



Collegedunia NCERT Notes

The Ultimate NCERT Revision Guide for Class 12 Geography
Fundamentals of Human Geography (Part: Human Geography) · 2026-27 / New NCERT

Chapter 1: Human Geography: Nature and Scope

NCERT Notes Class 12 Geography Chapter 1

For CBSE Board, CUET and UPSC foundation · collegedunia.com

Also see for this chapter: [NCERT Solutions](#)

How to use these notes

This chapter opens the book **Fundamentals of Human Geography**. It is a theory chapter, so the marks come from clear definitions, named scholars and the three approaches (determinism, possibilism, neo-determinism). Read the prose first, then revise from the boxes and tables. Every named concept here is a possible 1, 2 or 3 mark question in CBSE and CUET.

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1 Introduction: What is Human Geography?

Geography studies the Earth as the home of human beings. It has two big halves. **Physical geography** studies the physical or natural environment, such as land-forms, soils, climate, water and vegetation. **Human geography** studies people and their works, and how people and the natural environment shape each other. This chapter explains what human geography is, how the relationship between nature and humans has been viewed over time, and the many sub-fields the subject has grown into. The key idea to carry through the whole chapter is simple: nature and human beings are not two separate worlds, they are deeply tied together.

1.1 Definition and Core Concern

Human geography looks at the relationship between the physical or natural world and the human world. It studies where human activities are found on the Earth, why they are found there, and how they differ from place to place. In short, it asks how people use, change and depend on the space around them.

Working Definition

Human geography is the study of the inter-relationship between the physical environment and the socio-cultural environment that human beings create through mutual interaction with each other.

The core concern of geography as a subject is to understand the Earth as the home of human beings and to study everything that has supported human life. So the focus is always on **nature** and **human beings** together, not one without the other.

- **Integrative:** it brings together facts from many subjects into one place-based picture.
- **Empirical:** it is based on what can be observed and measured on the ground.
- **Practical:** it is useful for real problems like planning, resource use and welfare.

The Big Idea

Physical geography studies nature. Human geography studies people. But the two are joined, because human life depends on nature and human activity reshapes nature in return.

1.2 Nature and Humans Described Together

A neat clue that nature and humans are inseparable is the way we describe the Earth using words from the human body. We speak of the "face" of the Earth, the "eye" of a storm, the "mouth" of a river, the "snout" (nose) of a glacier, the "neck" of an isthmus and the "profile" of the soil. Villages and towns are called "organisms", a country is described as a "living organism", and road, rail and water networks are called the "arteries of circulation". This shared language shows how tightly the two worlds are woven together.

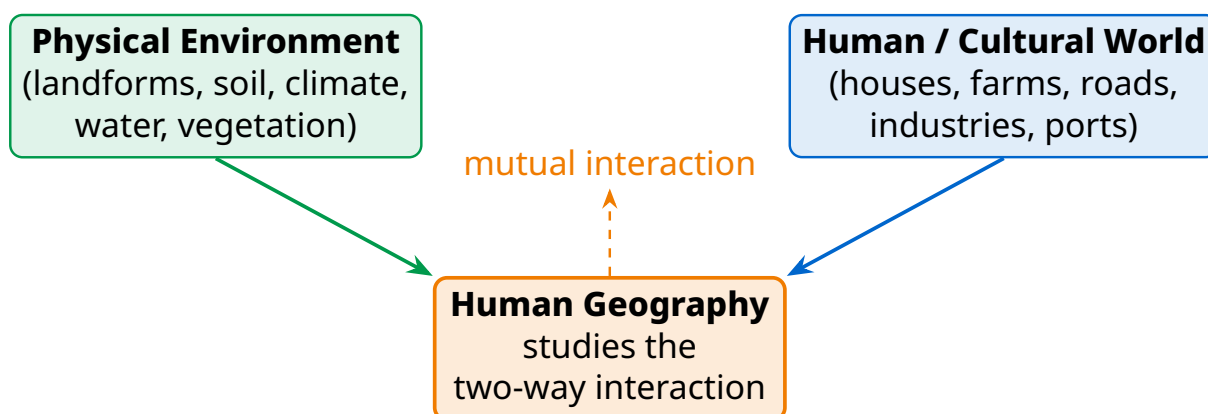
Human-body metaphor	Geographical feature
Face of the Earth	The visible surface of the land
Eye of the storm	Calm centre of a cyclone
Mouth of the river	Where a river meets the sea
Snout of the glacier	The front, melting end of a glacier
Neck of the isthmus	A narrow land strip joining two larger areas
Arteries of circulation	Road, rail and water networks

