

From Village to Empire: an Introduction to the History of Rome

Workshop 3: Essay Writing

ESSAY QUESTIONS

You should choose ONE of the following essay titles and write an essay of 1,500 words (worth 50% of your final mark).

EITHER

1] What were the main stages of the conflict of the orders? How was the *plebs* able to gain concessions from the patricians?

OR

2] What were the main stages of Hannibal's campaign in Italy? Why did he lose the war with Rome?

OR

3] What do you make of the Romans' diplomatic dealings with the Greeks of mainland Greece and Asia Minor in the period from the wars with Philip V to the destruction of Corinth in 146 BC?

OR

4] What issues did Tiberius Gracchus seek to address during his tribunate of 133?

What makes a good essay good?

Exceptional (90-100%) EXCEPTIONAL FIRST CLASS. An answer that fulfils all of the criteria for Outstanding and in addition shows a good degree of insight and some independent thought, together with some flair in tackling issues. Work displaying the highest level of scholarship and originality attainable at level 4.

Outstanding (80-89%) HIGH FIRST CLASS. A solid answer that provides an effective response to the question. It should show some command of the literature and an ability to integrate that literature. The analysis should achieve a sustained level of quality. Sources should be used accurately and concisely to inform the answer but not dominate it. There should be some attempt at critical and committed argument, which is mindful of other interpretations but not afraid to question them. Presentation and the use of English should be commensurate with the quality of the content.

Excellent (70-79%) FIRST CLASS. A focused answer of intellectual quality, which adopts a comprehensive approach to the question and maintains a sophisticated level of understanding throughout. It should show a willingness to engage critically with the literature, using sources effectively to arrive at its conclusions.

Very Good (60-69%) Structured work displaying an ability to deal with the sources and/or arguments relevant to the topic under discussion and judgement in evaluating and organising material. In the 64-60 range the work will display some of the qualities outlined above, although some aspects will be less fully realised. The 69-65 range represents a degree of achievement in some respects.

Good (50-59%) Competent work which covers the basic subject matter and is appropriately organised and presented. May tend to narrative and description but does attempt to answer the question. Work in the 54-50 band is likely to be factually sound for the most part but shows only a general grasp of the question, and to be weak in argument. There may be some evidence of the inclusion of irrelevant material, a certain lack of focus in the discussion or deficiencies in the evidence used to support the argument.

The other end of the spectrum

Pass (40-49%) Work which is adequate but limited. It may include irrelevant material and be too descriptive and/or narrative. Some aspects of the question may be answered, but others will be ignored because of omissions in the reading, factual inaccuracy, difficulty in identifying the relevant themes, or poor style, structure and presentation.

Fail (30-39%) Work which is poorly structured and of very limited relevance to the question. It may be distinguished by a lack of supporting evidence, misunderstandings, a failure to address the question asked, substantial generalisation and the lack of any real comprehension.

Clear Fail (20-29%) Work which shows little or no real understanding of the question and which displays little or no evidence of learning.

Bad Fail (10-19%) Work which fails on all criteria. It could also be the mark for a very short answer with little relevant material.

Outright Fail (1-9%) Incomplete work, or work with absolutely no relevance to the question. A mark of 0 will be awarded for plagiarism or failure to submit.

Argument and analysis

Argument and analysis are absolutely necessary for answering an essay question well. Any good essay question should require a firm conclusion, and in any good essay, this conclusion should follow logically from the preceding argument. You need to analyse the evidence, assess the arguments of modern scholars, and argue your own case (which may require you to engage, and even disagree, with modern scholarship).

Narrative and description

Narrative and description are sometimes a necessary part of an argument. Anyone should be able to follow an argument, even if they are unfamiliar with the topic. However, narrative and description *on their own* do not constitute an argument (although they may help to advance one), and so almost never provide any sort of answer to an essay question, unless the question asks (e.g.) for an overview of events. Keep any narrative or description brief (you only have 1,500 words).

On the one hand, always ask yourself if the reader will be able to follow what you are saying, but on the other, always ask yourself if what you're writing is actually helping to answer the question.

Constructing an argument: evidence and opinion

- Primary sources
 - Secondary sources
-
- Ancient evidence
 - Modern scholarship

Types of ancient evidence

1. Literary
2. Epigraphic (inscriptions)
3. Numismatic (coins)
4. Archaeological
5. Iconographic

What is modern scholarship?

Textbooks / general books

A general book may offer a broad, sometimes narrative, introduction to a particular subject (e.g. Republican Rome), or an overview of it. While it *may* contain numerous arguments throughout, it may not necessarily offer a single, overarching conclusion to the entire subject (the focus may be on narrative and description). In terms of academic standards, it may vary from something aimed at a very general readership to something aimed at a more academic audience.

