Suggested Reading 1

Geography: A Very Short Introduction

1. characteristics of geography
   - built upon the desire to discover more about the world in which we live
   - developed from the factual descriptions of different parts of the world
   - concerned with the natural environments and with the modifications brought about by human actions
   - geography is everywhere today: studies the Earth’s surface; examines locations, connections, territories, environments, places; understands their significance

2. importance of geography
   - in the past: driven by missionary, commercial, political, or scientific considerations
   - today: useful in the increasingly interdependent and connected world beset with problems of global significance (e.g. global warming, environmental change, natural hazards, flows of refugees, rising levels of pollution, rapid onset of epidemics, burgeoning conflicts, etc.)

3. geography in universities
   - mapping goes back a long way in time
   - geographical concepts can be found in ancient writings
   - but various concepts were not drawn together into an integrated subject area
   - Halford Mackinder, the first Professor of Geography at Oxford, developed the "Geographical Experiment"
   - integration of the study of the society and the environment under one umbrella
   - strength: includes nature and culture and their relationship, a concept no other discipline has claimed
   - weakness: different parts of geography relate to different intellectual traditions, and the touching points become very few or non-existent

4. core concepts of geography
   - space: location, distances, directions
   - place: a form of bounded space
   - environment: encompasses human perceptions and aspirations as well as biophysical characteristics
5. contemporary geography
- “Geography is the study of the surface of the Earth. It involves the phenomena and processes of the Earth’s natural and human environments and landscapes at local to global scales.” – D. T. Herbert and J.A. Matthews (2001)
- the nexus where the three core concepts overlap: the concept of landscape
- landscape is like a palimpsest: written over many times by both physical and human processes, but traces of the past are still discernible
- Earth Observation (EO), Geographical Information Systems (GIS), etc. have been added to traditional methods
- the need to understand the biophysical and human environments and their interactions is becoming increasingly urgent as issues of sustainability and the protection and preservation of planet Earth become imperative
- the main difference between modern expeditions and those in the past is that the former lead to a management plan for sustainable development
- the outer space may be the “final frontier” of exploration

6. physical geography
introducing physical geography
- study of the geo-ecosphere: lithosphere, toposphere, atmosphere, cyrosphere, hydrosphere, biosphere, pedosphere
- what differentiates physical geography from other scientific fields is its focus on spatial patterns in the landscape and their underlying dynamics
- investigates the interactions between the different spheres and also their changes through time
- although physical geography is defined by its emphasis on spatial patterns and spatial processes in the geo-ecosphere, human activity also plays a major role
development of physical geography
- Alexander von Humboldt was the most eminent proponent of physical geography
- publication of Charles Darwin’s *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* in 1859 changed views that had regarded the natural environment as harmoniously integrated but essentially static
- comparable evolutionary/developmental models were developed (e.g. “cycle of erosion” developed by William Morris Davis), but “stage” was paramount compared to “structure” and “process”
- focused on the global classification of phenomena making up the Earth’s surface rather than understanding the Earth-surface processes that underpinned these phenomena in the first half of the 20th century
- rapid growth and diversification within physical geography around the mid-20th century
- “process revolution”: description and classification replaced by the measurement, monitoring, analysis, and modelling of formative processes
- “systems approach”: downplays the individual objects and places the interrelationships between them at the centre stage
- environmental change theme: both long-term and short-term, has become an increasingly potent force on the political agenda because of human impacts from Holocene to Anthropocene

physical geography today
- interactions with established cognate sciences
- provides solutions to many problems that people have to face in the environment
- contributes its distinctive spatial perspective to the understanding of each of the component parts of the landscape
- explores the interconnections between those components
- the interface between the natural environment and people as a central concern

7. human geography
introducing human geography
- concerned with the ways in which people occupied the surface of the Earth

development of human geography
- environmental determinism: exemplified the emphasis on the natural environment in explaining human actions
- focused on the unique blend of factors (both physical and human) that produced distinctive throughout the middle decades of the 20th century
- spatial analysis: the “Age of Models” (e.g. Von Thünen’s land-use zones and Walther Christaller’s central place theory)
- humanistic geography: asserted the centrality of people and focused on the meanings of place (i.e. focused on qualitative meanings and values and on the diversity of human behaviour)
- structuralism: offered a grand theory that explained both human behaviour and its societal outcomes; a central idea was that there were powerful forces within society that conditioned the kinds of lifestyles that could be followed
- debate between structure (deeper forces) and agency (individual decision-makers)
- post-structuralism and postmodernism: emphasised the differences and diversity within human populations
- became organised around systematic themes
- the “cultural turn”: first concerned with the outcome of culture as it worked on the world, but later concerned with the inner workings of culture (i.e. meanings and values that underlie places and activities)

human geography today
- new issues introduced (e.g. gender and sexuality, ethnicity and race)
- issue-based approaches (e.g. geography of money and consumption)
- a variety of approaches exist currently
- there is a desire to defend a particular approach
- but there is also a willingness to recognise and learn from other approaches

