Education [socializes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialization) children into [society](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Society) by teaching cultural values and [norms](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_norm). It equips them with the skills needed to become productive members of society. This way, it stimulates [economic growth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economic_growth) and raises awareness of local and [global problems](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_global_issues). Organized [institutions](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Institution) affect many aspects of education. For example, [governments](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government) set [education policies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_policy). They determine when school classes happen, what is taught, and who can or must attend. [International organizations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_organization), like [UNESCO](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UNESCO), have been influential in promoting [primary education for all children](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_Primary_Education).

Many factors influence whether education is successful. [Psychological](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychology) factors include [motivation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Motivation), [intelligence](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_intelligence), and [personality](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Personality). Social factors, like [socioeconomic status](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socioeconomic_status), [ethnicity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethnicity), and [gender](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender), are often linked to [discrimination](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Discrimination). Further factors include [educational technology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Educational_technology), teacher quality, and parent involvement.

The main field investigating education is called [education studies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_studies). It examines what education is and what aims it has. It also studies how it happens, what effects it has, and how to improve it. It has many subfields, like [philosophy of education](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosophy_of_education), [psychology of education](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychology_of_education), [sociology of education](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sociology_of_education), [economics of education](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economics_of_education), and [comparative education](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparative_education). It also discusses the [history of education](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_education). In [prehistory](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prehistory), education happened informally through [oral communication](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oral_communication) and [imitation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imitation). With the rise of [ancient civilizations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_civilizations), [writing was invented](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Invention_of_writing), and the amount of knowledge grew. This caused a shift from informal to formal education. Initially, formal education was mainly available to elites and religious groups. The invention of the [printing press](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Printing_press) in the 15th century made books more widely available. This increased general [literacy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Literacy). Beginning in the 18th and 19th centuries, public education became more important. It led to the worldwide process of making primary education available to all, [free of charge](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_education), and [compulsory](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Compulsory_education) up to a certain age.

Definitions

*Main article:*[*Definitions of education*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Definitions_of_education)

The definition of education has been explored by theorists from various fields.[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTEMarshall2006[httpswwwjstororgstable42589880_33%E2%80%9337]-1)[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTECurtisWardSharpHankin2013[httpsbooksgooglecombooksidB_9OAgAAQBAJ_1._What_is_education?]-2)[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTEMatheson2014[httpswwwtaylorfranciscomchaptersedit1043249780203105450-8education-david-matheson_15%E2%80%9332]What_is_education?-3) Many agree that education is a purposeful activity aimed at achieving certain goals, which include the transmission of [knowledge](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knowledge), skills, and character traits.[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTEChazan2022[httpslinkspringercomchapter101007978-3-030-83925-3_3_13%E2%80%9321]What_Is_%22Education%22?-4)[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTEMarshall2006[httpswwwjstororgstable42589880_33%E2%80%9337]-1)[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTEUNESCO2018-5) However, there is extensive debate regarding its exact nature beyond these general features. Some theorists view education primarily as a process that occurs during educational events such as schooling, teaching, and learning.[[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTEPeters1967What_is_an_Educational_Process?-6)[[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTEHarperCollins_staff2023-7)[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTECurtisWardSharpHankin2013[httpsbooksgooglecombooksidB_9OAgAAQBAJ_1._What_is_education?]-2) Others perceive it not as a process but as the product resulting from this process, emphasizing the [mental states](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mental_state) and dispositions of educated persons.[[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTEPeters1967What_is_an_Educational_Process?-6)[[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTEHarperCollins_staff2023-7)[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTECurtisWardSharpHankin2013[httpsbooksgooglecombooksidB_9OAgAAQBAJ_1._What_is_education?]-2) Additionally, the term may also refer to an academic field that studies the methods, processes, and social institutions involved in teaching and learning.[[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTEHarperCollins_staff2023-7) The term "education" is derived from the [Latin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Latin) words *educare*, meaning "bring up, rear, educate", primarily related to the mind, and *educere*, meaning "bring out, lead forth", and refers to the bodily level.[[8]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTEEtymology_Online_staff-8)

