

Essays

For this course, you'll write three essays based on evidence from the ancient world.

The three essays are as follows:

Essay on Representations and Images

Due March 10.

- The images essay uses images from antiquity to talk about ideas important to Roman culture.
- See the assignment page for details and specific requirements.

Position Paper

Due May 12.

- Use evidence from primary and secondary sources to take a position on a research topic of your interest.
- See the assignment page for details and specific requirements.
- A proposal is due March 24.

Presentation Write-Up

Due the week after you present.

- For each of your two presentations on sources from the assigned readings, write a 2–3 page essay that summarizes what the reading tells us.
- See the assignment page for details and specific requirements.

Resources and Information

- See the Research and Citation Center for more information.
 - Footnotes
 - Bibliographies
 - Citing Ancient Sources
 - Kinds of Sources
 - Research Options
- Writing a Position Paper (a.k.a. the “Elephant Pamphlet”)
- Policies: Plagiarism
- Pre-formatted MS Word template
- Pre-formatted Google Docs template

Essays – Representations and Images

The images essay uses images from antiquity to talk about ideas important to Roman culture.

The assignment: Write a 3- to 4-page essay that uses depictions of the Roman world to take a position on the representations of Roman cultural ideas and beliefs.

What you need to do

● Get ready.

Review the requirements. Review the Requirements for All Papers. This page has important guidance and videos on formatting your document, structuring your essay, and using evidence.

Watch the video. The overview video linked above explains what I want you to cover in the essay and what I'm expecting in terms of arguments, evidence, and structure.

Another resource you may find helpful is the Elephant Pamphlet, which gives step-by-step guidance on preparing for and writing a position paper.

● Choose your topic from one of the two prompts below.

Option A

Two pieces in a museum. How a culture sees abstract ideas (masculinity, virtue, old age, divinity, and so on) is often reflected in its artwork. What can two different works of art depicting the same idea, but from different times or places, tell us about how the cultures that produced them?

Compare the two works show to explore what their creators/artists believed about the idea they were representing. What insight do these beliefs this give us into the cultures the two artists came from?

Option B

The Roman world on film. Every depiction of an historical event, whether in prose, poetry, painting, theater, or film, involves an artist using history to convey his or her own beliefs. What do the creators of these works want you to believe?

Compare the agenda of the filmmakers with the agenda of the authors of the primary source. How did these creators reshape this event for their own purposes? How do these similarities and differences show what this event means to the people who create art about it?

● Choose two works depicting the ancient world to compare.

Option A

For the museum option, you need to choose two works of art from the ancient world that (a) represent the same idea or concept but (b) come either from different periods or from different places in the ancient world.

Choosing your subjects:

- Your two works of art must represent the same idea or concept. For example, you can choose two little girls, two warriors, two fertility goddesses, etc.
- Your works of art must be from the ancient Roman world (before 500 CE) and from either two different places or two different periods. The two pieces can be in any visual medium: sculpture, painting, relief, etc.
- You should experience the artwork face-to-face by attending a museum in person. Possible venues include: Metropolitan Museum's Egypt Collection; Metropolitan Museum's Greek and Roman Art Collection; Brooklyn Museum of Art's Ancient Egyptian Art Collection; and Fordham Museum of Greek, Etruscan and Roman Art. You are not limited to these venues or to New York.

Option B

For the film option, you need to choose a film that is set in the ancient world and that is based on ancient primary sources.

Choosing your subjects:

- First, choose and watch any feature-length film or two episodes of a TV series set in the ancient Roman world (3500 BCE to 500 CE).
- Then find the ancient primary source material it was based on and read it. For example, if you chose the movie *Gladiator*, which is set in the era of the emperor Commodus, the primary source would be ancient accounts of Commodus's reign. Your primary source(s) must come from the ancient world (before 500 CE).
- Some suggestions for possible films or series and their corresponding sources are below.

● Find three aspects of your works that are strong examples of your topic.

Option A

For the museum option, choose three aspects of the works you can discuss for both pieces that seem to reflect how the artist felt about the subject and what the subject stood for.

- Some possibilities include facial expression, dress, use of technique or medium, stiffness/fluidity, apparent strength/weakness, idealism/realism, or any other elements offering some kind of insight into what the artist was trying to convey.
- For each aspect, relate your subjective impressions of how it manifests in the first piece; then how the second piece is similar or different and in what way.
- For example: say you've chosen two sculptures depicting different love goddesses, and one has a crafty expression while the other has an innocent expression. The contrast can be used to talk about how each artist might have thought about the goddesses' relationships with mortals; the nature of love; etc.

