

SCHOOL OF HISTORY, CLASSICS AND ARCHAEOLOGY

GUIDELINES FOR ESSAYS IN CLASSICS

PART 1: CONTENT

1.1 General

1.1.1 When we mark an essay, there are three things above all that we look for:

- factual knowledge of the subject;
- an understanding of those facts;
- the ability to develop a coherent and well argued case on the basis of that understanding.

Your approach to essay writing should take account of these objectives.

1.2 The essay question

1.2.1 Make sure that you understand the question that has been asked and that you answer that question, not the one you wish had been asked. You will not receive credit for writing down everything you know about a given topic; you should only include in the essay things that are relevant to the essay in hand, and which contribute to the argument you are trying to develop. Essay questions may consist of two or more parts; make sure that your answer does not omit consideration of any of those parts.

1.2.2 Never lose sight of the essay question; check that all your paragraphs relate to the question and that you have made it clear to the reader (either explicitly or by means of the logical structure) how they relate.

1.2.3 To ensure that you have a well ordered and well argued case to make, you should always prepare an outline before you begin writing. Always try to write clear, concise and simple English, and take care over the way you organise your answer. One good structure is: introduction, argument and conclusion. The introduction and conclusion are there to help the reader catch on to what you are trying to say in between.

1.3 Introduction

1.3.1 In the introduction, state briefly how you understand the question, and indicate briefly how you are going to approach it. Do not substitute a different question by beginning: 'In order to answer *X* (the question asked), it is necessary first to write about *Y* (some other issue)'.

1.3.2 Remember that you are introducing only your essay, not the subject as a whole, and so do not begin with a string of irrelevant general statements. There is no need to explain who people were, what the work is about etc.: that can all be taken for granted. Avoid weak and/or over-formulaic introductions, for example beginning with a dictionary definition ('*X* is defined by the *Pocket Oxford Dictionary* as...'), quotation, over-generalisation or something trivial ('*X* was born in...'). (If you must quote a dictionary in your essay, it should be the *Oxford English Dictionary* or the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, not one of the smaller dictionaries.)

1.3.3 Avoid giving a one-sentence, summary answer to the question in the introduction.

While it may be appropriate to say in your introduction that you are going to produce arguments to show such-and-such, you should make sure that your final verdict on the question is kept back until the end of the essay.

1.4 Argument

1.4.1 The middle of the essay should connect with the beginning (which says what the question is) and the end (which says what the answer is) by way of a logically constructed and fully documented argument.

1.4.2 Each paragraph should form a logical unit in itself and the argument should be connected by transitions between paragraphs. Remember that you cannot assume that your reader will follow your own sequence of thought if you have not made all the logical steps explicit. You should signpost all the logical connections so that it is clear to the reader where you are in the argument, how you reached that point, and where the argument is going next.

1.4.3 Make sure that it is clear why a reader needs to know the information you are giving and how it is relevant to your argument. Do not leave the reader to fill in the gaps. To avoid straying into irrelevance, it can be a good idea to keep referring to the wording of the question throughout the essay.

1.4.4 Always argue any point you make; never simply assert it. Explain each idea in detail with appropriate and sufficient evidence; explain the implications of that idea, and justify it against any possible objections. Beware of including too much historical narrative or plot summary, and of substituting paraphrase for argument and analysis.

1.4.5 Your argument should not consist of generalisations, but should contain specific examples to back up the case you are making. In essays on art or archaeology, a good range of objects and sites will often need to be cited.

1.5 Conclusion

1.5.1 In your conclusion, briefly summarise the conclusions you have reached, and perhaps mention the most important reasons why you have reached those conclusions.

1.5.2 Take care that you do not write an essay which ignores the question until the final paragraph, and then announces: 'In conclusion, therefore...'. The conclusion must follow logically from what has come before.

1.6 Use of primary and secondary sources

1.6.1 It is always important to tie your argument to sufficient and relevant supporting primary evidence.

1.6.2 Quotations in an essay do not 'speak for themselves'. It is usually necessary to follow a direct quotation with comments explaining its significance, how it serves as evidence for the particular point you are making, and sometimes drawing out relevant implications. The use of a longer quotation is normally justifiable only if you have a great deal to say about it and its contribution to your argument.

1.6.3 It is almost always necessary to make use of others' opinions and arguments in an essay, but you should do so transparently (by identifying your sources) and critically (for example, by giving your own reasons for finding A's interpretation more convincing than B's). You should show that you have worked through the issues that others have discussed, come to your own understanding of them, and applied them to arrive at your own personal interpretation of the primary source(s).

