**What is Sociology?**

**Sociology** is a branch of [social sciences](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_sciences) that uses systematic methods of [empirical investigation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Empiricism) and [critical analysis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Critical_theory) to develop and refine a body of knowledge about human [social](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Society) structure and activity, sometimes with the goal of applying such knowledge to the pursuit of social welfare. Its subject matter ranges from the [micro](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Microsociology) level of face-to-face interaction to the [macro](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Macrosociology) level of societies at large.

Sociology is a broad discipline in terms of both methodology and subject matter. Its traditional focuses have included [social relations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_relations), [social stratification](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_stratification), [social interaction](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_interaction), [religion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion), [culture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture) and [deviance](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deviance_(sociology)), and its approaches have included both [qualitative](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qualitative_research) and [quantitative research](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quantitative_research) techniques. As much of what humans do fits under the category of social structure or social activity, sociology has gradually expanded its focus to further subjects, such as the study of the [media](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Media), [health disparities](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medical_sociology), the [internet](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet), and even the role of social activity in the creation of [scientific knowledge](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sociology_of_scientific_knowledge). The range of social scientific methods has also been broadly expanded. The [cultural turn](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_turn) of the 1960s brought increasingly [hermeneutic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hermeneutic) and interpretive approaches to the study of culture in sociology. Conversely, recent decades have seen the rise of new mathematically rigorous approaches, such as [social network](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_network) analysis.