

The Complete Guide to Writing Essays in Ancient Greek Studies

Ancient History, Classical Archaeology, and Ancient Art History
From the Mycenaean to the Hellenistic Period (c. 1600–31 BCE)

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This guide provides a practical, end-to-end framework for writing essays in ancient history, classical archaeology, and ancient art history, covering Greece from the Mycenaean through Hellenistic periods, though the general principles will be more widely applicable to ancient history and history outside this period. It establishes a methodology that prioritises ancient evidence over modern scholarship, explains how to find and evaluate every major type of source, and sets out the Oxford Author-Date citation conventions alongside standard abbreviations from the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (OCD). Whether you are writing your first undergraduate essay on Athenian democracy or a dissertation on Hellenistic sculpture, the principles here apply – what changes is the depth, range, and originality expected at each level.

Part 1: Start with the Sources, Not the Scholarship

The single most important habit in classical studies is this: **read the ancient evidence before you read what modern scholars say about it.** Too many student essays are simply summaries of secondary literature. The best essays are built from the ground up, with the student's own analysis of ancient material as the foundation. Modern scholarship refines your thinking – it should never replace it.

The recommended 'order of operations' is:

- 1. Find and read the ancient sources first.** Identify every relevant literary text, inscription, archaeological report, or artistic object that bears on your question. Read them carefully (in the original language or translation) and take notes on what you observe.
- 2. Form your own impressions.** Before consulting any modern book or article, write down what strikes you as significant, puzzling, contradictory, or revealing. Develop a preliminary argument or hypothesis.
- 3. Test your hypothesis against more ancient evidence.** Look for patterns, parallels, and counter-examples across different source types. If Thucydides says one thing and an inscription says another, that tension is where the interesting analysis lives.
- 4. Then engage with modern scholarship.** Read with specific questions in mind. Does the scholarship confirm your reading? Challenge it? Open angles you had not considered? Read critically and with purpose.
- 5. Return to the ancient sources.** Modern scholars will have pointed you toward passages, objects, or inscriptions you missed. Re-read the primary material with fresh eyes.
- 6. Contextual reading can run in parallel:** handbooks, companions, and reference works help you understand the period. But the analytical argument in your essay must be your own, built from your own engagement with the evidence.

This iterative cycle between ancient evidence and scholarship is what produces genuinely strong classical essays. It is what markers at every level are looking for.

Part 2: Finding and Accessing Ancient Sources

Digital Libraries for Greek Literary Texts

Three platforms form the core toolkit for accessing ancient Greek texts digitally.

Perseus Digital Library (perseus.tufts.edu; scaife.perseus.org) is the essential free resource. The Scaife Viewer hosts **2,412 works in 3,192 editions and translations**, totalling 69.7 million words. Every major Greek author studied at undergraduate level is represented. Perseus also provides built-in morphological analysis tools and the Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek Lexicon: click any Greek word for an instant dictionary entry. The art and archaeology browser catalogues over 1,300 coins, 1,900 vases, and 2,000 sculptures with images. Access is **entirely open** with no login required. The main limitation is that many translations are pre-1923 public domain editions with archaic English. Always check which edition you are reading.

Loeb Classical Library Online (loebclassics.com) offers **more than 520 volumes** of Greek and Latin literature with facing-page modern English translations: the gold standard for parallel text reading. Search by author, title, keyword, or canonical citation. Access the collection using your Leeds credentials by selecting 'Log in with Shibboleth'.

Thesaurus Linguae Graecae (TLG) (stephanus.tlg.uci.edu) is the most comprehensive digital library of Greek literature in existence, containing virtually all surviving Greek texts from Homer to the fall of Constantinople: **over 10,000 works by more than 4,000 authors**. The TLG enables sophisticated lemmatised searching across the entire corpus. The full corpus requires institutional subscription, but the **Abridged TLG is free** and contains works commonly used in undergraduate teaching. Texts are in Greek only, with no translations. You can access the **full TLG** by using your Leeds credentials through the Library website (you will need to create an account and link it to your university account)

For quick dictionary lookups, **Logeion** (logeion.uchicago.edu) provides free, fast access to multiple Greek and Latin dictionaries including LSJ and the Middle Liddell. There is also a Logeion app.

