**Periodization: Creating a Framework for Understanding the Past**

**What is Periodization?**

* Periodization is the dividing or categorizing of time into separate sections.

**Why do historians use periodization?**

* To distinguish one cluster of interrelated historical events from another in order to discover patterns of change
* To identify significant shifts in those patterns in terms of discontinuities or turning points, which serve as the start and end of periods
* To highlight trends or events that appear dominant or important during a particular span of time

**But problems emerge:**

1. All systems of periodization are more or less arbitrary
2. Labels are continually challenged and redefined

**More Thoughts on Periodization:**

* Definition of Periodization:

A conceptual tool that makes change over time manageable by identifying big changes

* Implied Watersheds:

Developments or events that occurred in world history affecting the most people

* Criteria for periodization:

Change (political, economic, cultural, biological) in relation to the “masses”

* Three Overlapping Shifts:

Three overlapping shifts across societies must occur for a new period of world history to be identified

1. The world map must change significantly

(Cultural, political, or economic boundaries; migrations)

1. New kinds of contacts must be established among civilizational areas

(New trade patterns, outreach of religions)

1. New parallelisms must arise in patterns displayed by major civilizations

(Example: “The fall of the great empires meets the requirements. Cultural and political boundaries shifted in India and the Mediterranean world. Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam spread widely. The Islamic world replaced India as the most expansive civilization.”)

**Periodization in according to your textbook:**

**Directions**: Use your textbook, figure out the periodization of your textbook. The periods are listed. Your task is to create a list of topics covered in each period. Use the table of contents and skim through the chapters. Then, answer the questions on the back of this sheet.

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| **Period** | **Topics Covered** |
| Early Complex Societies, c. 3500 to c. 500 BCE |  |
| Formation of Classical Societies c. 500 BCE to c. 500 CE |  |
| Postclassical Era c. 500 CE to 1000 CE |  |
| Origins of Global Independence c. 1500 to c. 1800 |  |

**Textbook Periodization**

1. Review how your textbook is organized in terms of time periods. List the time periods that the textbook uses.
2. Why do you think the authors chose to break up time in this way?
3. In what other ways could the book be organized?
4. What hidden or implied assumptions are there in the periodization of this book? Might it have been different if the author was not western?
5. Choose a time period from your textbook. Skim through the introduction of the unit for that time period. What are some of global processes (world trends) that are associated with that time period?
6. Why does periodization matter? What does it help us to be aware of?