1.6.4 The crucial test of understanding is whether you can make a point in your own words. Never reproduce someone else's work word-for-word, or closely paraphrased, without due acknowledgement. Always identify your source, and put direct quotations in quotation marks. (When you are making notes on a book or article, you will need to use quotation marks whenever you write down words that are not your own; if you do not do this, there is a danger that when you come to write your essay you may accidentally incorporate someone else's words without due acknowledgement.) If you merely want to acknowledge that you obtained the idea from someone else and/or want to invoke their authority to back up what you are arguing, then either insert a footnote or include the reference in the main body of the text in parentheses.

1.6.5 Most student essays contain far too many quotations from modern scholars. You only need to quote a passage from a book or article if the point is controversial, or you are going to go on to argue with it or qualify it in some way, or it is a point which neatly encapsulates the point of view of the scholar whose interpretation you are discussing in some detail. You should not quote a passage simply because it expresses a point better than you could. You should not normally need to quote more than three or four passages from modern scholars—and often you will not need to quote any at all. If you quote a very large number of passages, the marker may conclude that you are using the quotations as padding, or even that you are using the modern scholars to write the essay for you. It is far better, therefore, to leave out unnecessary quotations, but (if you like) add some references to the relevant passages in footnotes or in the main text.

1.6.6 However, if you are discussing an ancient work of literature in detail, you will need to quote passages from it often.

1.6.7 When using websites, bear in mind that they differ widely in their scholarly content. Some, such as JSTOR (www.jstor.org), consist of archives of journals all of which have been edited to a high standard of scholarship, and which originated in print form. Other websites have not been edited by scholars and may well be unreliable. *Wikipedia*, for example, is not sufficiently scholarly to use for researching an essay, as should be clear from the introductory page which states: 'Don't be afraid to edit—*anyone* can edit almost any page, and we encourage you to be bold!'

1.7 Illustrations

1.7.1 If your essay refers in any detail to works of art, buildings or archaeological sites, then you are advised to include illustrations or plans. These may be taken from the internet, photocopied or hand-drawn, and should be accompanied by titles which include a reference to the source used (with page or figure number if taken from a book). A list of illustrations should also be provided. If you are unable to include illustrations, you should at least make clear which examples you are discussing: a good way is to cite a particular plate in a book.

1.7.2 When referring to an object or site, you should make clear which of your illustrations or plans you are referring to: although some objects are well known, many are not obvious from description only, and a reference to a particular illustration should be given.

PART 2: PRESENTATION

2.1 General

2.1.1 Essays should be on A4 paper, word processed, in 12 point font (10 point for footnotes), double-spaced, and printed on one side of the paper only. There must be a bibliography at the end of the essay. The word count must be stated at the beginning or the end.

2.2 Word limit

2.2.1 You must keep to the word limit that has been set for the essay. There is no 'percentage rule' by which it is permitted to overshoot the word limit by x per cent. If you find you need to cut down your essay to make it fit within the word limit, consider abridging or deleting the first page and a half: that is where any superfluity is most likely to be. The bibliography does not count towards the word limit, but everything else does.

2.3 Bibliography

2.3.1 The bibliography should list all works directly quoted or referred to in the essay, and any others which you found useful. Items should only be included if you have used them yourself. The system of citation to be used is the 'Harvard system'. This is as follows.

2.3.2 For books:

Macleod, C.W. (1982), ed., *Homer: Iliad Book XXIV*, Cambridge.

Syme, R. (1939), *The Roman Revolution*, Oxford.

West, D. (1990), tr., *Virgil: The Aeneid*, London.

2.3.3 For journal articles:

Lintott, A.W. (1990), 'Electoral bribery in the Roman republic', *Journal of Roman Studies* 80, 1-16.

2.3.4 For contributions to multi-author volumes, collections of essays etc.:

Dewald, C. (1997), 'Wanton kings, pickled heroes and gnomic founding fathers: strategies of meaning at the end of Herodotus' *Histories*', in D.H.Roberts, F.M.Dunn and D.P.Fowler (eds), *Classical Closure*, Princeton, NJ, 62-82.

2.3.5 So for books you need to cite four things: author (with initials), date of publication (in brackets), title (*in italics*, with initial capitals) and place of publication. (If the book is an edition or a translation, add 'ed.' or 'tr.' as appropriate between the date of publication and the title.) For articles, you need to cite six things: author (with initials), year of journal (in brackets), title of article (in quotation marks, without initial capitals), name of journal (*in italics*), volume number of journal, and pages (just the page numbers, not 'pp.').