Databases for Archaeological and Artistic Evidence

The Beazley Archive Pottery Database (BAPD) at Oxford's Classical Art Research Centre (carc.ox.ac.uk) is the **world's largest database of ancient Greek painted pottery**, with over **130,000 records and 250,000 images**. Most entries date from the sixth to fourth centuries BCE. Search by painter, potter, shape, technique, decoration subject, provenance, or museum collection. The BAPD record number (e.g., BAPD 202142) is the internationally standard citation for specific vases in academic work. Access is **completely open**.

The Digital LIMC (weblimc.org), the *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*, catalogues approximately **50,000 ancient objects** depicting mythological subjects across all media: pottery, sculpture, gems, mosaics, and reliefs. Organised alphabetically by mythological figure, it is the most extensive resource for ancient mythological iconography. The digital archives are **open access**; the full eight-volume print edition (1981–2009) with scholarly apparatus is available in the library.

Arachne (arachne.dainst.org), the central object database of the German Archaeological Institute (DAI), contains hundreds of thousands of records on archaeological objects:

architecture, sculpture, pottery, topography. It contains **over 800,000 digitised images**, including historic glass-plate negatives from DAI branches in Athens, Cairo, Istanbul, and Rome. Free and open access.

Major **museum collection databases** provide high-resolution images and detailed catalogue information. The **British Museum** (britishmuseum.org/collection) offers searchable records of its Greek and Roman holdings including the Parthenon sculptures. The **Metropolitan Museum of Art** (metmuseum.org/art/collection) holds over **30,000 works** in its Greek and Roman department, with many images released under open-access policies. The **National Archaeological Museum, Athens** (namuseum.gr), housing the Mask of Agamemnon, the Antikythera mechanism, and the world's richest collection of Greek sculpture, is developing its digital catalogue.

Hellenic Heritage (hh.gr/en) is a new initiative from the Hellenic Ministry of Culture which allows you to explore Greek archaeological sites and museums.

Inscription Databases

PHI Greek Inscriptions (inscriptions.packhum.org), maintained by the Packard Humanities Institute, is the single most useful free tool for epigraphy, containing approximately **210,000 ancient Greek inscriptions** organised by region. It is text-searchable across the entire corpus. Access is **free** after agreeing to licence terms. The limitation is that texts are in Greek only, with no translations or commentary.

Inscriptiones Graecae (IG) has a growing **digital scholarly edition** (ig.bbaw.de) maintained by the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences, offering texts with German and English translations for eleven volumes so far. This is the oldest and most authoritative corpus of Greek inscriptions, covering the Greek mainland and Aegean islands.

Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum (SEG) (scholarlyeditions.brill.com/sego) is the annual publication collecting newly published inscriptions and re-editions of known texts. It is indispensable for keeping up with new discoveries. Access requires **institutional subscription** through Brill.

Attic Inscriptions Online (AIO) (atticinscriptions.com) provides **free English translations** of Attic inscriptions with annotations, browseable by source, date, findspot, and type—an invaluable resource for students who do not read Greek.

Papyrological Databases

Papyri.info is the central portal for digital papyrology, integrating the Duke Databank of Documentary Papyri (approximately **50,000 texts**), the Advanced Papyrological Information System (APIS), and the Heidelberger Gesamtverzeichnis (HGV). Each document page can include metadata, catalogue data, transcription, translations, and images. Entirely **open access**.

Archaeological Journals Online

The three most important journals for Greek archaeology are accessible digitally. **Hesperia** (American School of Classical Studies at Athens) is available on JSTOR (1932–recent) and Project MUSE (2002–current). **The Annual of the British School at Athens (BSA)** is on JSTOR with a moving wall. **The American Journal of Archaeology (AJA)** is available through the University of Chicago Press and JSTOR (five-year moving wall), with all pre-1928 content freely

downloadable and book reviews open access from 2004 onward. These give access to excavation reports. Other excavation reports are also a valuable source of information on archaeological sites.

Part 3: Types of Ancient Evidence and How to Use Them

Literary Sources Demand Critical Reading

Ancient literary texts are the backbone of most essays in Greek history, but every genre comes with characteristic biases that must be acknowledged and analysed, never ignored.

Historiography – Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, Polybius, Diodorus Siculus, as well as historians whose work only survives in fragments – is the most frequently cited category. Ancient historians differ from modern ones in fundamental ways: they composed speeches representing what speakers ‘would have said’ rather than verbatim records; they lacked professional standards of evidence, peer review, or footnoting; and they wrote with explicit moral, political, and literary agendas. Herodotus blends inquiry with storytelling and myth, presenting multiple oral accounts and sometimes choosing the one he finds most convincing. Thucydides, though more empirical, was an exiled Athenian aristocrat whose political sympathies colour his account. Xenophon is openly pro-Spartan. Polybius privileges eyewitness testimony and is harshly critical of predecessors but has his own Roman-centred perspective. Diodorus compiled from earlier sources and is valuable for preserving lost historians, but is often uncritical.