Why this matters

If even our everyday words mix nature and the human body, then in real study the two cannot be neatly separated either. This is the simplest proof of the chapter's main claim.

1.3 The Two Components of the Earth's Surface

The Earth's surface has two major components. The first is **nature**, the physical environment. The second is **life forms**, including human beings. Human geography sits exactly where these two meet and studies the give-and-take between them.



Quick Tip

If a question asks for the "core concern" of geography, write: to understand the Earth as the home of human beings. This single line is a safe 1-mark answer.

1.4 Dualism in Geography

Over time geographers argued over how the subject should be studied. These debates are called **dualism**. You should know the pairs of opposite views, because they explain why human geography developed the way it did.

One view	Opposite view
Nomothetic (law-making, theorising)	Idiographic (descriptive of unique places)
Systematic approach (topic by topic)	Regional approach (region by region)
Theoretical interpretation	Historic-institutional interpretation
Physical geography	Human geography

The final lesson from these debates is that the split between physical and human is not a very useful one. Nature and humans cannot really be separated, so they should be seen **holistically**, as one connected system.

Remember the dualism pairs

"**NI**ce **SR** **TH**eory" → **N**omothetic vs **I**diographic, **S**ystematic vs **R**egional, **TH**eoretical vs historic-institutional. Three pairs, that is all CBSE expects.

2 Nature and Human Beings: A Two-Way Bond

The heart of this chapter is the relationship between nature and human beings. People meet their needs from nature, but they do this with the help of **technology**. The kind of technology a society has decides how much it can change nature, and how much nature still controls it. This section explains that bond and the two ideas of naturalisation and humanisation.

2.1 Role of Technology

Technology is the link between human beings and the physical environment. What matters is not only *what* people produce, but *with which tools and techniques* they produce it. Technology shows the level of cultural development of a society.

- Human beings built technology only after they understood the laws of nature.
- Understanding friction and heat led to the discovery of fire.
- Understanding DNA and genetics helped conquer many diseases.
- The laws of aerodynamics gave us faster planes.

Key link

Knowledge of nature comes first, technology comes next. Better technology then loosens the control of the environment over human beings.