Some theorists provide precise definitions by identifying the specific features that are exclusive to all forms of education. [R. S. Peters](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/R._S._Peters), for instance, outlines three essential features for education:[[9]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTEPeters2015[httpsbooksgooglecombooksidUfRWCgAAQBAJ_1._Criteria_of_Education]-9)[[10]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBeckett2011[httpsonlinelibrarywileycomdoiabs101111j1741-5446201100402x_239%E2%80%93255]-10)[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTEMarshall2006[httpswwwjstororgstable42589880_33%E2%80%9337]-1)

* It is concerned with the transmission of knowledge and understanding.
* This transmission is worthwhile.
* It is done in a morally appropriate manner in tune with the student's interests.[[9]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTEPeters2015[httpsbooksgooglecombooksidUfRWCgAAQBAJ_1._Criteria_of_Education]-9)[[10]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBeckett2011[httpsonlinelibrarywileycomdoiabs101111j1741-5446201100402x_239%E2%80%93255]-10)[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTEMarshall2006[httpswwwjstororgstable42589880_33%E2%80%9337]-1)

Such precise definitions often succeed at characterizing the most typical forms of education. But they are criticized because there are counterexamples.[[10]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBeckett2011[httpsonlinelibrarywileycomdoiabs101111j1741-5446201100402x_239%E2%80%93255]-10)[[11]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTEPetersWoodsDray1973[httpsphilpapersorgrecPETAOE_Aims_of_Education:_A_Conceptual_Inquiry]-11)[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTECurtisWardSharpHankin2013[httpsbooksgooglecombooksidB_9OAgAAQBAJ_1._What_is_education?]-2) These difficulties have led some theorists to develop less precise concepts. Some of them are based on [family resemblance](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Family_resemblance). This means that all the forms of education are [similar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Similarity_%28philosophy%29) to each other. But they need not share a [set of essential features](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essence) that all of them have in common.[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTEMarshall2006[httpswwwjstororgstable42589880_33%E2%80%9337]-1)[[12]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBiletzkiMatar2021-12)[[13]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTESluga2006[httpsphilpapersorgrecSLUFR_1%E2%80%9321]-13) Some theorists claim that the term "education" is context-dependent. This implies that its meaning varies depending on the situation in which it is used.[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTECurtisWardSharpHankin2013[httpsbooksgooglecombooksidB_9OAgAAQBAJ_1._What_is_education?]-2) Having a clear idea of what the term means is important to correctly identify forms of education. It also matters when trying to measure or improve them.[[14]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTEWilson2003[httpsonlinelibrarywileycomdoiabs1011111467-97523701007_101%E2%80%93108]-14)[[15]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTEWatson2016[httpscompassonlinelibrarywileycomdoiabs101111phc312316_146%E2%80%93159]-15)[[16]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBiesta2015[httpsonlinelibrarywileycomdoiabs101111ejed12109_75%E2%80%9387]-16)

There is disagreement in the academic literature on whether education is an [evaluative](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Axiology) concept. This means that being good in some sense is part of the definition of education. So-called *thick definitions* affirm this. They may claim, for example, that an improvement of the learner is a requirement of education. Different thick definitions may still disagree among themselves on what kind of improvement is needed. *Thin definitions*, on the other hand, try to give a value-neutral account of education.[[15]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTEWatson2016[httpscompassonlinelibrarywileycomdoiabs101111phc312316_146%E2%80%93159]-15)[[17]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTEKotzee2011[httpsonlinelibrarywileycomdoi101111j1741-5446201100420x_549%E2%80%93564]-17) A closely related distinction is that between *descriptive* and *prescriptive conceptions*. Descriptive conceptions aim to describe how the term is actually used by regular speakers. Prescriptive conceptions try to express what good education is or how it should be done.[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTEChazan2022[httpslinkspringercomchapter101007978-3-030-83925-3_3_13%E2%80%9321]What_Is_%22Education%22?-4)[[18]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTESmith2020[httpscogentoatandfonlinecomdoiabs1010800007100520201785788journalCoderbje20_781%E2%80%93783]-18)

Many thick and prescriptive conceptions rely on the [aims of education](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aims_of_education) to explain their view. This means that they see education as an activity that tries to achieve certain aims.[[19]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTESiegel2023-19)[[20]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTESiegelPhillipsCallan2018-20)[[21]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTESiegel2010[httpswwwoxfordhandbookscomview101093oxfordhb97801953128810010001oxfordhb-9780195312881-e-001_3%E2%80%939]Introduction:_Philosophy_of_Education_and_Philosophy-21) These aims can be classified into different categories. There is one category for *epistemic goods*, like knowledge and understanding. Another category covers *skills*, like [rationality](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rationality) and [critical thinking](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Critical_thinking). Additionally, there are character traits, like [kindness](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kindness) and [honesty](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Honesty).[[15]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTEWatson2016[httpscompassonlinelibrarywileycomdoiabs101111phc312316_146%E2%80%93159]-15)

