**What Caused Neanderthals To Go Extinct?**

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<https://insider.si.edu/2015/08/why-did-neanderthals-go-extinct/>

**Introduction**

Neanderthals (*Homo neanderthalensis*) were widespread across Europe and Western Asia for a long time, starting about 400,000 years ago. But things began to change when populations of *Homo sapiens* (earlier members of our own species) migrated from Africa to Europe at about 45,000 years ago. Five thousand years later not a single Neanderthal remained. What happened? To find out, Smithsonian Insider posed a seemingly simple question to Dr. Briana Pobiner, paleoanthropologist (scientist who studies ancient human remains) at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History.

**Q: So, why exactly did Neanderthals go extinct?**

**Pobiner:**It is hard to know exactly why many species are on the verge of extinction now, let alone species in the deep past that are already gone. However, we can assume some of the same basic ecological processes driving animals to extinction today are part of the puzzle. In the case of Neanderthals, we think competition and changes to their habitat due to climate change were two of the main factors.

Neanderthals were fairly specialized to hunt large, Ice Age animals like mammoth and bison. But sometimes being specialized isn’t such a good strategy. When climates changed and some of those animals went extinct, the Neanderthals may have been more vulnerable to starvation. Moreover, their large heavy spears were only good for thrusting at animals at close range. They would not have been useful for hunting swifter animals like deer or elk.

We also think *Homo sapiens* had a competitive edge over Neanderthals. There is evidence that early *Homo sapiens* had long-distance trade networks, possibly buffering them against times of climate change when their preferred foods were not available; Neanderthals did not.

Neanderthals had physical features that helped them survive cold climates, like large noses to humidify and warm dry, cold air and short, stout bodies to conserve heat, but early *Homo sapiens* had technology that Neanderthals didn’t, including sewing needles to make clothing, important during the colder periods of the Ice Ages. *Homo sapiens* also had innovative tools like bows and arrows that allowed them to hunt from animals from a distance, like deer or elk, and seemed to have had a more diverse diet than Neanderthals.

We don’t have evidence of direct combat between the two species, but we know they interacted, because they interbred. Some would say Neanderthals didn’t go extinct, because everyone alive today whose ancestry is from outside of Africa (where Neanderthals never lived) carries a little bit of Neanderthal DNA in their genes. It is quite possible that because Neanderthals tended to live in smaller bands and tribe, that they just eventually blended into the general population of Homo sapiens.

**What caused Neanderthals to go extinct?**  
**Directions**  
Part 1:

**Before Reading**: Take a guess on which of the following claims you think is true by placing a check mark (🗸) next to that claim.

**1. \_\_\_\_\_Neanderthals died off due to competition for resources.**

**2. \_\_\_\_\_\_Neanderthals went extinct due to climate change.**

**3. \_\_\_\_\_\_Neanderthals were killed off by Homo sapiens.**

**4. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_Neanderthals lacked advanced technology.**

**5. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_Neanderthals blended into the general Homo sapiens population.**

Now let’s do some [reading.](https://insider.si.edu/2015/08/why-did-neanderthals-go-extinct/)

Let’s check out this article that was just [published](https://www.zmescience.com/science/neanderthal-extinction-demographics-81252343/).

Part 2:

**After Reading**: With your table group, go back and re-read the article. As you read, find evidence to eliminate the claims that don’t work and cross them off.

**1. \_\_\_\_\_Neanderthals died off due to competition for resources.**  
Is there evidence for this claim? Yes or No

If yes, what is the evidence?

**2. \_\_\_\_\_\_Neanderthals went extinct due to climate change.**  
Is there evidence for this claim? Yes or No

If yes, what is the evidence?

**3. \_\_\_\_\_\_Neanderthals were killed off by Homo sapiens.**   
Is there evidence for this claim? Yes or No

If yes, what is the evidence?

**4. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_Neanderthals lacked advanced technology.**  
Is there evidence for this claim? Yes or No

If yes, what is the evidence?

**5. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_Neanderthals blended into the general Homo sapiens population.**Is there evidence for this claim? Yes or No

If yes, what is the evidence?

Part 3:  Which theory is the trigger event or the most probable cause for Neanderthals going extinct? Complete the CER below:

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| **Claim:  I believe that Neanderthal went extinct because….** |

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| **Evidence: The evidence that best supports my claim is….** |

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| **Reasoning: The reason my evidence supports my claim is….** |