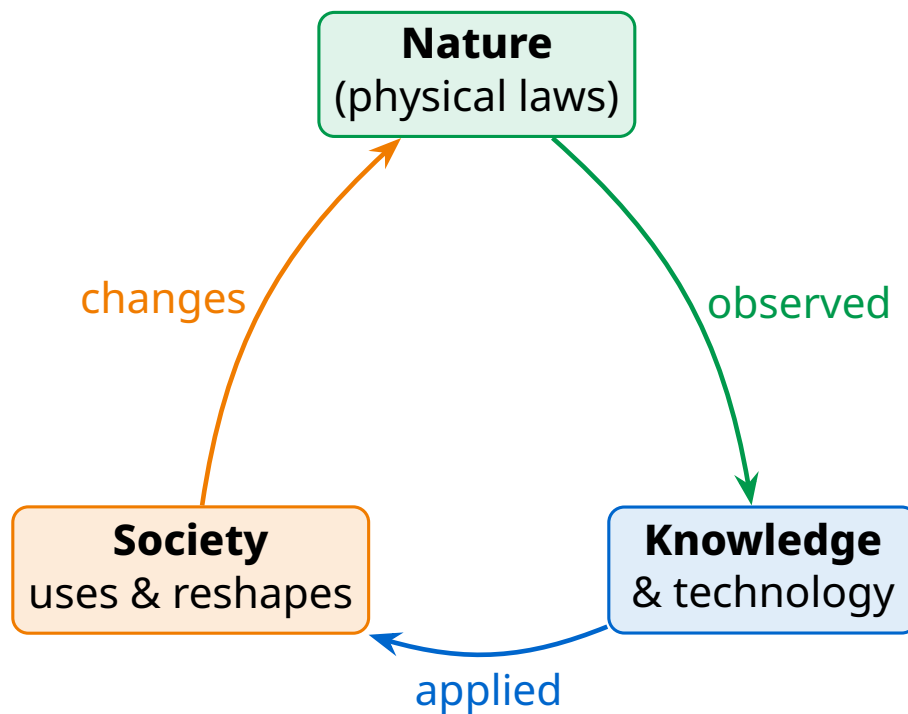
Technology in daily life

A modern weather app uses satellites and physics to warn farmers about rain. The same nature that once decided whether a crop survived can now be planned for, because technology turns knowledge of nature into useful tools.

2.2 The Nature-Technology-Society Loop

The bond between people and nature is best seen as a loop, not a one-time event. People first observe natural laws. That knowledge becomes technology. Technology lets society use and change nature. The changed nature then offers new

things to observe, and the loop turns again. As the loop spins, society moves from being controlled by nature to shaping nature.



The loop in one line

Observe nature → build technology → reshape nature → observe again. Each turn of the loop gives society more power over its environment.

Common Mistake

Do not write that technology “defeats” nature. The chapter is clear that technology only loosens the control of nature; it never fully removes the need to obey natural limits. That limit is the whole point of neo-determinism later in the chapter.

2.3 Naturalisation of Humans

In the early stages, the level of technology was very low and society was simple. People could not control nature, so they **adapted** to whatever nature demanded. Nature was a powerful force that people feared, respected and even worshipped. This stage, where strong nature controls a simple human society, is called **environmental determinism**. The human being at this stage is a **naturalised human**, who listens to nature and depends on it directly.

- Direct dependence on nature for the resources that keep people alive.
- Nature is treated as “Mother Nature”, to be revered and conserved.

- Example from NCERT: Benda's tribe in the Abujh Maad forest of central India, who practise shifting cultivation and thank the forest spirit for water.



Environmental Determinism

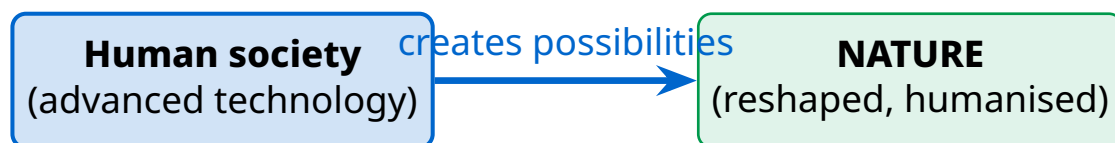
Quick Tip

Naturalisation of humans = nature controls people. The matching theory is **environmental determinism**. Tie the two together in any 3-mark answer.

2.4 Humanisation of Nature

With social and cultural growth, people understand nature better and build more efficient technology. They move from a "state of necessity" to a "state of freedom". Now human beings create new possibilities from natural resources. The marks of human activity appear everywhere, and nature slowly becomes **humanised**, carrying the imprints of human effort. This stage of thinking is called **possibilism**: nature offers chances, and people choose among them.

- Health resorts on highlands, huge cities, fields and orchards in the plains.
- Ports on coasts, shipping routes across oceans, satellites in space.
- Together these form the **cultural landscape**, the human-made face of the Earth.
- Example from NCERT: Kari in Trondheim, where heated offices, a glass dome and air travel beat the harsh Arctic winter.



Possibilism

Common Mistake

Students often swap the terms. **Naturalisation of humans** is when humans adapt to nature (determinism). **Humanisation of nature** is when humans reshape nature (possibilism). Direction of control is opposite in the two.

2.5 Two NCERT Case Studies Side by Side

NCERT gives two short stories that show the two stages clearly. Benda lives in a forest in central India with very low technology and adapts fully to nature. Kari lives in cold Trondheim in Norway and uses high technology to overcome a harsh climate. The contrast is a favourite source of exam examples.

