms into wedge-shaped signs which is called cuneiform writing ("Ancient Mesopotamia: The Invention of Writing"). The invention of writing was the dawn of the information revolution. This great technological advance allowed news and ideas to be carried to distant places without having to rely on a messenger's memory. Like all inventions, writing emerged because there was a need for it. In Mesopotamia, it was developed as a record-keeping vehicle for commercial transactions or administrative procedures. There are also texts that served as "copy books" for the education of future scribes.

Eventually, cuneiform script was used to produce some of the greatest literary works in recorded history ("Ancient Mesopotamia: The Invention of Writing"). We got the alphabet that we used today because after the

Sumerians in Mesopotamia started writing, it spread to Egypt, and by 1500 B. C. E. it spread to China, and from then on people were “ scribbling, sketching, and telling [the] world about their culture in a very permanent way” (Whipps). As writing spread, people developed their own styles, forms, and way of writing.

Another invention that we still use today is government. I learned from studying world history that the Sumerians needed a way to maintain order, organize work forces, and keep crimes from happening because Mesopotamia was a very large city with many artifacts and valuables. The Sumerians were able to build large defensive walls, roads, canals, ditches, and dikes that ran throughout Mesopotamia because of the organized labor, which was possible because they had a government. “ Now, government is what keeps the world from becoming a place of anarchy and chaos” (“ government”).

Government affects us now because we elect officials that represent our beliefs on how the United States should be run. America would be nothing without a government. We can thank the Sumerians because with a government America is a superpower and prosperous (“ government”). In conclusion, without the inventions of math, writing, government, and many more we would have a chaotic world. Sumerians invented arithmetic, a number system, cuneiform writing that many have adopted and changed, and a government to keep the Empire together.

Without the inventions of the Sumerians we would be set back a couple thousand years today.

## Citations " Ancient Mesopotamia:

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4. " How Writing Changed the World. " LiveScience. 10 2008: n. page. Web. 13 Dec. 2012. ; <http://www.livescience.com/2283-writing-changed-world.html>;. Figure 1: Sumerian Tablets With Semi-Pictographic Writing