Option B

For the film option, choose three moments or depictions from the film and find the corresponding events or depictions in the primary source.

- For each moment or depiction, describe and discuss how it appears in the film and how it is presented similarly or differently in the primary source material.
- For example:
 - In the movie *Gladiator*, the movie uses the fictional character Maximus to talk about Roman culture and the nature of imperial rule.
 - Meanwhile, the primary sources about Commodus talk about the emperor's personality and character and what that means about the criteria for a ruler.

Please take note: This essay is about the agenda of the primary source author as much as the filmmakers'. Do not use the source to "fact check" the film and list what it got "wrong". You must consider the primary source to be at least as skewed, manipulative, and agenda-driven as the film.

● Write a 3- to 4-page essay in which you take a position on the works you're studying.

You'll need an Introduction State what you believe these works show us about the culture, beliefs, and social expectations of the cultures involved and how they were perceived and used by others in a way that answers the question in the prompt you chose. (This is your thesis statement.)

... a Body Describe and discuss, one by one, each of the three aspects of the works you are studying. For each section, discuss what the evidence tells us about the ideas being represented.

... and a Conclusion. Tie your examples and assertions together and show how they support your overall thesis.

● Finalize your essay.

Citations are important. Make sure your evidence is cited and that you include a bibliography. For how to do citations and bibliographies, see the Research and Citation Center. You will be marked down drastically if your paper is not properly cited.

Option A

For the museum option, instead of a bibliography, on a separate "Works Discussed" page after your essay, list the title of each work, artist, date created, place of origin, and the museum. Paste in photographs of the items from your visit or from the museum's website. Footnotes/parenthetical cites are not needed for this assignment.

Option B

For the film option, instead of a bibliography, on a separate "Works Discussed" page after your essay, list the title of film, year, director, stars and studio. Then list the book or books you drew your written evidence from, using standard citation style. You will need to provide footnotes/parenthetical cites for the primary source(s) you used, but not for the film.

Optional draft. You may email me an optional draft two weeks before the final due date. It should include most of your paper (at least two-thirds of the final content, with sections to be written described in square brackets). I'll give feedback, but not a grade, to help you refine your final paper.

Double-check the requirements. Make sure your essay meets the Requirements for All Papers for formatting, structure, and evidence, as well as the specifications given above for what's expected for this assignment.

Once you're sure your essay meets the requirements, upload it as DOCX or PDF to BlackBoard.

Commonly used films and their primary sources

Some possibilities for the film and sources option are listed on the assignment page on the course website. Links to most of these primary sources can be found on the ancient texts page on my website.

Essays – Proposal

The proposal gives a one-page preview of your position paper.

The assignment: Give a one-page preview of the research paper you'll be submitting at the end of the semester. This one-pager includes your problem/question, the possible sides to this question, and your proposed argument.

What you need to do

● Get ready.

Watch the video. The overview video explains what I want you to cover in the proposal and what I'm expecting to be included.

● Choose a problem or question you want to explore.

Choose a controversy or debate pertaining to the ancient Roman world. One starting point is to look over the 13 meeting topics. What would you like to dig more deeply into?

You can choose something that the people at the time might have debated—e.g., “Is Greek culture degrading Roman virtue and old-fashioned values?” as a question arising in the late Republic, or a question arising among modern historians—e.g., “Did the Roman empire arise through conscious imperialism or ad hoc reactions to events?” In each case you need to outline both sides of the question in your paper and then provide evidence why you think one side was right.

Choose a topic you're interested in and have fun with it. Make it wacky, make it provocative—anything is fine as long as you make an argument regarding your chosen topic and support it with facts.

● Formulate a preliminary thesis statement.

Opposing sides. The problem you're interested in addressing should involve something that could be argued with opposing positions. You should be able to delineate the problem by describing the opposing views people might take.

- To make sure you have two clear opposing opinions, you might want to express them in the form “Some say... Others say....”

Preliminary thesis. Your thesis statement, both here and in the final paper, should be a statement of opinion that someone could disagree with. It can take the form of following up the description of the opposing opinions with your own: “I believe....”

You can change it later. Remember that your thesis is provisional. You can change anything about your approach and interpretation after the proposal; in fact, uncovering information as you do your research makes refining or changing your initial assessments very likely.

