

## Strands

As you do your own research on secular humanism you will encounter references to other philosophies such as atheism, rationalism, skepticism, humanism and freethought.

Despite these philosophies being based on distinct but related principles they do share a common purpose -- to guide us as good citizens while also living a happy and meaningful life. In this sense it could be said that this collection of philosophies are the strands of a broader (unnamed) philosophy.

The purpose of this exercise is to help you better understand the similarities and differences between three of these strands, namely, humanism, rationalism and skepticism.



## Your tasks

For each strand,

1. Find an Australian website that describes the principles for that strand.
2. Write your own summary of those principles (in 100 words or less).

Now compare and contrast the strands.

3. Identify the principles that are common to all three strands.
4. Identify the principles that are unique to each strand.

## Teacher's notes

### Websites

There are many societies in Australia, each with their own websites, that promote rationalism, humanism and skepticism. The home pages for the national societies are

<https://rationalist.com.au>

<https://www.humanistsaustralia.org>

<https://www.skeptics.com.au>

Each society also has a page that describes their underlying philosophy (these are the pages you could point students to as a source for their own summaries)

<https://rationalist.com.au/about/the-four-pillars-of-rationalism/>

<https://www.humanistsaustralia.org/humanism>

<https://www.skeptics.com.au/about/>

### Summary of humanism

Humanism is a way of thinking that says we can be good people and make the world a better place without needing religion. It encourages us to use our own minds, be curious and creative, and make choices that are fair and responsible. It also believes that everyone should be treated with respect and have equal rights. So, it's a way of living that helps us find meaning and happiness in life and make the world a better place for everyone.

### Summary of rationalism

Rationalism is a way of thinking that values reason and logic over things like tradition or emotions. It says that by using our brains and looking at evidence, we can come up with the best answers to problems. Rationalists also believe in naturalism, which means that we only have one life in the real world, and not in any spiritual or supernatural worlds. They also support the idea of people being free to make

their own choices and the government being fair to everyone. And they think that religion and government should be separate from each other.

### Summary of skepticism

Skepticism is a way of thinking about the world where you don't just accept things at face value, but instead you question and look for evidence to back up what people say or claim. It's important to be skeptical of things that sound too good to be true or that go against what scientists know about how the world works. It's a healthy way to think and helps you make good decisions based on facts, not just what someone tells you. Skepticism is not being negative or cynical but it is being critical and not accepting things just because they are popular or appealing.

**What do they have in common?** (ie, humanism, rationalism, skepticism)

They all focus on positive values, and using evidence, reason and critical thinking.

**What are their differences?**

Humanism emphasizes valuing humans, their individual worth and dignity.

Rationalism emphasises valuing reason over emotionality and separating church and state.

Skepticism emphasises challenging pseudoscience and the paranormal."