2.3.6 Do not forget to include the page numbers of journal articles.

2.3.7 The name of the journal may be given in abbreviated form (*in italics*), if you prefer, as long as the correct abbreviation is used. A list of the standard abbreviations for journals may be found at http://library.uncg.edu/depts/ref/bibs/lannee_abbrev.asp.

2.3.8 If you consulted a journal article in an internet archive (accessed via the University Library electronic journals page), the article should be cited as if in the print form, i.e. in the same way as Lintott (1990) above; the archive should not be referenced.

2.3.9 If you take a reference from an internet archive, it may be unnecessarily detailed, as for example: ‘Ammianus Marcellinus on the Persian Invasion of A.D. 359’, R.C.Blockley *Phoenix*, Vol. 42, No. 3. (Autumn, 1988), pp. 244-260.’ The correct way to put that into a bibliography would be: ‘Blockley, R.C. (1988), ‘Ammianus Marcellinus on the Persian invasion of A.D. 359’, *Phoenix* 42, 244-60.’

2.3.10 If you cite two or more items published by the same author in the same year, use the letters ‘a’, ‘b’, ‘c’ etc. after the date to differentiate between them (e.g. ‘Syme, R. (1939b), *The Roman Revolution*, Oxford.’).

2.3.11 Note that for books you must cite the place of publication, not the publisher. If your lecturers cite the publisher in their reading lists, this is simply to help you if you are ordering the book from a bookshop. For Penguin books, the place of publication is Harmondsworth (for older Penguins) or London. It is not ‘Penguin’. Similarly, there is no such place as ‘Loeb’. The item by West cited at 2.3.2 above is published in the Penguin Classics series, but that is not information which should be cited.

2.3.12 Websites should be cited as follows, with the date accessed:

‘*De imperatoribus Romanis*: an online encyclopaedia of Roman rulers and their families’, www.roman-emperors.org/ (accessed 1.4.08).

2.3.13 The bibliography should contain only (i) published translations of primary sources and (ii) other modern works. There is no need to list primary sources in the bibliography if all you have done is to cite the ancient reference, but if a translation is actually quoted, then it should appear in the bibliography.

2.3.14 You should not reference your lectures or lecture handouts, unless the lecturer has indicated that the views expressed in them represent original unpublished material. We take it for granted that you have attended your lectures and made use of the material presented in them.

2.4 References

2.4.1 Whenever you make a point based on something you have taken from another author, you should give the reference. As a general rule, references to primary sources are best put in brackets in the body of the essay, and references to modern works in footnotes at the bottom of the page. But short references can be put in brackets in the body of the essay. If all your references are short, you could dispense with footnotes altogether.

2.4.2 If footnotes are used, they should be placed at the bottom of the page; endnotes are not to be used. In the text, the footnote number should normally be placed at the end of a sentence, and should always follow the punctuation; for example, ‘Syme has a different

argument.¹’, not ‘Syme¹ has...’ or ‘...a different argument¹.’ Footnotes should be numbered sequentially, i.e. do not start again at “1” on each new page.

2.4.3 References to ancient works should be in the following form:

Homer, *Iliad* 6.232-6
 Herodotus 1.82-3
 Sophocles, *Oedipus the King* 316-18
 Plato, *Symposium* 212c3
 Aristotle, *Poetics* 1449b3
 Ennius, *Annals* 34-50 Skutsch
 Cicero, *In Catilinam* 2.18-23
 Virgil, *Aeneid* 3.476-81
 Horace, *Odes* 3.5.1-4
 Tacitus, *Annals* 1.6
 Diogenes Laertius 8.77
 Augustine, *City of God* 12.10

2.4.4 If the author only has one surviving work, the name of the work is not given, and the reference consists of: author, book, dot, line/section number(s). If the author has more than one surviving work, the name of the author is given, and also the name of the work, and the reference consists of: author, comma, name of work (*in italics*), book, dot, line/section number(s). If several references are given, they should be separated with semicolons: Homer, *Iliad* 6.232-6; Herodotus 1.82-3; Sophocles, *Oedipus the King* 316-18. But if several references are made to the same work, commas are used: Homer, *Iliad* 6.232-6, 9.485-91; *Odyssey* 24.510-12; Herodotus 1.82-3, 86-90, 130. Note that in this last example, the name of the author was not given before ‘*Odyssey*’, because it had already been provided in the previous reference, before ‘*Iliad*’; similarly, ‘1.’ (in the Herodotus reference) was not given before ‘86-90’ or ‘130’ because it had already been provided before ‘82-3’.