When working with any ancient historian, ask: Who was the author, and what were their political allegiances? When was the text written relative to the events described? What sources did the author use? What biases of class, ethnicity, or politics are likely at work? Where does the author admit uncertainty?

Epic poetry – Homer, Hesiod, and authors of other epic cycle works – requires special caution. The Homeric epics were composed c. 750–700 BCE from centuries of oral tradition stretching back to the Mycenaean period, but **the idea that they accurately describe Bronze Age Greece has long been abandoned in serious scholarship**. Moses Finley demonstrated that Homeric institutions better reflect the Dark Age, while Jan Paul Crielaard showed many material elements belong to Homer’s own time. The epics are an amalgam of features from multiple periods. They reliably reflect aristocratic values and social structures of the eighth to seventh centuries BCE, but cannot be used as straightforward evidence for specific Mycenaean events or institutions. Hesiod’s *Works and Days* provides our best window onto the life of an ordinary farmer in early Archaic Greece.

Tragedy and comedy reflect Athenian society, but through the distorting lens of genre conventions. As Edith Hall warns, the tragic universe is simultaneously idealised and dysfunctional, attempts to archaize but is often anachronistic. Aristophanic comedy directly names and satirises contemporary politicians, but exaggeration for comic effect makes literal interpretation dangerous. Paul Cartledge cautions social historians too greedy for raw facts against using comedy uncritically. Nevertheless, comedy is our best evidence for Athenian popular attitudes, social tensions, and everyday language. The shift to middle comedy, notably with Menander, demonstrates a shift away from the broad political themes of Aristophanes and other Old Comedy writers whose work exists only in fragmentary form, and towards more domestically minded storytelling.

Oratory – Demosthenes, Lysias, Isocrates, Aeschines – provides vivid evidence for Athenian law, economy, and social life. Over **100 forensic speeches** survive from the last century of Athenian democracy. However, orators were advocates, not objective historians. Edward Harris argues they could not lie outright about major recent events because jurors would remember

them, but extensive obfuscation and creative retelling was standard practice. Factual claims in speeches should always be cross-checked against other evidence where possible; argumentative and evaluative claims are less reliable.

Philosophy – particularly Plato’s dialogues – must be handled with care. Early dialogues (*Apology*, *Crito*) are generally regarded as more faithful to the historical Socrates, while later works (*Republic*, *Timaeus*) express Plato’s own thought through a fictionalised Socrates. Aristotle’s *Constitution of the Athenians*, discovered on papyrus in Egypt and published in 1891, contains information found in no other surviving text, but derives from a mixture of sources and is of uneven merit. Presocratic fragments survive only in quotations by later authors and must be treated with extreme caution, since the quoting context may distort meaning.

Later sources also matter. Pausanias (second century CE) preserves invaluable descriptions of monuments and cult practices as he saw them. Plutarch (c. 46–120 CE) is a major source for Greek history but wrote 400+ years after many events with a moralising agenda. Athenaeus preserves extensive quotations from lost Classical and Hellenistic texts.

Material and Archaeological Evidence

Archaeological evidence provides material reality unfiltered through literary bias, but it is mute: it cannot directly tell us about thoughts, motivations, or events. **Pottery** is the most abundant surviving artefact type and serves as evidence for chronology (style-based relative dating), trade networks (distribution patterns), daily life, and iconography. **Architecture** reveals urban planning, religious investment, and political ideology. **Settlement patterns** from survey archaeology illuminate population change and land use. **Burials** yield information about social hierarchy, health, diet, and ritual practice.

Always describe archaeological evidence with precise context: findspot, associated materials, stratigraphic position, and the publication where the material was first reported. Distinguish between primary (*in situ*) and secondary (redeposited) contexts. Key site publications include the *Athenian Agora* series (Princeton), *Fouilles de Delphes* (French School at Athens), and the *BSA* for Mycenae and Knossos.

The main limitations are survival bias (organic materials rarely survive; stone and pottery are over-represented), recovery bias (excavated sites may not be representative), and interpretation (objects do not speak for themselves). A common student mistake is treating artefacts in isolation without context, or assuming archaeological evidence straightforwardly ‘proves’ a particular historical narrative.