While such a work may provide a useful introduction to a topic, the value of this type of work can vary considerably. A general survey of the Roman republic may actually be of no help whatsoever for writing an essay on a specific aspect of Roman republican history. This is usually because general works do not provide enough detail and detailed argumentation. If there is no argument, then there's no argument to engage with either.

The same applies to encyclopaedias and dictionaries: these works rarely contain enough detail. They're useful for filling gaps in knowledge, but often aren't useful when it comes to arguing a case.

What is modern scholarship?

Monographs

A monograph is a book written on one central topic or theme. Unlike a textbook/general book it is essentially an original critical exploration of a problem or question, like a longer form of an article, or sometimes like several articles on a related theme. Monographs are the closest form of book to a dissertation – indeed many monographs originated from dissertations.

What is modern scholarship?

Articles

An article is usually an essay which focuses on a particular problem. Even if its title does not always ask a question, it usually has a central question. It does not usually aim to provide a basic narrative introduction to a period or to an area of study. It is intended to be read as an example of an approach to a particular question and should be rigorous in terms of scholarship (i.e. demonstrates awareness of other scholarship and careful referencing). There are exceptions: some articles in journals may take the form of an edition of a primary source or a review of recent critical approaches to a certain subject. Chapters in edited collections are often similar in scope and scale to a journal article, and usually undergo a similar process of peer-review to journal articles, although they are not always as thoroughly rigorous.

Differences between ancient evidence and modern scholarship

- Ancient evidence is evidence, it's how we know about the ancient world
- Modern scholarship is opinion formed by an analysis of the ancient evidence and consideration of other people's arguments
- Modern scholars base their arguments on the ancient evidence, and hence quote it more frequently
- Modern scholars only rarely quote the work of other scholars, as modern scholarship consists of opinion and argument
- Modern scholars use ancient evidence to support their argument
- Modern scholars often disagree with one another about what the ancient evidence means and how it should be interpreted
- If you get an idea from studying ancient evidence, then you should use that evidence to show how it supports your idea
- If you get an idea from reading a piece of modern scholarship, then you need to include a reference to the modern scholarship from which the idea comes

If modern scholarship is opinion,
how do we engage with it?

How to engage with modern scholarship

1. Read it carefully and fairly
2. Treat it as opinion, as an argument, but also with respect
3. Ask ourselves: what is the modern scholar saying? What is (are) her/his argument(s)?
4. Is the argument plausible? Is it logical?
5. What is the ancient evidence for the argument?
6. Do we agree with the interpretation of the *specific* evidence?

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7. Does the argument fit with the wider context (e.g. with what we know of Roman behaviour elsewhere)?
 8. Do we agree with the way in which the evidence has been handled in general (e.g. are our sources for early Roman history reliable enough to support the argument, *or* has the scholar been unduly sceptical about the value of the sources, perhaps in order to make room for her/his own thesis)?
 9. What alternative reconstructions are there? How does wider reading of the views of other scholars affect our assessment of the argument?

Researching the topic

While of **limited** use when it comes actually to writing your essay, encyclopaedias and dictionaries often provide a few bibliographical details with each entry.

For example: http://brillonline.nl/subscriber/uid=3228/entry?entry=bnp_e308460

All serious academic books will contain a bibliography, and you should be able to track relevant work through the notes.

L'Année philologique: <http://www.annee-philologique.com/aph/index.php>

Gnomon Bibliographische Datenbank: <http://www.gnomon-online.de/>

JSTOR: <http://www.jstor.org/>

Things to note:

- 1] date
- 2] relevance
- 3] diminishing returns
- 4] cosmetic bibliographies

Researching the topic

Ancient evidence: in order to engage with modern scholarship, it's vital that you consult the ancient evidence on which that scholarship is based. Similarly, when writing your essay, you need to cite the ancient evidence for the tradition of events, **not** modern scholarship.

Wrong:

In 295 BC, the Romans fought a great battle against a coalition of Samnites and Gauls, during the course of which the consul P. Decius Mus was killed.¹

¹ T. J. Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome*, p. 000.

Correct:

In 295 BC, the Romans fought a great battle against a coalition of Samnites and Gauls, during the course of which the consul P. Decius Mus was killed.¹

¹ Livy 10.28.

Researching the topic

Again, the footnotes will direct you to those sources which are immediately relevant to any given argument. Some encyclopaedias and dictionaries will also include information about the ancient evidence. For the events of any given year, T. R. S. Broughton's *Magistrates of the Roman Republic* is extremely useful.

<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=acls;idno=heb01426>

343 B.C. ¹A.U.C. 411

Consuls

M. VALERIUS M. ²f. M. n. CORVUS ³Pat. ⁴(137) Cos. 348, 346, 335,
300, 299

A. CORNELIUS P. f. A. n. COSSUS ARVINA Pat. (122) Cos. 332

1. A.U.C. = *ab urbe condita*, from the founding of the city.
2. M. f. M. n. = the son of Marcus, the grandson of Marcus [f. = *filius* = son; n. = *nepos* = grandson.
3. Pat. = Patrician
4. (137) etc = entry number in the German encyclopaedia, *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*.