2.4.5 If the essay is about a particular text, it is acceptable to make your reference more abbreviated, as long as you use the correct abbreviations and there is no danger of ambiguity: e.g. ‘Hdt. 1.82-3’; ‘Virg. *Aen.* 3.476-81’ (or simply ‘*Aen.* 3.476-81’, if the author has already been stated). The correct abbreviations for ancient authors and works can be found in Liddell and Scott’s *Greek-English Lexicon*, the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* and the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*. Do not invent your own abbreviations, or use different abbreviations for the same author or work.

2.4.6 If you are quoting from an ancient author in translation, it is not necessary to give a reference in the course of the essay to the translation from which you are quoting. The translation should appear in the bibliography (in the form given at 2.3.2 above), and it will be assumed that that is the one from which your quotations have been taken. If you quote from more than one translation of the same text, however, a reference to the relevant translation should be given with each quotation.

2.4.7 Never cite ancient works by page number of a translation. Every ancient author has their own standard system of reference (line number, section number, or whatever): you must use this system and no other. Do not forget to state which work of the author it is that you are referring to, even if you think it is obvious (a reference such as ‘Plutarch 17.2’ is meaningless).

2.4.8 Never cite primary sources via a secondary work. If the text of your essay refers to Plutarch, the footnote should give the complete Plutarch reference, rather than saying (for example) ‘Scullard (1982) ...’. You do not need to acknowledge the fact that you came across the reference by reading Scullard rather than by reading through the works of Plutarch independently.

2.4.9 When referencing secondary works (whether books or articles), do so in the following form:

In your text: (Syme 1939: 78)

For example: ‘Caesar’s adherents were ‘a ghastly and disgusting rabble’ (Syme 1939: 78) but the most repellent of them all was surely Mark Antony...’

In a footnote: Syme (1939), 78

For example: ⁴ Syme (1939), 78.’

or: ⁴ The view of Syme (1939), 78 and of most historians since.’

2.4.10 When referencing a note in a commentary, do so in the following form:

In your text: (Nisbet 1970 on Horace, *Odes* 1.7.1)

In a footnote: Nisbet (1970) on Horace, *Odes* 1.7.1

If you have been discussing Horace’s *Odes* and it is obvious that that is what the reference relates to, you could write just ‘(Nisbet 1970 on 1.7.1)’ in your text or ‘Nisbet (1970) on 1.7.1’ in a footnote. The commentary itself should be listed in the bibliography.

2.4.11 The author’s initials should not be given in references and footnotes unless you need to distinguish between authors with the same surname: e.g. (S.West 1995: 101-2); M.L.West (1997), 23-4.

2.4.12 You must not cite the full bibliographical details in footnotes: they should appear in the bibliography only.

2.4.13 Footnotes must end with a full stop.

2.4.14 You only ever need to use the abbreviation ‘p.’ or ‘pp.’ if it is not obvious that the number which follows is a page number. Note that the abbreviation is ‘p.’, not ‘pg.’ (similarly, the abbreviation for ‘fragment’ is ‘fr.’, not ‘frg.’). Never use *id.* and *ibid.* (which are unnecessary when using the Harvard system) or ‘f.’/‘ff.’ (give the closing reference). The abbreviation ‘ed.’ (‘editor’, ‘edited by’) is followed by a full stop, but ‘eds’ (‘editors’) has no full stop.

2.5 Use of italics

2.5.1 Ancient words and phrases (*logos, polis, equites, princeps, lex Iulia*), foreign words and phrases (*raison d’être*) and titles of ancient works (whether abbreviated or not: *Works and Days, Antigone, Aen., Ann.*) and modern books (*The Roman Revolution*) should be put in italics. Latin quotations should be put either in italics or in quotation marks consistently throughout the essay (unless set out as a separate block of text, in which case neither italics nor quotation marks should be used).

2.5.2 Titles of articles should not be put in italics, but in quotation marks.

2.5.3 When text is written by hand (for example, when a lecturer writes something up on a whiteboard), words which should be in italics are instead underlined, because italic script is difficult to write by hand. But when text is written on a computer, italics are used, not underlining. So in your essays, ancient words and book titles should always be in italics, not underlined. Some students appear to have been told at school that certain titles should be put in italics whereas other ones should be underlined. This is incorrect.

2.6 Quotations

2.6.1 Quotations should be put in quotation marks, except Greek quotations (Greek is never put in quotation marks); with Latin quotations you have the choice of quotation marks or italics, so long as you are consistent. Quotations that are several lines long should be set out as a separate block of text and indented (not centred); neither quotation marks nor italics should be used. Material in quotation marks should not also be italicised.

2.6.2 If passages of Greek or Latin are quoted, there is usually no need to give a translation. You should only give a translation (or translations) if the passage is obscure, corrupt or difficult, and its meaning needs to be established or explained (this may more often be the case when discussing philosophy). Never quote only in translation texts which you are supposed to have read in Greek or Latin.