Epigraphic Evidence

Inscriptions provide **direct, unmediated, contemporary** access to the moment of their production, unlike literary texts, which have passed through centuries of copying and editing. Major types include decrees, laws, treaties, tribute lists, financial records, dedications, epitaphs, and manumission records. The **Attic Tribute Lists** record payments from Delian League allies to Athens and are essential for studying the Athenian Empire. The **Gortyn Code** (fifth century BCE, Crete) is the only complete Greek law code.

Standard collections include **Meiggs and Lewis (ML)**, *A Selection of Greek Historical Inscriptions to the End of the Fifth Century BC* – the standard undergraduate reference containing 95 texts with full commentary – and **Rhodes and Osborne**, *Greek Historical*

Inscriptions 404–323 BC, which continues ML into the fourth century with full English translations.

Limitations include fragmentarity (restored text in square brackets is conjectural), dating disputes (letter forms and historical context can yield different conclusions), and geographic bias, for instance Athens is vastly over-represented compared to other Greek states.

Visual and Artistic Evidence

Attic black-figure (c. 620–480 BCE) and red-figure (c. 530–300 BCE) pottery provides rich iconographic evidence for mythology, religion, gender roles, the symposium, athletics, and warfare. **John D. Beazley** revolutionised the field by attributing over **17,000 vases to more than 1,500 individual painters** using Morellian connoisseurship methods. His lists (*ABV*, *ARV²*) remain foundational reference works.

Key reference works for sculpture include John Boardman's handbooks: *Greek Sculpture: The Archaic Period* (1978), *Greek Sculpture: The Classical Period* (1985), and *Greek Sculpture: The Late Classical Period* (1995).

Critical caution: artistic convention does not equal reality. Images follow genre conventions: women are almost always shown with white skin on pottery; warriors appear in heroic nudity. There are virtually no images referring to contemporary historical events on pottery. The survival of enormous numbers of Attic pots in Italian (especially Etruscan) tombs, where they were deposited as grave goods, means the preserved corpus may not represent what was used in Greece itself. Always consider the function of the object, a symposium cup depicting drinking scenes had a specific social context shaping its imagery.

Numismatic Evidence

Greek coinage, adopted from Lydia in the late seventh century BCE, provides political, economic, and iconographic evidence. Civic emblems on coins reveal identity and independence. The Athenian silver tetradrachm (owl/Athena) was one of few internationally accepted currencies. Hoard evidence reveals patterns of circulation and economic disruption. However, as the American Numismatic Society notes, 'most people in the ancient world, who lived in a largely agrarian society, did not use coins on a daily basis.' Standard reference works include the *Sylloge Nummorum Graecorum (SNG)* and C.M. Kraay's *Archaic and Classical Greek Coins* (1976).

Part 4: Citation Practices

Oxford Author-Date Format for Modern Scholarship

Classical studies in UK universities typically uses a hybrid system: Oxford Author-Date (Harvard-style) for modern secondary sources, with standard classical conventions for ancient primary sources.

Note: you should always follow the referencing system specified in individual modules, or default to [Leeds Harvard](#) if unsure. I personally use Oxford Author-Date, and am happy for you to use it in my modules.

In-text citations for modern works follow the format (**Author Year: page**):

Single author: (Osborne 2004: 137)

Two authors: (Meiggs and Lewis 1988: 42)

Three or more authors: (Hunter et al. 1997: 46–51)

Multiple works: (Hornblower 1991: 78; Rhodes 2003: 22)

Same author, different years: (Cartledge 2001: 45; 2009: 112)

Same author, same year: (Hansen 1991a: 30; 1991b: 156)

Bibliography entries follow these formats:

Book: Osborne, R. (2004) *Greek History*. London.

Chapter in edited volume: Dillon, S. (2012) 'Female portraiture in the Hellenistic period', in S.L. James and S. Dillon (edd.), *A Companion to Women in the Ancient World*, 263–277. Malden, MA.

Journal article: Rhodes, P.J. (2003) 'Nothing to do with democracy: Athenian drama and the polis', *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 123, 104–119.

Edited volume: Hansen, M.H. ed. (2000) *A Comparative Study of Thirty City-State Cultures*. Copenhagen.

Use single quotation marks for article and chapter titles (British convention). Italicise book titles and journal names. Use en-dashes for page ranges and elide second numbers: 100–4, 523–29, 1396–430.

