

# Then: The Development of Written Language

by Sophia Tutorial



## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will focus on one of the historical communication revolutions -- the development of writing. Writing gave our thoughts, ideas, and words a durability they had not previously had. Writing enabled us to spread our ideas consistently to different places as well as forward in time. With writing, we no longer needed to rely on others to speak for us when we tried to spread what we wanted to say. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. The Development of Written Language



## BEFORE YOU START

How did the alphabet change the way we record and preserve history?

## 1. The Development of Written Language

Written language is a fundamental tool for communication. The earliest forms of written languages were created to help with record keeping and were often written on clay tablets, **papyrus**, or leather parchment. There are records of people using tallies to keep track of numbers as early as 20,000 years ago (Hirst, 2018). Examples of early contracts, property records, and receipts indicate that writing was used in business transactions. Early writing was also used for recording important cultural artifacts such as laws, religious texts, and literature.

A key driver of widespread written communication was the invention of the alphabet. Before an alphabet existed, it took a great deal of specialization and study to understand written language (think about the complexity of the ancient Egyptian system of hieroglyphics). A basic alphabet originated in ancient Phoenicia, traveled to Greece, and later became incorporated into many countries, laying the foundation for greater literacy and, thus, more and better global communication. Yet it wasn't until much more recently that reading and writing became widely accessible. For a very long time, many cultures continued to use oral traditions to preserve history from one generation to the next through stories, poems, and songs.

The invention of the alphabet and its use for keeping records changed how we preserve history. Written communication meant that more information could be saved and studied. It's one of the reasons we're able to study history today!

Next up, we'll read about how the printing press and television took our ability to communicate even further.



#### TERM TO KNOW

### Papyrus

An early type of paper made from the leaves of the aquatic papyrus plant.



#### SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned why the **development of written language** was so important. Written communication, supported by the invention of the alphabet, changed the way that societies created and preserved information.

Best of luck in your learning!

Source: Strategic Education, Inc. 2020. Learn from the Past, Prepare for the Future.

#### REFERENCES

Hirst, K. (2018, May 27). *Clay Token System*. ThoughtCo. [www.thoughtco.com/clay-tokens-mesopotamian-writing-171673](https://www.thoughtco.com/clay-tokens-mesopotamian-writing-171673)



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