Point	Benda (Abujh Maad)	Kari (Trondheim)
Technology level	Very low (axe, fire)	Very high (cars, glass dome, flights)
Relation to nature	Adapts, fears, worships nature	Overcomes nature's limits
Food	Forest produce, shifting cultivation	Tropical fruit flown in, plants under a dome
Stage shown	Naturalisation of humans	Humanisation of nature
Linked approach	Environmental determinism	Possibilism

How to use the stories

Quote Benda for determinism and naturalisation; quote Kari for possibilism and humanisation. Two named, contrasting examples make any 3 or 5 mark answer stronger.

3 Approaches to Human Geography

The way geographers explain the nature-human bond changed across history. Three main approaches are asked again and again in exams: **environmental determinism**, **possibilism**, and **neo-determinism**. This section compares them so you can answer both short and long questions with confidence.

3.1 Environmental Determinism vs Possibilism

Environmental determinism says the physical environment controls human life. It fits an early stage of low technology, when people had little power over nature. **Possibilism** says nature only offers opportunities, and human beings, using technology, decide what to make of them. It fits a later stage of higher technology.

Point	Environmental Determinism	Possibilism
Main idea	Nature controls humans	Nature offers choices, humans pick
Technology	Very low	Higher
Human role	Adapts, obeys nature	Creates possibilities
Stage of society	Primitive	Developed
Linked term	Naturalisation of humans	Humanisation of nature

One-line contrast

Determinism: nature is the boss. Possibilism: nature is the menu, humans order from it.

3.2 Neo-determinism (Stop and Go Determinism)

The geographer **Griffith Taylor** introduced a middle path between determinism and possibilism. He called it **neo-determinism** or **stop and go determinism**. The idea uses the example of traffic lights. Red means stop, amber means get ready, green means go. In the same way, human beings can develop, but only when nature permits. There is neither total control by nature nor total freedom for humans.

- Human beings can "conquer nature by obeying it".
- Possibilities can be created **only within limits** that do not damage the environment.
- There is no free run without accidents.

Neo-determinism



Why neo-determinism matters today

The “free run” of developed economies brought global warming, ozone depletion, receding glaciers and degraded land. Neo-determinism says development must stay within nature’s limits, which is exactly the idea behind sustainable development.

3.3 Schools of Thought in the 1970s

In the 1970s many geographers felt the subject had become too cold and number-heavy. Three new schools of thought made human geography more human and more relevant to social and political reality.

School	Main concern
Welfare / Humanistic	Social well-being of people: housing, health and education.
Radical	Used Marxian theory to explain poverty, deprivation and inequality; linked these to the growth of capitalism.
Behavioural	Stressed lived experience and how different social groups (by ethnicity, race, religion) perceive space.

The three 1970s schools

“**We Really Believe**” → **W**elfare, **R**adical, **B**ehavioural.

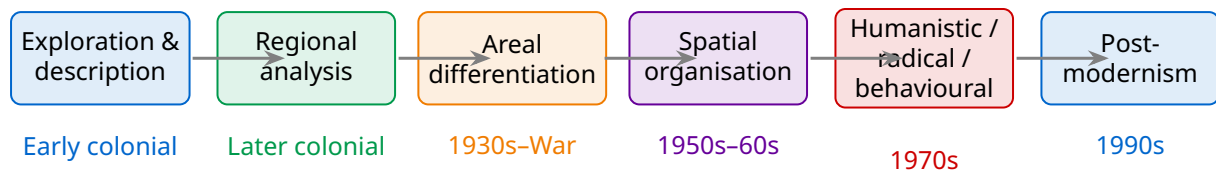
4 Development of Human Geography: Stages and Thrust

Human geography did not appear all at once. It grew through clear stages, each with its own focus or “thrust”. CBSE and CUET often give a period and ask for its approach, or the reverse. This section lays out the stages in order and pairs them with the scholars who defined the subject.

4.1 Broad Stages and Their Thrust

The table below follows NCERT Table 1.1. Learn the period and the matching approach as a pair.