Citing Ancient Authors: OCD Abbreviations and Conventions

Ancient sources use their own internal reference systems – **book, chapter, section, and line numbers** – never modern page numbers, since these vary by edition. Citations work from large to small. Titles of ancient works are italicised. A full stop separates hierarchical levels.

The key OCD abbreviations for major Greek authors and their works are:

| Author | Abbreviation | Key Works |
|------------|--------------|--|
| Homer | Hom. | <i>Il.</i> (Iliad), <i>Od.</i> (Odyssey) |
| Hesiod | Hes. | <i>Theog.</i> (Theogony), <i>Op.</i> (Works and Days) |
| Herodotus | Hdt. | Single work (title omitted) |
| Thucydides | Thuc. | Single work (title omitted) |
| Xenophon | Xen. | <i>An.</i> (Anabasis), <i>Hell.</i> (Hellenica), <i>Mem.</i> (Memorabilia) |

| | | |
|--------------|--------|---|
| Plato | Pl. | <i>Resp.</i> (Republic), <i>Symp.</i> (Symposium), <i>Ap.</i> (Apology) |
| Aristotle | Arist. | <i>Pol.</i> (Politics), <i>Eth. Nic.</i> (Nicomachean Ethics), <i>Poet.</i> (Poetics) |
| Aristophanes | Ar. | <i>Ach.</i> (Acharnians), <i>Av.</i> (Birds), <i>Nub.</i> (Clouds), <i>Ran.</i> (Frogs) |
| Euripides | Eur. | <i>Med.</i> (Medea), <i>Hipp.</i> (Hippolytus), <i>Ba.</i> (Bacchae) |
| Sophocles | Soph. | <i>OT</i> (Oedipus Tyrannus), <i>Ant.</i> (Antigone), <i>Aj.</i> (Ajax) |
| Aeschylus | Aesch. | <i>Ag.</i> (Agamemnon), <i>Pers.</i> (Persae), <i>Eum.</i> (Eumenides) |
| Demosthenes | Dem. | Orations cited by number |
| Pausanias | Paus. | Single work—title omitted |
| Plutarch | Plut. | Lives by subject: <i>Per.</i> (Pericles), <i>Alex.</i> (Alexander); <i>Mor.</i> (Moralia) |

The full OCD abbreviations list is available at oxfordre.com/classics/page/ocdabbreviations.

How numbering works by genre:

Epic poetry: Book.Line – Hom. *Il.* 1.1 means Book 1, Line 1

Historiography: Book.Chapter.Section – Thuc. 2.65.5 means Book 2, Chapter 65, Section 5

Plato: Stephanus pages – Pl. *Resp.* 514a (page 514, column a of the 1578 Stephanus edition)

Aristotle: Bekker numbers – Arist. *Pol.* 1253a15 (page 1253, column a, line 15 of the 1831 Bekker edition)

Drama: Line numbers – Soph. *OT* 1–20 means lines 1–20

Speeches: Oration number.Section – Dem. 18.1 means Oration 18, Section 1

Plutarch's Lives: Subject.Chapter.Section – Plut. *Per.* 32.2

Fragments: Fragment number + editor – Hes. fr. 23 MW (Merkelbach-West edition)

When an author wrote only one major surviving work (Herodotus, Thucydides, Pausanias, Polybius), the work title is conventionally omitted. For authors with multiple works (Xenophon, Plato, Aristotle, Plutarch), the work title must be included.

Citing Inscriptions

Inscriptions are cited by their standard corpus abbreviation and number. Major corpora are listed once in the bibliography; individual inscriptions do not need separate bibliography entries.

IG (Inscriptiones Graecae): *IG* Volume[^]edition Number — e.g., *IG* I³ 40 (Volume I, 3rd edition, inscription 40); *IG* II² 1 (Volume II, 2nd edition, inscription 1). Line numbers: *IG* I³ 40, ll. 16–17.

SEG (Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum): *SEG* Volume.Number — e.g., *SEG* 22.410.

ML (Meiggs and Lewis): ML Number — e.g., ML 31.

Example in running text: 'An inscription from Athens (*IG* I³ 40) records the decree concerning Chalcis, while the tribute quota list (*IG* I³ 259) provides revenue figures for the same year.'

Bibliography entry for a corpus: Meiggs, R. and Lewis, D. (1988) *A Selection of Greek Historical Inscriptions to the End of the Fifth Century BC*. Rev. ed. Oxford.

