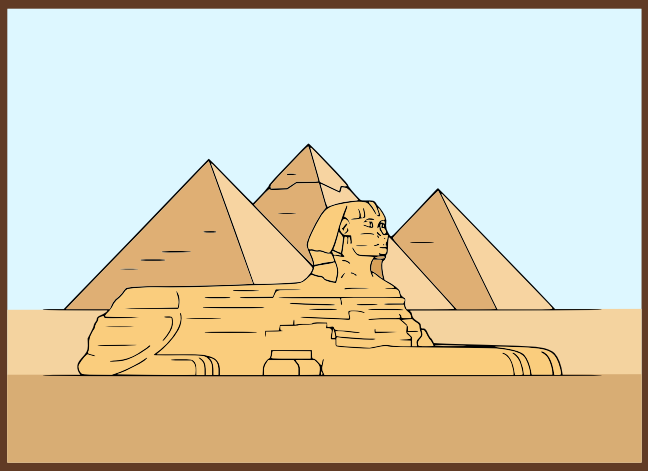
ARCHAEOLOGY



A Beginner’s Guide

CHOOSING A DIG SITE

Existing knowledge: is the site already known?





Does documentary evidence, such as records and maps, provide useful clues?

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEYS

Ground survey - use of aerial photography, GPS, landscape studies to assess if a site is worth investigating

Chemical survey - testing for phosphates in soil



BEFORE THE EXCAVATION

You need permission to dig - get a permit if required
Get funding in place

SITE ROLES

Excavation Director - overall charge of the site, logistics, teaching and research

Site Manager - focus on the smooth running of the entire site

Site Administrator - in charge of documentation

Site Staff - field archaeologists, taking part in and supervising the excavation

Finds Manager - oversees the artefacts and supervises their cleaning

Science Manager - in charge of the scientific aspects of the dig

Visitor Manager - the public face of the project, in charge of interacting with visitors



DIGGING METHODS

Trenches - useful cross section, only causes damage to a smalll part of the site

Area excavation - best used on single-use sites

Box grid systems - ensures the accurate cataloguing of artefacts found

Quadrant system - best used on round sites such as barrows or pits



HEALTH & SAFETY



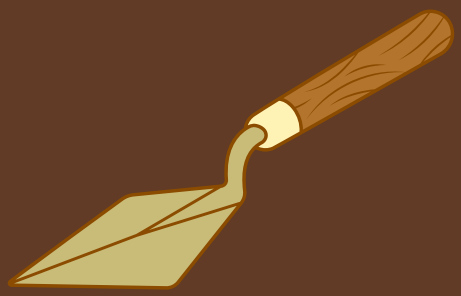
Complete or read the risk assessment for the site

Wear appropriate PPE

Be aware of potential dangers (particularly from collapsing trenches)
Complete any training required

Ensure access to shelter and other facilities as appropriate

TOOLS



Surveying transit - used by road surveyors to gauge distance and elevation so that the land on which the dig will take place can be mapped

String and stakes - these are used to divide the dig site into squares to enable finds to be accurately logged

Shovel - round-edged shovels are used to remove surface material, while flat-edged shovels are used to remove thinner amounts of material

Mason's trowel - used to gently scrape away thin layers

Pickaxe - a small pickaxe can be used to separate compacted soil

Garden clippers - used to remove obstructions such as tree roots

Brushes - used to remove the soil from artefacts and gently clean them

Shaker screen - made with wire mesh material, these are used to sieve and gently remove soil from artefacts

Wheelbarrow - for removing large amounts of excavated dirt from a site

Camera - many uses including taking photographs of artefacts as they are removed from the ground, as a record of exactly where they were found