Period	Approach	Broad feature
Early colonial period	Exploration and description	Trade and empire pushed the discovery of new areas; full, encyclopaedic descriptions.
Later colonial period	Regional analysis	Detailed study of all parts of a region, seen as parts of one whole (the Earth).
1930s to Inter-War	Areal differentiation	Find what makes each region unique and why it differs from others.
Late 1950s to late 1960s	Spatial organisation	The quantitative revolution: computers, statistics and laws of physics to find mappable patterns.
1970s	Humanistic, radical, behavioural schools	Reaction against the cold, number-heavy method; made geography socially relevant.
1990s	Post-modernism	Doubted grand universal theories; stressed understanding each local context on its own.



Common Mistake

Do not mix up the periods. The **quantitative revolution** belongs to the late 1950s–1960s (spatial organisation), not the 1970s. The 1970s is the decade of the three new schools.

4.2 Scholars and Their Definitions

A few classic definitions are almost always asked. Learn the scholar with the key-word of the definition.

Scholar	Definition of human geography	Keyword
Ratzel	Synthetic study of the relationship between human societies and the Earth's surface	Synthesis
Ellen C. Semple	Study of the changing relationship between the unresting man and the unstable Earth	Dynamism
Paul Vidal de la Blache	A new conception of the inter-relationships between Earth and human beings	New conception

Quick Tip

Pair each scholar with one keyword: Ratzel = synthesis, Semple = dynamism (changing, unresting, unstable), Vidal de la Blache = new conception. The keyword alone often earns the mark.

Note on Ratzel

Ratzel is called the father of human geography. His word **synthesis** means human geography pulls many strands together into one study of people and place.

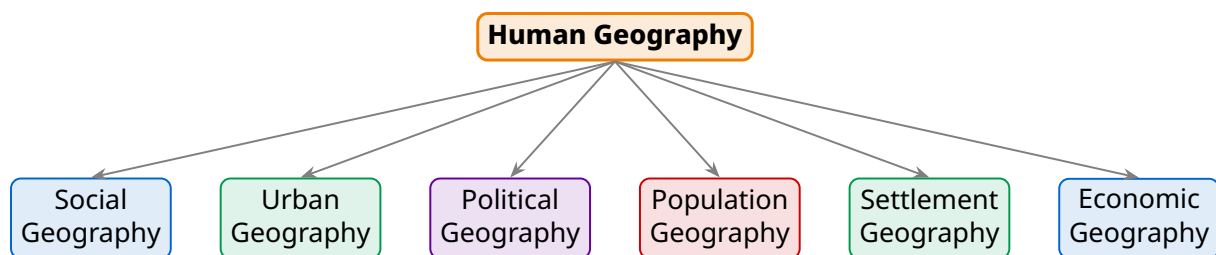
5 Scope: Fields and Sub-fields of Human Geography

Because human geography deals with every part of human life and the space it occupies, it is highly **inter-disciplinary**. It works closely with other social sciences. As knowledge grows, new sub-fields keep appearing. This section maps the main fields, their sub-fields and the sister disciplines they connect to, following NCERT Table 1.2.

5.1 The Main Fields and Sister Disciplines

Field of Human Geography	Sub-fields	Interface (sister discipline)
Social Geography	Behavioural, Geography of Social Well-being, Geography of Leisure, Cultural, Gender, Historical, Medical Geography	Sociology, Psychology, Welfare Economics, Anthropology, Women's Studies, History, Epidemiology
Urban Geography	(no separate sub-fields)	Urban Studies and Planning

Field of Human Geography	Sub-fields	Interface (sister discipline)
Political Geography	Electoral Geography, Military Geography	Political Science, Psephology, Military Science
Population Geography	(no separate sub-fields)	Demography
Settlement Geography	(no separate sub-fields)	Urban / Rural Planning
Economic Geography	Geography of Resources, Agriculture, Industries, Marketing, Tourism, International Trade	Economics, Resource Economics, Agricultural Sciences, Industrial Economics, Business Studies, Tourism Management, International Trade

