

# What is Public History?

Australian Centre for Public History,  
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<https://www.uts.edu.au/research-and-teaching/our-research/australian-centre-public-history/about-acph/what-public-history>

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**History is everywhere.** It is in the history books written by academics in universities and it is in the events and exhibitions of art galleries, libraries, heritage consultancies and historical associations. But history is also part of the way, as individuals and as groups, we make sense of who we are and where we come from. It is in the games our kids play and the ways we tell stories.

As an academic discipline, Public History is interested in **understanding how histories are made and interpreted in the broader community.** It has been defined as 'the practice of history by academically trained historians working for public agencies or as freelancers outside the universities'. Public historians examine phenomena such as the changing commemoration of Anzac Day in Australia, the current debates about historical monuments, or the ways that certain family histories are remembered and forgotten. The academic fields of Memory Studies, Historical Consciousness and Historiography have an important part to play in understanding this dimension of public history.

But Public History is also a practice. It is a way of **doing history for (and with) public audiences**. This kind of public history is sometimes informed by the history done inside universities, but its aim is to engage with the broader community, through preserving our culture, providing services, and facilitating access to information. This can be done in a variety of ways, from exhibitions and heritage plans to walking tours and podcasts. Public historians may work in heritage conservation, commissioned history, museums, the media, education, radio, film, interactive multimedia and other areas as well as in universities. They are people who have asked: 'What is history for?' And they are concerned with addressing the relationship between audience, practice and social context. Methodologies of Oral History, Museum and Curatorial Studies, Digital Humanities, Archival and Heritage Studies (many taught in public history courses in universities) are all central to their work.

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