● Write your one-page proposal.

What to include: Your proposal is structured like the introduction to your position paper, and may serve as the basis for it. It should include

- your problem/question;
- the opposing sides; and
- your preliminary thesis.

A sample proposal can be found on the course website.

● Finalize your proposal.

Submit your proposal Upload your proposal to BlackBoard.

Feedback and guidance. The proposal is not graded, but whether you submitted a proposal on time will be factored into the final grade for the position paper.

I will give you feedback on things like the feasibility of researching your topic, whether the scope is too big or too narrow for a paper like this, and some possible sources you might want to look at.

Essays – Position Paper

Use evidence from primary and secondary sources to take a position on a research topic of your interest relating to Roman history.

The assignment: Write a 6- to 8-page position paper, due at the end of the semester, in which you express an opinion about a topic related to Roman history, and use evidence to back up that opinion.

In this paper, you're taking a side on some question or controversy, and you're using reasoning and research to support your side of the argument.

What you need to do

● Get ready.

Review the requirements. Review the Requirements for All Papers. This page has important guidance and videos on formatting your document, structuring your essay, and using evidence.

Watch the video. The overview video linked above explains what I want you to cover in the essay and what I'm expecting in terms of arguments, evidence, and structure.

Another resource you may find helpful is the Elephant Pamphlet, which gives step-by-step guidance on preparing for and writing a position paper.

● Find your evidence.

Review your feedback. The next step after writing your proposal and reviewing my feedback is to gather the research you will need to support the arguments you'll be making in your paper.

Find 3 sources. Research your topic and find at least three sources that will provide you with evidence for your argument; these need to be primary and secondary sources only (see the Research and Citation Center for more on sources).

- I'll point you toward some possibilities in my feedback on your proposal.

Kinds of sources. Ideally you should have a mix of primary and secondary sources, but it will depend on the topic.

- **Tertiary sources are not allowed.** These include textbooks, encyclopedias, and most websites. See the Research and Citation Center for more on sources.
- For guidance on finding full-text online primary and secondary sources, see the Research and Citation Center. We will talk about this in class as well.

● Write a 6- to 8-page research paper in which you take a position on your topic.

You'll need an Introduction ... In your introduction, briefly describe the problem and state the position you will argue as a thesis statement. Your introduction should follow the format of the proposal (see the proposal page).

- A sample intro can be found on the course website.

... a Body ... In the body of your paper, make three assertions as to why your thesis statement is valid.

- For each assertion, describe and discuss the evidence from the primary and secondary sources.
- Each section starts with an assertion followed by evidence, and each section builds on the previous sections to make an overall argument.

... and a Conclusion. Tie your examples and assertions together and show how they support your overall thesis.

● Finalize your essay.

Citations are important. Make sure your evidence is cited and that you include a bibliography. For how to do citations and bibliographies, see the Research and Citation Center. You will be marked down drastically if your paper is not properly cited.

Optional draft. You may email me an optional draft two weeks before the final due date. It should include most of your paper (at least two-thirds of the final content, with sections to be written described in square brackets). I'll give feedback, but not a grade, to help you refine your final paper.

Double-check the requirements. Make sure your essay meets the Requirements for All Papers for formatting, structure, and evidence, as well as the specifications given above for what's expected for this assignment.

Once you're sure your essay meets the requirements, upload it as DOCX or PDF to BlackBoard.

Essays – Presentation Write-Up

After you present on your chosen reading, you'll submit a written version.

The assignment: For each of your two presentations on sources from the assigned readings, write a 2– to 3-page essay that summarizes what the reading tells us. It's due one week after you present in class.

What you need to do

Your write-up should do the following:

- **Briefly summarize** what the document says and, more importantly, analyze what the author is trying to say about the subject at hand. In other words, you need to identify and discuss what you believe is the author's interpretation, bias, and point of view and how it affected the author's treatment of the topic. Give examples from the document that illustrate your assessment of the author's spin.
- **Provide perspective** by relating the material in the document, and the author's bias on it, to the bigger picture—the material being discussed in class.

The main point of the presentation and the write-up is NOT to summarize the reading. Summary should be less than 25% of your presentation and your write-up. The main point is to analyze the reading and talk about what it means and what it tells us about that place and time in ancient history.

Writeup deadline. Your write-up needs to be posted to BlackBoard before the next class meeting after you present in class. In this final version of the write-up you can incorporate ideas and reactions that came up during the in-class discussion that followed the presentation.