2.6.3 Quotations of Greek must show the correct breathings and accents; these may be added in by hand if your computer font is unable to produce them. (There are several Greek fonts that can be downloaded from the internet.)

2.7 Style

2.7.1 Try to write in a way that is scholarly and professional. Always write in full sentences, not in note form. Your writing style should not be colloquial (but it should not be pretentious either). Contracted forms in '-n't' are colloquial: so write 'did not' not 'didn't', 'cannot' not 'can't', 'would not' not 'wouldn't', and so on. The expression 'a lot of' is also colloquial: in essays, write 'a large number of' or 'many'. Some writers of English object to 'quote' (as a noun, for 'quotation'), 'due to' (for 'owing to'), 'whilst' (if over-used: 'while' is the normal form), 'firstly' (for 'first': 'first... secondly... thirdly' is preferred) and split infinitives ('to effectively answer', 'to after reviewing all the arguments conclude'); but these are ultimately matters of personal taste. R.W.Burchfield, *Fowler's Modern English Usage*, ed. 3 revised (Oxford, 2004) is the standard reference work on English usage, and provides practical help with grammar, syntax and style.

2.7.2 Consistency is of paramount importance. Do not refer to 'Heracles' and 'Hercules' or 'Virgil' and 'Vergil' within the same essay.

2.7.3 'B.C.' comes after the year ('431-404 B.C. '), 'A.D.' before the year ('A.D. 14', not '14 A.D.'). It is acceptable to write 'BC' and 'AD' (without the full stops)—provided, of course, that your practice is consistent within the essay.

2.8 Spelling and punctuation

2.8.1 Mis-spelling, particularly of ancient names, gives an extremely bad impression. Note these correct spellings: 'Euripides' (not 'Euripedes'), 'Catiline' or 'Catilina' (not 'Cataline')

or ‘Catalina’), ‘Pompey’ or ‘Pompeius’ (the person), ‘Pompeii’ (the place), ‘Caesar’ (not ‘Caeser’, ‘Ceasar’ or ‘Ceaser’), ‘Mark Antony’ or ‘Marcus Antonius’ (not Marc Anthony), ‘Suetonius’ (not ‘Suetonious’), ‘Sulpicius’ (not ‘Sulpicious’), ‘Tiberius’ (not ‘Tiberious’). Note also ‘emperor’ (not ‘emporor’ or ‘emporer’). Historians who show bias are ‘biased’ (they are not ‘bias’).

2.8.2 The most common error of punctuation is known as the ‘comma splice’. This involves using the comma as a ‘splice’, to join grammatically separate sentences. Consider the following examples: ‘The Roman constitution encouraged violence, there was no means of stopping it’; ‘Naturally the aristocracy opposed it, it would have meant the loss of their only source of wealth’. In each case, two sentences have been joined (‘spliced’) with a comma. This is something you cannot do in English: instead, you have to use a full stop or a semicolon (or insert a co-ordinating conjunction such as ‘and’ or ‘but’). So: ‘The Roman constitution encouraged violence. There was no means of stopping it’ or ‘The Roman constitution encouraged violence; there was no means of stopping it’; ‘Naturally the aristocracy opposed it. It would have meant the loss of their only source of wealth’ or ‘Naturally the aristocracy opposed it; it would have meant the loss of their only source of wealth’. This error is particularly common before the word ‘however’. For example: ‘Virgil left instructions for the *Aeneid* to be burned, however Augustus countermanded them’. This is impossible in English. You have to write: ‘...to be burned. However, Augustus...’ or ‘...to be burned; however, Augustus...’. When you are checking your essay, it is worth doing a search for the word ‘however’ and checking in each case that you have not used the comma splice.

2.8.3 Another common error is confusion between the semicolon (;) and the colon (:). These marks of punctuation look similar, but have completely different functions. The semicolon is a weaker form of full stop. The colon, on the other hand, is shorthand for ‘namely’ or ‘that is to say’: it introduces material which follows on logically from what precedes. You also need a colon, not a semicolon, to introduce a quotation; hence ‘Virgil writes: *Arma virumque cano*’ not ‘Virgil writes; *Arma virumque cano*’. In the second instance, you would not know that *Arma virumque cano* is by Virgil: all you would know is that Virgil is busy writing (because the semicolon is a weaker form of full stop).

2.8.4 Do not confuse ‘it’s’ (= ‘it is’) and ‘its’ (= ‘belonging to it’).

2.8.5 If you have difficulty with punctuation, L.Truss, *Eats, Shoots & Leaves: the Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation* (London, 2003) is recommended.