Some theorists focus on a single overarching purpose of education and see the more specific aims as means to this end.[[22]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTEHaack1981[httpswwwjstororgstable3750273_289%E2%80%93302]-22)[[20]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTESiegelPhillipsCallan2018-20) For example, they may claim that [socialization](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialization) is the aim of education. This means that education is seen as the process of transmitting accumulated knowledge from one generation to the next. This process helps the student to function in society as a regular citizen.[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTEChazan2022[httpslinkspringercomchapter101007978-3-030-83925-3_3_13%E2%80%9321]What_Is_%22Education%22?-4)[[23]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBowenGelpiAnweiler2023introduction-23)[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTECurtisWardSharpHankin2013[httpsbooksgooglecombooksidB_9OAgAAQBAJ_1._What_is_education?]-2) More person-centered definitions focus on the [well-being](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Well-being) of the student instead. For them, education is a process that helps them lead a good life or the life they wish to lead.[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTEChazan2022[httpslinkspringercomchapter101007978-3-030-83925-3_3_13%E2%80%9321]What_Is_%22Education%22?-4)[[22]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTEHaack1981[httpswwwjstororgstable3750273_289%E2%80%93302]-22)[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTECurtisWardSharpHankin2013[httpsbooksgooglecombooksidB_9OAgAAQBAJ_1._What_is_education?]-2) Various scholars stress critical thinking to distinguish education from [indoctrination](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indoctrination).[[20]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTESiegelPhillipsCallan2018-20)[[21]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTESiegel2010[httpswwwoxfordhandbookscomview101093oxfordhb97801953128810010001oxfordhb-9780195312881-e-001_3%E2%80%939]Introduction:_Philosophy_of_Education_and_Philosophy-21)[[24]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTECurren1996[httpsphilpapersorgrecBEAREO_Education,_philosophy_of]-24) For them, mere indoctrination is only interested in instilling [beliefs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belief) in the student, independent of whether they are rational.[[20]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTESiegelPhillipsCallan2018-20)[[19]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTESiegel2023-19) Education, on the other hand, should also foster the [rational](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rational) ability to critically reflect on those beliefs and question them.[[25]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTEDaviesBarnett2015[httpslinkspringercomchapter1010579781137378057_1_1%E2%80%9325]Introduction-25) But some theorists contend that some forms of indoctrination may be necessary in the early stages of education. It may be needed until the child's [mind](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mind) is sufficiently developed.[[20]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTESiegelPhillipsCallan2018-20)

Education can be characterized from the teacher's or the student's perspective. Teacher-centered definitions focus on the perspective and role of the teacher. They may claim, for example, that education is the transmission of knowledge and skills in a [morally](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morality) appropriate way.[[26]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBeckett2018[httpswwwtandfonlinecomdoiabs1010800013185720171365705_380%E2%80%93389]-26)[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTECurtisWardSharpHankin2013[httpsbooksgooglecombooksidB_9OAgAAQBAJ_1._What_is_education?]-2)[[9]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTEPeters2015[httpsbooksgooglecombooksidUfRWCgAAQBAJ_1._Criteria_of_Education]-9) Student-centered definitions, on the other hand, see education from the student's [experience](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Experience) in the learning process. For example, they may define it as a process that transforms and enriches their subsequent experience.[[27]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTEDewey2004[httpswwwgutenbergorgfiles852852-h852-hhtmlink2HCH0006_6._Education_as_Conservative_and_Progressive]-27)[[10]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBeckett2011[httpsonlinelibrarywileycomdoiabs101111j1741-5446201100402x_239%E2%80%93255]-10)[[28]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education#cite_note-FOOTNOTEJackson2011[httpsbooksgooglecombooksidj4xx_uHSVgEC_1._Dewey's_parting_words]-28) Definitions taking both perspectives into account are also possible. This can take the form of describing the process as the shared experience of a common world. This shared experience involves discovery as well as po