

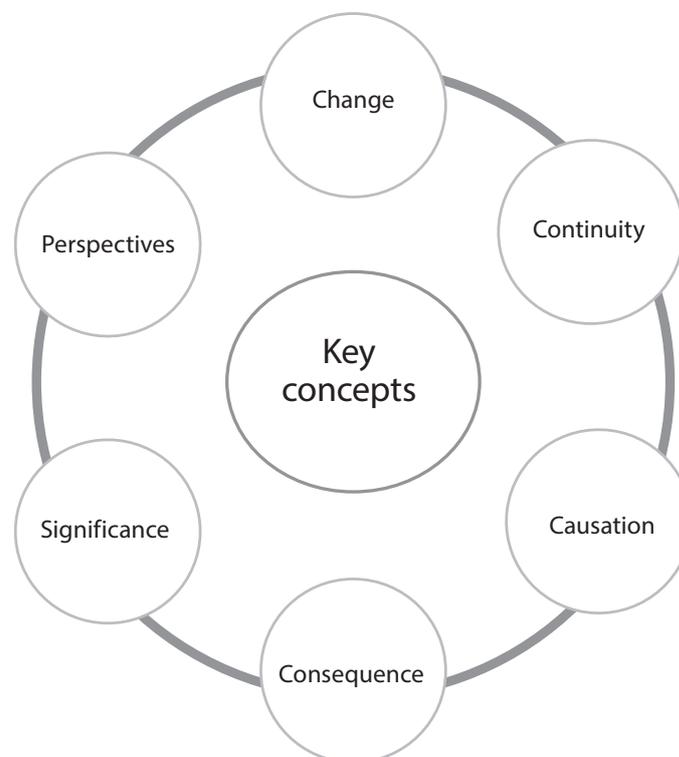
## Nature of the subject

History is a dynamic, contested, evidence-based discipline that involves an exciting engagement with the past. It is a rigorous intellectual discipline, focused around key historical concepts such as change, causation and significance.

History is an exploratory subject that fosters a sense of inquiry. It is also an interpretive discipline, allowing opportunity for engagement with multiple perspectives and a plurality of opinions. Studying history develops an understanding of the past, which leads to a deeper understanding of the nature of humans and of the world today.

The IB Diploma Programme (DP) history course is a world history course based on a comparative and multi-perspective approach to history. It involves the study of a variety of types of history, including political, economic, social and cultural, and provides a balance of structure and flexibility. The course emphasizes the importance of encouraging students to think historically and to develop historical skills as well as gaining factual knowledge. It puts a premium on developing the skills of critical thinking, and on developing an understanding of multiple interpretations of history. In this way, the course involves a challenging and demanding critical exploration of the past.

There are six key concepts that have particular prominence throughout the DP history course.



**Figure 2**  
*Key concepts for DP history*

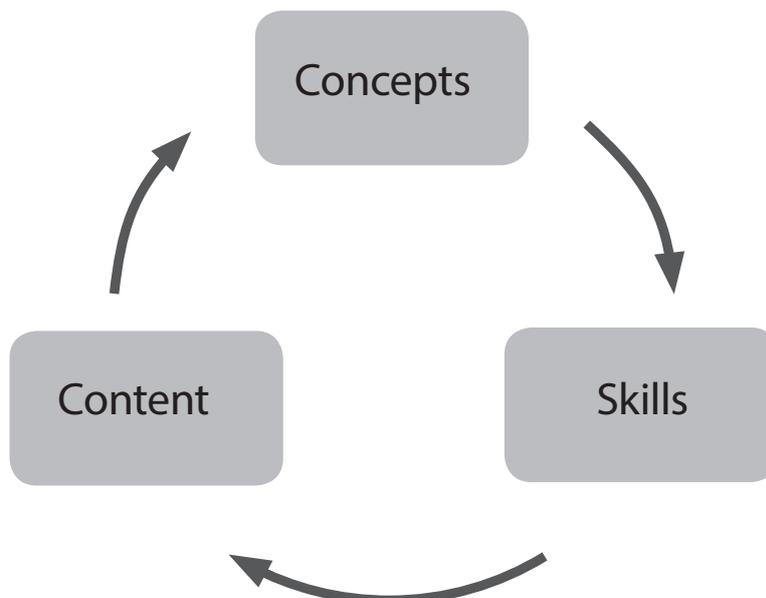
More information and guidance on these six concepts can be found in the “Key concepts for DP history unpacked” section of this guide, and also in the *History teacher support material*.

## Approaches to teaching and learning in the Diploma Programme history course

Approaches to teaching and learning in the Diploma Programme (DP) refer to deliberate strategies, skills and attitudes that permeate the teaching and learning environment. These approaches and tools are intrinsically linked with the learner profile attributes, enhance student learning and assist student preparation for the DP assessment and beyond.

The five approaches to learning (developing thinking skills, social skills, communication skills, self-management skills and research skills) along with the six approaches to teaching (teaching that is inquiry-based, conceptually focused, contextualized, collaborative, differentiated and informed by assessment) encompass the key values and principles that underpin IB pedagogy. More advice and support on these approaches to teaching and learning can be found in the following pages of this subject guide and also in the *History teacher support material*.