8. integrated geography
introducing integrated geography
- core concepts of space, place, environment, time, process, scale unify geography
- many key research questions which can only be addressed by combining physical and human geography (e.g. exploitation of resources, natural hazards, global environmental change, etc.)
- geography's focus on both nature and culture (and hence its ability to act as a bridge between the sciences and the humanities) makes it a distinct subject worthy of study in universities and schools

regional geography
- defined as place description, analysis, and synthesis
- regional research
- analyses and explains regional differences
- tests general theories in the regional context
- develops policies for particular regions
- solves problems in specific places
- modern geographical studies of regions are not studied in isolation but take account of multi-scale relationships with connections up to global scale
- complements the emphasis on generalisation and globalisation with a consideration of the specificity of place, the local effects of global processes, and locally generated processes

historical geography
- geography of the past: the key geographical concepts of space, place, and environment are considered in the context of past times
- analyses a particular place or region at some time or period in the past
- uses evidence from the past to help understand the present-day world
- investigates changes through time in a particular phenomenon or a whole landscape
geography of environment-society interactions
- provides a strong academic justification for physical and human geography remaining together in the same university department
- studies the complex effects of different natural environments on societies and their activities
- understands the nature and extent of beneficial as well as adverse human impacts in different environments

geography of global change
- concerned with the magnitude, rate, and direction of current changes in both the biophysical and human environment
- key indicators of global change: population, urban population growth, use of fresh water, damming of rivers, fertiliser consumption, tropical rain forest deforestation, species extinction, atmospheric ozone depletion
- documents and monitors local and regional spatial patterns of change
- understands the interacting processes and explains their effects in different places
- develops policies for the mitigation of environmental impacts at local to global scale
- contributes to ethical frameworks

landscape geography
- the concept of landscape refers to a part of the Earth's surface viewed as a whole, including a set of phenomena, their characteristics, and those aspects of the biophysical and human environment that are influential
- investigates the complexities of landscapes as coupled natural and human systems
- reveals patterns, processes, and surprises not evident when they are studied by physical or human geographers separately
- relates the spatial structure and underlying processes of the natural and cultural landscape in a unified way

9. key methods and skills of geography

generic skills
- literacy: language and style, qualitative analysis, conceptual models
- numeracy: measurement, sampling and statistics, quantitative analysis
- graphicacy: graphs/ maps/ diagrams, graphic design

components of the research process
- ideas/ aims/ objectives
- research design
- information gathering
- information analysis
- presentation of findings

geographical skills
- fieldwork: exploration, observation and experiment, field monitoring, qualitative assessment fieldwork
- Earth Observation (EO) and Geographical Information Systems (GIS): aerial photographs and satellite images, environmental monitoring and modelling, spatial analysis
- maps: cartographic description, cartographic analysis, spatial representation

10. applied geography
- in the research frontiers: input to policy-making and the setting of research agendas
- involvement of geographers on key committees and working parties
- parts of an interdisciplinary team to tackle major global or regional problems
- a specific contract or consultancy to address and offer solutions to a current issue

11. the present and future of geography
new research topics
- physical geography: geo-ecological studies on glacier forelands, geography of global warming
- human geography: geography of crime, geographical meanings in literature and film

strengths of geography
- brought by the breadth of the discipline of geography and its better-developed battery of methods
- a great need for geographical knowledge (e.g. wealth creation, preserving and enhancing the quality of life, ensuring sustainability of the Earth and its peoples, responsible citizenship, leadership at local/ national/ international levels, etc.)
- the core geographical concepts are more relevant than ever to understanding the world (e.g. environmental concerns, global-scale processes caused by globalisation, etc.)

weaknesses of geography
- brought by the internal divisions that have developed in geography
- nature and importance of geography not well understood
- differences between physical and human geography and the shared core of concepts can be confusing
- “Jack-of-all-trades, master of none”: image problem and identity problem
- lack of understanding of geography, undervalued by the general public and those in authority within education, academia, industry, government
- lack of communication and understanding between physical and human geographers

Future developments of geography
- “laissez-faire” scenario: existing specialisms would thrive, and numerous new specialisms would emerge
- “separate-development” scenario: physical geography and human geography will become increasingly autonomous
- “integrated-development” scenario: geographical theory development in a thriving core informs the two sub-disciplines and the specialisms which are at the same time influenced by ideas from outside the discipline (disciplinary identity is strengthened and there is a more focused external role for geography in relation to interdisciplinary activities)