Cic. *Div.* 1.51; Liv. 7.28.10; 10.31.10; Diod. 16.77.1; *Act. Tr.*; Plin. *NH* 16.11; App. *Samn.* 1; Auct. *Vir. Ill.* 26; Chr. 354 (Corvo III et Cosso III); *Fast. Hyd.* (Corvino III et Cosco), so also *Chr. Pasc.*; Cassiod.; Degrassi 106, 408f. At Saticula in the First Samnite War Cornelius was saved from a dangerous position by Decius Mus (see Tribunes of the Soldiers), and thereafter won a victory and celebrated a triumph (Liv. 7.32.2, 34—37.3, and 38.3; Cic. *Div.* 1.51; *Act. Tr.*, Degrassi 68f., 541; Frontin. *Str.* 1.5.14; 4.5.9; Auct. *Vir. Ill.* 26). Valerius was victorious at Mt. Gaurus and Suessula, celebrated a triumph, and returned to protect Campania during the winter (Liv. 7.32—33, and 37.4—38; Dion. Hal. 15.3; *Act. Tr.*, Degrassi 68f., 541; App. *Samn.* 1; Auct. *Vir. Ill.* 26). On Valerius, see Münzer, *Gent. Val.* 49, no. 49.

Tribunes of the Soldiers

P. DECIUS MUS (15) Cos. 340

Saved the Consul Cornelius and his army from a trap and received the civic crown (Liv. 7.34—37.3, and 38.3; 22.60.10; Cic. *Div.* 1.51; Plin. *NH* 16.11; 22.9; Frontin. *Str.* 1.5.14; 4.5.9; App. *Samn.* 1; Auct. *Vir. Ill.* 26; Fest. 208 L).

342 B.C. A.U.C. 412

Consuls¹

Q. SERVILIUS Q. f. Q. n. AHALA Pat. (35) Cos. 365, 362

C. MARCIUS L. f. C. n. RUTILUS (97) Cos. 357, 352, 344

Liv. 7.38.8; Diod. 16.82.1; Dion. Hal. 15.3.1; Chr. 354 (Hala III et Rutillio IIII); *Fast. Hyd.* (Achala et Rutilio II); *Chr. Pasc.* ("Ἀλλοῦ καὶ 'Ρουτηλίου τὸ β'); Cassiod.; Degrassi 106, 408f. While Servilius remained in Rome (Liv. 7.38.8), Marcius in Campania broke up a Roman conspiracy to seize Campanian territory (Liv. 7.38.8—39; Dion. Hal. 15.3; Frontin. *Str.* 1.9.1, A. Manlius; App. *Samn.* 1, Μάμερκος). On the resulting mutiny, see Dictator and Tribunes of the Plebs.

Dictator

M. VALERIUS M. f. M. n. CORVUS Pat. (137) Cos. 348, 346, 343, 335, 300, 299

Appointed to face the mutineers who were advancing on Rome (Liv. 7.39—41), he carried through the reforms requested: 1. immunity for

Summary of the year's events along with a list of the ancient evidence for them.

Other known magistrates appointed in the 343 BC.

Start of the next year.

Structuring your essay

The structure of an essay is something that does repay careful thought. While the basic structure of introduction, body, and conclusion should be familiar, the way in which you organise your argument in the body is often crucial, and it will vary from topic to topic (and question to question).

Things to note:

1. A clear, concise introduction always makes a good impression. Rambling and over long introductions should be avoided, while the absence of an introduction can leave the reader uncertain of your argument and/or approach.
2. Repetition must be avoided, not least because you're not adding anything new if you're repeating yourself.
3. If your essay naturally falls into sections, then a subheading to introduce each section can be helpful for the reader. Excessive and/or unnecessary use of subsections and subheadings should be avoided however (not least because they're a waste of words).
4. Once you reach your conclusion, you should have finished arguing your case (i.e. answering the question) and so therefore should not need to add anything new. You may wish to use your conclusion to pull your argument together, or simply to state what your final position is (and this should follow logically from the preceding discussion).

Finally:

1. Have you answered the question?
2. Is there any material in your essay which doesn't help to answer the question? If so, do you need it? Or should you replace it with material which *does* answer the question, or can you re-write it so that it does answer the question?
3. Is there any irrelevant material in your essay? If so, remove it.
4. Is your essay about 1,500 words long? Is it significantly over or under?
5. Have you assumed any knowledge on the part of your reader? If so, how much? Is this acceptable, or do you need to elaborate?
6. Have you proofread your essay? 1] if the reader can't understand what you've written, then however good your argument may be, you're unlikely to get a good mark; 2] a polished essay will inevitably be received better than one which is filled with errors in spelling and grammar.