The DP history course is based on three key elements: content, concepts and skills. These three elements are seen as being inextricably linked.



**Figure 9**  
*Three key elements*

“Three-dimensional” models, such as this, “value a solid base of critical factual knowledge across the disciplines, but they raise the bar for curriculum and instruction by shifting the design focus to the conceptual level of understanding” (Erickson 2012).

<b>Concepts</b>	Concepts are big powerful ideas that have relevance both within and across subject areas. Concepts help to move students from knowledge to understanding as “knowledge is integrated with existing schemas and cognitive frameworks” (Anderson and Krathwohl 2001). Concepts also help to provide bridges between old knowledge and new knowledge, and facilitate transfer of knowledge across subject areas/contexts. Understanding the “big ideas” behind a topic can also help students get to the heart of why they are learning a particular topic. (See, for example, Perkins 2010.)
<b>Content</b>	Content also plays a crucial role in the DP history course, as there needs to be a solid base of factual knowledge to underpin the development of conceptual understanding. Specific examples and case studies also help to ground abstract concepts, allowing students to see a concept represented in a particular context.
<b>Skills</b>	Throughout the DP history course, students should be encouraged to develop their understanding of the methodology and practice of the discipline of history. Teaching historical skills enriches the student’s understanding of the subject and encourages the student to apply them to the future study of history or related areas. It is essential that these skills are covered throughout the syllabus, are introduced appropriately, depending on the context, and are not treated in isolation.

## Key concepts for DP history unpacked

The DP history course is focused on six key concepts: causation, consequence, change, continuity, significance and perspectives. In their efforts to place thinking at the centre of historical understanding, researchers in history education have highlighted the role that concepts such as these play in helping to shape our thinking about history (Seixas and Morton 2013). These concepts help students to think critically about historical issues; helping students to identify and solve problems, make decisions, and form judgments about past claims, actors and issues. These concepts are also extremely useful to history teachers as a tool for helping to craft creative lessons and assessment activities that avoid passive content delivery, and that provide opportunities for students to build on their prior knowledge and to think deeply about historical issues and events.

<b>Change</b>	The study of history involves investigation of the extent to which people and events bring about change. Discussion of the concept of change can encourage sophisticated discussions such as encouraging students to think about, and look for, change where some claim none exists, or using evidence to challenge orthodox theories and assumptions about people and events that it is claimed led to significant change. Students’ questions and judgments about historical change should be based on deep understanding of content and on comparison of the situation before and after the events under examination.
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<p><b>Continuity</b></p>	<p>While historical study often focuses on moments of significant change, students should also be aware that some change is slow, and that throughout history there is also significant continuity. Students can demonstrate deep historical knowledge and understanding by, for example, showing awareness that there are times when there has been considerable continuity in the midst of great historical change. Alternatively, students may question and assess whether a change in political leadership, for example, brought about a change in foreign policy, or whether it was more accurately mirroring policies of previous governments.</p>
<p><b>Causation</b></p>	<p>Effective historical thinkers recognize that many claims made about the past seek to more thoroughly explain and understand how a certain set of circumstances originated. Deep historical understanding is demonstrated where students recognize that most historical events are caused by an interplay of diverse and multiple causes that require students to make evidence-based judgments about which causes were more important or significant, or which causes were within the scope of individuals to direct and which were not.</p>
<p><b>Consequence</b></p>	<p>History is the understanding of how forces in the past have shaped future people and societies. Students demonstrate competency as historical thinkers where they understand and can explain how significant events and people have had both short-term and long-lasting effects. Students use evidence and interpretations of those people and events to make comparisons between different points in time, and to make judgments about the extent to which those forces produced long-lasting and important consequences.</p>
<p><b>Significance</b></p>	<p>History is not simply the record of all events that have happened in the past. Instead, history is the record that has been preserved through evidence or traces of the past, and/or the aspects that someone has consciously decided to record and communicate. Students should be encouraged to ask questions about why something may have been recorded or included in a historical narrative. Similarly, they should be encouraged to think about who or what has been excluded from historical narratives, and for what reasons. Additionally, students' questions should encourage them to think about, and assess, the relative importance of events, people, groups or developments, and whether the evidence supports the claims that others make about their significance.</p>
<p><b>Perspectives</b></p>	<p>IB students should be aware of how history is sometimes used or abused to retell and promote a grand narrative of history, a narrowly focused national mythology that ignores other perspectives, or to elevate a single perspective to a position of predominance. Students are encouraged to challenge and critique multiple perspectives of the past, and to compare them and corroborate them with historical evidence. Students should recognize that for every event recorded in the past, there may be multiple contrasting or differing perspectives. Using primary-source accounts and historians' interpretations, students may also investigate and compare how people, including specific groups such as minorities or women, may have experienced events differently in the past. In this way there are particularly strong links between exploring multiple perspectives and the development of international-mindedness.</p>