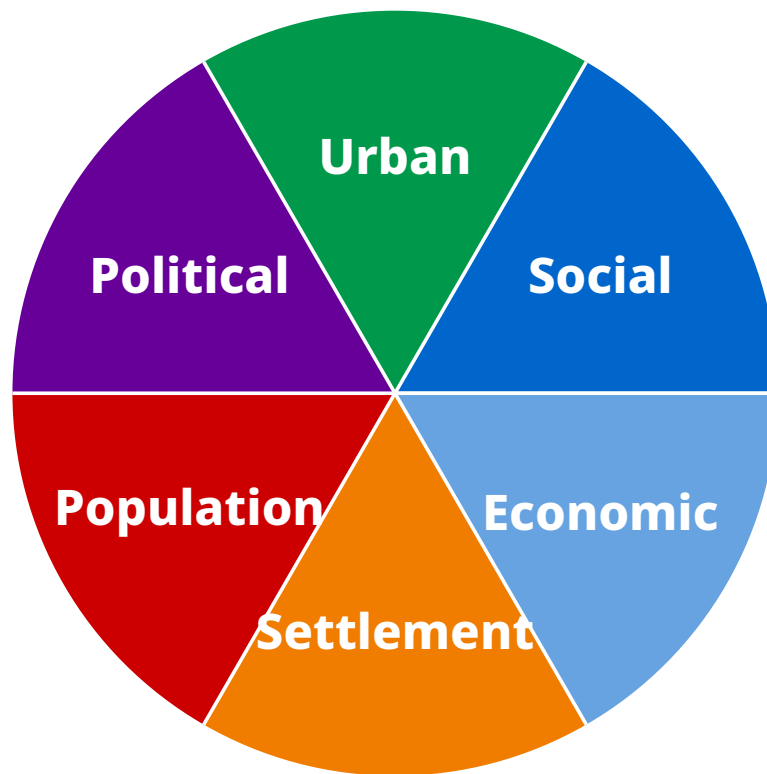


Why so many sub-fields?

Each field of human geography borrows from one or more social sciences. Population geography leans on demography, economic geography on economics, political geography on political science. This borrowing is what makes the subject inter-disciplinary.

5.2 Share of the Six Fields (Visual Aid)

The six fields are not formally weighted in NCERT, but the picture below helps you recall all six as one set. Treat each slice as one field to remember.



Six fields of Human Geography

Sub-fields at work

When a city plans a new metro line, urban geography decides the route, population geography estimates riders, economic geography weighs costs and trade, and settlement geography studies which neighbourhoods grow. One real project touches several sub-fields at once.

5.3 The Six Fields Explained

Each field studies one slice of human life on the Earth. A short, clear sense of each one is enough for the exam.

- **Social Geography** studies society in space: how communities, cultures, gender, health and well-being differ from place to place. Its many sub-fields make it the broadest field.
- **Urban Geography** studies towns and cities: their growth, structure and problems, working closely with urban studies and planning.
- **Political Geography** studies how space and politics meet: boundaries, states, elections (electoral geography) and the geography of conflict (military geography).
- **Population Geography** studies the size, growth, distribution and movement

of people, drawing heavily on demography.

- **Settlement Geography** studies where and why people live in particular patterns, in both rural and urban areas.
- **Economic Geography** studies how people earn a living: resources, agriculture, industry, marketing, tourism and international trade.

Quick mapping

Society → Social Geography. Cities → Urban Geography. Power → Political Geography. People → Population Geography. Living patterns → Settlement Geography. Livelihood → Economic Geography.

Quick Tip

If a 5-mark question asks for the “scope” of human geography, name the six fields, give one line on each, and add that the subject is inter-disciplinary because each field links to a sister social science.

5.4 Sources of Geographical Information

Human geographers gather facts from many sources. Knowing valid sources also helps with the NCERT exercise question on this topic.

- Travellers’ accounts of places and people.
- Old and historical maps.
- Ancient epics and written records.
- Census and survey data, satellite images and field study.

