

# Chapter 4

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# Bellwork!!

1. Before the invention of writing, ancient Mesopotamians used the \_\_\_\_\_ system as a means of keeping track of livestock, belongings, and other business.
2. What do we call the ancient Mesopotamian system of writing?
3. List 2 things for which ancient Mesopotamian scribes used writing:

Cuneiform video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dSTsscuw9Rg>

Keeping records:

farmers used “tokens”; different shapes represented different items or amounts

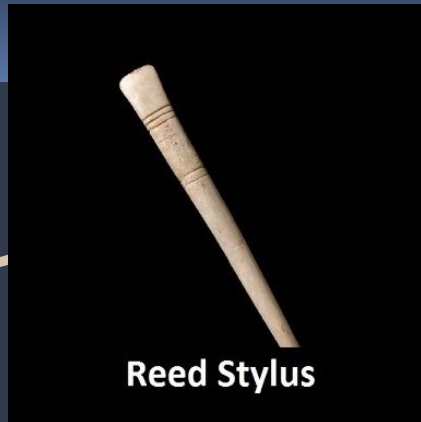
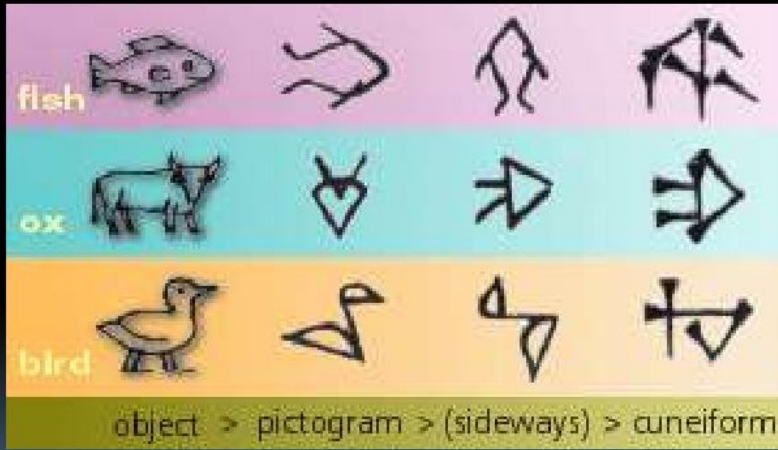
system in place for over 4,000 years

(chart on page 38 → timeline for invention of writing)

tokens sent in ancient “envelopes” as a means of record keeping for trade

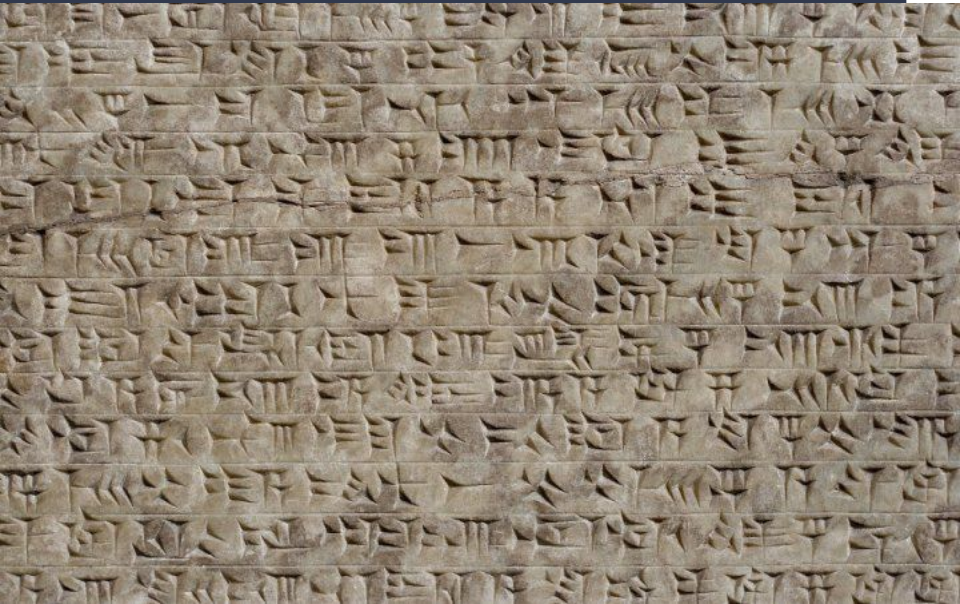
tokens changed, listed numbers and amounts, messengers could “read” them

# From Pictogram to Cuneiform



## Pictograms:

- Around 3,000 B.C., Mesopotamia moved from using counting tokens to using pictograms to record more complex economic data.
- The Earliest Forms of Writing: Pictograms are symbolic, abstract representations of actual objects. Pictograms were used to communicate basic information about crops and taxes.
- The first pictograms were drawn in vertical columns with a pen made from a sharpened reed.
- Early pictograms resembled the objects they represented, but through repeated use over time they began to look simpler, even abstract. These marks eventually became wedge-shaped ("cuneiform"), and could convey sounds or abstract concepts



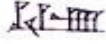





Advancements in Writing: Two things happened that revolutionized writing, moving it from pictogram to cuneiform.

- People began to write in horizontal rows.
- A new type of pen was used called the “stylus”, which was pushed into the clay, producing "wedge-shaped" signs that are known as cuneiform writing.

Scribes created the wedge shapes which made cuneiform signs by pressing the stylus into a clay or wax surface.

Over time, the need for writing changed and the signs developed into a script we call cuneiform. Over thousands of years, Mesopotamian scribes recorded daily events, trade, astronomy, and literature on clay tablets.

# Evolution from Token to Cuneiform Writing

Token	Pictograph	Neo-Sumerian/ Old Babylonian	Neo-Assyrian	Neo-Babylonian	English
					Sheep
					Cattle
					Dog
					Metal
					Oil
					Garment
					Bracelet
					Perfume

- “Cuneiform” is a general word , like “alphabet,” used to describe a kind of writing. In fact, "cuneiform" came from Latin cuneus, which means "wedge". Therefore, any script can be called cuneiform as long as individual signs are composed of wedges.
- Sumerians created cuneiform script over 5000 years ago. It was the world's first written language. The last known cuneiform inscription was written in 75 AD.
- Cuneiform was adapted by the Akkadians, Babylonians, Sumerians and Assyrians to write their own languages and was used in Mesopotamia for about 3000 years.





Cuneiform Tablets: Clay tablets were the primary media for everyday written communication and were used extensively in schools.

Tablets were routinely recycled and if permanence was called for, they could be baked hard in a kiln.

Many of the tablets found by archaeologists were preserved because they were baked when attacking armies burned the building in which they were kept.



# Final Questions:

What were the limitations of this “keeping records” system?

What changed that led to the eventual emergence of writing?