

Archaeological Cultures

How do archaeologists start making sense of the things they excavate? How do they order the materials found in survey and excavation and use this to reconstruct a picture of past societies? Traditionally archaeologists have ordered this material into **archaeological cultures** as a first step for reconstructing past lifeways.

Workshop activity

In this workshop we want to focus on why things with similar purposes are different: what determines the form and decoration of an artefact? Is this style (communicating symbolic messages) or function?

There are many reasons for certain aspects of material culture being similar or dissimilar. Indeed determining similarity can be quite difficult. If we find it difficult to develop a typology for modern material culture (where we know the function and understand implicit stylistic information) think about how difficult it can be to develop an archaeological typology for ancient things and to understanding the meanings implicit in that typology.

Please work in pairs/groups of three. I will give you each a group of four objects:

- Eating implements
- Drinking vessels
- Liquid Containers
- Stationery

These might be considered similar – general function and context of use or where they are kept.

What about their material, form and stylistic information (shape, decoration, size). Is there similarity or difference of form?

Think about this analysis in more detail. Complete the table on the other side of this sheet, thinking about the specific function of the objects to highlight areas of similarity and difference (style and function).

HPAR4002: Introduction to Archaeology

1. Identify your three objects in the relevant box
2. List areas of similarity and difference between objects 1 and 2, 1 and 3 etc. in the relevant box.

	Object 1:	Object 2:	Object 3:	Object 4:
Object 1:		<i>Similarity</i>	<i>Similarity</i>	<i>Similarity</i>
Object 2:	<i>Dissimilarity</i>		<i>Similarity</i>	<i>Similarity</i>
Object 3:	<i>Dissimilarity</i>	<i>Dissimilarity</i>		<i>Similarity</i>
Object 4:	<i>Dissimilarity</i>	<i>Dissimilarity</i>		