Quick Tip

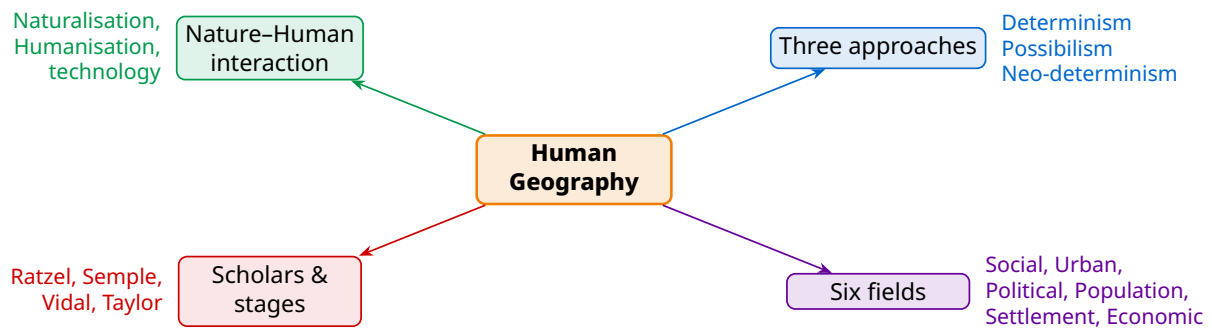
In the NCERT MCQ, “samples of rock materials from the moon” is **not** a source of geographical (human) information. Travellers’ accounts, old maps and ancient epics are valid sources.

6 Quick Reference Summary

This final section pulls the whole chapter into one place for last-minute revision. If you only have ten minutes before the exam, read this page.

6.1 One-Page Concept Map

The whole chapter flows in one line: the Earth has nature and humans, the two interact through technology, and how we read that interaction gives the three approaches, while the subject itself splits into six fields.



Recall trigger

If you can draw this four-arm map from memory, you can rebuild the entire chapter answer by answer: relationship, approaches, scholars and fields.

6.2 Key Terms at a Glance

Term	Meaning
Human geography	Study of the inter-relationship between physical and human worlds
Naturalisation of humans	Humans adapt to and depend on strong nature
Humanisation of nature	Humans reshape nature using technology
Environmental determinism	Nature controls human life
Possibilism	Nature offers chances; humans choose using technology
Neo-determinism	Middle path: develop only within nature's limits (stop and go)
Cultural landscape	The human-made face of the Earth
Dualism	Debate between opposite ways of studying geography
Quantitative revolution	Use of computers and statistics (late 1950s–1960s)

6.3 Scholars to Remember

One-line recall

Ratzel = synthesis (father of human geography). **Ellen C. Semple** = dynamism, "unresting man and unstable earth". **Vidal de la Blache** = new conception of Earth-human links. **Griffith Taylor** = neo-determinism, the stop and go (traffic light) idea.

6.4 NCERT Exercise Pointers

The chapter's own exercises give a strong hint about what gets asked. Use these as ready answers.

Question type	Safe answer line
Which statement does not describe geography?	"Not relevant today due to technology" is wrong; geography is integrative, studies human-environment links and is subject to dualism.
Which is not a source of geographical information?	Samples of rock from the moon. (Travellers' accounts, old maps and ancient epics are sources.)
Most important factor in people-environment interaction?	Technology.
Which is not an approach in human geography?	"Quantitative revolution" is an approach; the odd one is whichever option names a non-approach in the set.

Short-answer template: scope of human geography

Open with one definition line, then list the six fields with one phrase each, then close by saying the subject is inter-disciplinary because every field links to a sister social science. That structure covers a full 5-mark answer.

6.5 Exam Pointers and Common Slips

- 1-mark: define human geography; name two sub-fields; name a source of information.
- 3-mark: explain naturalisation of humans; explain neo-determinism with the traffic-light example.
- 5-mark: compare environmental determinism and possibilism; describe the scope (fields and sub-fields) of human geography.

Top slips to avoid

Three slips lose easy marks: (1) swapping naturalisation of humans with humanisation of nature; (2) placing the quantitative revolution in the 1970s instead of the late 1950s–1960s; (3) calling neo-determinism "no rules" when it actually means "develop within nature's limits".

Three approaches in order

"**D** then **P** then **N**" → **D**eterminism (low technology) → **P**ossibilism (high technology) → **N**eo-determinism (balance). The order matches rising technology and rising care for the environment.

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