

Commentary Style Exercises – Some Guidelines

How to prepare:

The best way of preparing for this assignments is to look at as many scholarly commentaries on ancient texts as you can. Be sure to make full use of the links and handouts provided of current commentaries. These commentaries will also be helpful in that they provide you with references to further secondary literature. It is also recommended that you look at other commentaries on Classical texts in order to get a wider idea of what they might include.

What to include:

As you get more familiar with scholarly commentaries, you will find that they differ according to the tastes and interests of the commentator. Some commentaries will have a linguistic or philological emphasis, some will focus rather on historical or literary features. In this exercise, you have the same freedom of choice. You will be expected to comment on extremely striking elements in the text even if they are outside of your field of interest, but it is perfectly acceptable to do so in passing, and use the greater part of your word count to discuss issues that are central to your own interests. To give you some examples, consider the following: where are there grammatical difficulties? What does the reader need to bear in mind? What stylistic features does the text contain (e.g. repetition, alliteration, chiasms, etc)? If you are interested, what is the historical background? What words or phrases are used in a specific sense in this text but mean something else normally? (This might be, later on, specific military use of common vocabulary).

What materials to use:

In addition to the commentaries mentioned above and the material they indirectly lead you to, you should use the standard tools as starting points: a scholarly dictionary (preferably *the Oxford Latin Dictionary*, but also the Lewis and Short, which is available through Perseus) for lexical matters, Hornblower's *Oxford Classical Dictionary* for general matters, as well as your *Reading Latin* for grammatical elements. If you are interested in a particular issue (a historical matter, for instance), you may naturally also make use of scholarly literature published in hard copy or online (the advanced search tool of JSTOR should come in handy here), but at this level, extensive engagement with secondary literature is not a requirement.

When you use secondary literature, you should always take care not only to use them as confirmation for your statements, but also to engage critically with them. Ask yourself if you really agree with their statements? Have they argued for them in the best way possible? Are they clear and relevant? Could you perhaps find alternative interpretations?

There is no need to include within your paper the text of (e.g) Catullus or Ovid, unless you propose changes to the text given. Otherwise, the paper should be formatted in the same way you would format an essay (see the relevant student handbook). You must include a bibliography. Excerpts from commentaries provided in handouts should be cited according to the bibliographical information provided through the title pages included in the handout.