Prerequisites to Civilization

OR

What are the shared characteristics of civilizations?
What do these Civilizations Have in Common?

Ur, ca 2000 BCE

America, ca 2000 CE
1) Agricultural Surplus

- Sometimes called the agricultural revolution
- The society produces enough food with the result that
  - Living is less precarious
  - There is generally, an agricultural/economic surplus rather than a deficit
Ancient Sumeria
Results of the Agricultural Surplus

- As not every person has to be dedicated to the production of food, labor specialization occurs.
- As there is an agricultural/economic surplus, taxation to support the payment of governmental officials can occur.
Tablet recording Tax Payment ca. 2500 BCE
Social stratification

- Specialization of labor and the development of a tax structure results in social stratification
  - Farmers
  - Craftsmen
  - Merchants
  - Political leaders
  - (sometimes) slaves
Sumerian slaves ca 2300 BCE
2) Urban Living / Cities

- Agricultural surpluses go hand in hand with the development of cities.
- Laborers, merchants and craftsmen need a central place where they can purchase food and goods used in their day-to-day lives.
- The central place where this occurs is the city.
Importance of Cities

- Places for the exchange of goods
- Places for the exchange of ideas
- Places where information can be collected and also disseminated more widely.
- Places where a shared culture and religion, shared values can develop
3) Trade Networks

- Some of the laborers who do not farm and are able to specialize become merchants in civilizations.
- Merchants organize trade that brought food from the countryside into cities and good produced in the cities to the countryside and other cities.
- Trade networks encourage greater economic growth of a civilization but also the exchange of ideas and technology.
4) Permanent Government Offices

- Cities require some people whose job it is to administer the city and civic services
  - Tax collectors
  - People to repair city infrastructure
  - Judges to hear court cases
  - Officials to preside over the market
  - Generals to lead people into battle
Oldest Example of Sumerian Case Law, ca 2050 BCE

NB: This is not a law code, but an example of case law, that is a discussion of a case and its resolution to be consulted when similar trials occur.
5) Writing

- Writing is necessary to ensure an efficient bureaucracy
  - Legal contracts
  - Taxation records
  - Religious documents
  - Ability to record more accurate? History
  - Ability to foster greater scientific and intellectual inquiry
Cuneiform

- Developed by the Sumerians beginning in 3000 BCE
- Developed as pictographs, then evolved into phonological symbols by about between 2000 and 1000 BCE
In most societies, the ability to write was limited to a few elite individuals. This does not, however, negate the importance of writing to civilizations.
6) Intellectual and Artistic Movement

- Intellectual and Artistic Movement can take many forms
  - the development of monumental architecture
  - the development of gymnasia, schools etc
  - the dedication of monetary and labor resources to educational, cultural or religious endeavors
    - Plays, religious houses, hiring teachers
Ziggurat of UR, ca 2100 BCE (MODEL RECONSTRUCTION)
A hallmark of civilization is the development of tools to aid in production or understanding of the world.

- Calendars
- Stylus
- Metal tools for farming (i.e. bronze, iron)
- Fast potting wheel
Fast Pottery (Utilitarian) from Ur
Artistic Innovations

Silver Lyre 2600-2400 BC
Why Do Civilizations Collapse?

- Dependence on foreign resources
- Overpopulation which strains a government’s ability to maintain revenues, low surpluses and resources
- Internal strife caused by famines, epidemics, state breakdowns, decay of society and oppressiveness