

## Structuring Content in Archaeological Writing

### Recognising types of information in archaeological writing

In this exercise, you have to correctly identify what kind of information is being given in short extracts from archaeological writing. The different types of information are: background information, aims, methodology, results, interpretation and conclusions.

“Danebury is an Iron Age hillfort situated in Hampshire”

Is this: Background information, aims, methodology, results, interpretation, or conclusions?

#### **Correct answer: Background information**

This is an example of background information. It describes basic information about the project or site, such as name, location, and date, e.g. “The Ribchester hoard was discovered in a field in Ribchester, Lancashire in 1796. It consists of a helmet, horse brasses, an amulet and other objects dating from the late 1<sup>st</sup> or early 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries AD”. It refers to information that is already known, and does not include any new results or analysis.

“Test pits were dug over a 20 metre interval grid across the site aligned grid north from the survey base station”.

Is this: Background information, aims, methodology, results, interpretation, or conclusions?

#### **Correct answer: Methodology**

This is an example of how the methodology used in the project is explained. The methodology states how the information needed to address the aims of the project was collected. It often refers to an activity e.g. “samples from 48 black burnished ware pots were thin sectioned and analysed under polarizing microscope” or “The author undertook a programme of visits to 14 museums with displays of archaeological materials, photographing them and taking detailed notes”. It may contain technical language about the method or equipment used.

“What can digital infra-red photography of Palaeolithic rock art tell us about the preservation of pigments? How can the technique be used in conservation?”

Is this: Background information, aims, methodology, results, interpretation, or conclusions?

**Correct answer: Aims**

This extract is an example of the aims of the project. Aims or goals state the purpose or intention of the project. They may be phrased as questions (e.g. “Why did the site fall into disuse in the late Bronze Age?”), or as a statement e.g. “a central aim of the project was to understand why the site fell into disuse in the late Bronze Age”.

“This project has demonstrated the contribution of residue analysis of cooking pots to the understanding of activities and space in the Neolithic household”.

Is this: Background information, aims, methodology, results, interpretation, or conclusions?

**Correct answer: Conclusions**

This is an example of the kind of statement you would find in a conclusion. Conclusions can include lots of different kinds of information, they may be a summary of the findings of the research as in this example, refer to wider research, or they make suggestions about further analysis or research that could be done.

“The different concentration of juvenile cattle bone found in the dated contexts [3037], [3010], [3003] (30%, 41% and 70% respectively), demonstrates the shift from meat to dairy production at the site”

Is this: Background information, aims, methodology, results, interpretation, or conclusions?

**Correct answer: Interpretation**

This is an example of interpretation. While this extract does present some results, it is classified here as interpretation because it draws together the results to make a general statement that there was a shift in economy type at the site. This highlights an important issue, that presenting all results involves a degree of

interpretation because decisions about what data to collect and present involves choices. However, although there is a degree of blurring between results and analysis, analysis always draws on results, and should always address the aims of the project.

“Excavation of area C revealed a mud brick structure that had been cut by a 70 cm wide pit containing ceramic fragments and animal bones”

Is this: Background information, aims, methodology, results, interpretation, or conclusions?

**Correct answer: Results**

This extract presents the results of the project. Depending on the project, they can be presented in combinations of numeric data, tables, text or illustrations, accompanied by a written description. It is generally structured by the activities outlined in the methodology, e.g. the results of the excavation are presented together, then the results of the faunal remains.