Citing Archaeological Objects and Museum Holdings

Objects are cited by city, museum name, and inventory number:

Athens, National Archaeological Museum 3851

London, British Museum 1836,0224.127

Paris, Musée du Louvre G 197

Athens, Agora P 24113

For vases attributed by Beazley, cite the standard reference works:

ABV (Attic Black-Figure Vase-Painters): *ABV* 255, no. 4

ARV² (Attic Red-Figure Vase-Painters, 2nd ed.): *ARV²* 213.242

BAPD record number: BAPD 202142

A full scholarly citation combining these elements: 'Athens, Agora P 24113: *ARV²* 213.242; BAPD 202142; Moore 1997, 317–18, no. 1407.'

For sculpture, cite the relevant catalogue: Kaltsas 2002, cat. no. 48 (referring to Kaltsas, N. (2002) *Sculpture in the National Archaeological Museum, Athens*. Los Angeles.).

For coins, cite by city/authority, denomination, approximate date, metal, and type description, with standard catalogue references: 'Athens, silver tetradrachm, c. 449–404 BCE, obv. head of Athena, rev. owl with olive branch (SNG Copenhagen 31).'

Formatting Conventions

Italicise: titles of ancient works (*Iliad*, *Republic*), modern book titles, journal names, corpus abbreviations (*IG*, *SEG*, *ABV*, *ARV²*), and unfamiliar foreign terms.

Do not italicise: familiar Latin abbreviations that have entered English (e.g., i.e., cf., s.v., et al.).

Key scholarly abbreviations and their correct use:

cf. (*confer*) means 'compare'—use when the comparison is implicit, not for direct references. It is not a synonym for 'see.'

s.v. (*sub verbo*) means 'under the word'—use when citing encyclopedia entries: *OCD⁴* s.v. 'Athens'.

c. or **ca.** (*circa*) for approximate dates: c. 450 BCE.

fl. (*floruit*) for approximate active dates of a person.

Avoid **f./ff.**—give exact inclusive page ranges instead (86–89, not 86ff.).

Avoid **ibid.**, **op. cit.**, and **loc. cit.**—now discouraged in most classical publications.

Use **BCE/CE** or **BC/AD** consistently throughout.

For translated quotations: cite the ancient source in standard format and note the translator—e.g., Hdt. 8.62 (trans. de Séincourt). Present brief quotations in English in quotation marks; block-indent quotations longer than three lines. Use direct quotation sparingly—an English paraphrase or summary often suffices.

Part 5: Finding and Evaluating Modern Scholarship

The Essential Databases

L'Année philologique (APh) is the authoritative bibliographic database for the entire field of classical studies, containing over **1,480,000 records** indexing journals, edited volumes, festschriften, and dissertations, with over **14,000 new records added annually**. It covers all aspects of Graeco-Roman civilisation. APh is a bibliographic index, not a full-text collection – it provides citation information and abstracts, and you must follow links to JSTOR, publisher websites. It is available through Brepols (using your Leeds credentials, it is easiest to enter through the library webpage). No other database provides comparably comprehensive and systematic coverage of classical scholarship.

JSTOR (jstor.org) provides full-text archival access to back issues of major journals with a moving wall of three to five years. For classical studies, it carries the full archives of *Classical Quarterly*, *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, *Hesperia*, *American Journal of Archaeology*, *American Journal of Philology*, *Classical Philology*, *Phoenix*, *Historia*, and many more. Its strength is deep historical coverage. Its limitation is that it does not include the very latest issues. JSTOR's Register & Read programme allows limited free access even without institutional subscription.

Project MUSE (muse.jhu.edu) complements JSTOR by providing full-text access to **current issues** of scholarly journals and university press books. Classical studies content includes *Classical World*, *Helios*, *Mouseion*, and material from major university presses. Institutional access required.

Oxford Bibliographies Online offers peer-reviewed, annotated bibliographies with over **270 bibliographic essays** in its Classics module. Each essay identifies the most important works on a topic with evaluative annotations, exceptionally useful for building reading lists and identifying key scholars.

Google Scholar (scholar.google.com) is useful for quick discovery and citation tracking (the 'Cited by' feature traces how scholarship has developed). Link your university library in Settings for direct access to subscribed content. But for systematic bibliographic searching, Google Scholar is far inferior to L'Année philologique: it does not comprehensively cover non-English publications and lacks subject-specific indexing. **Note:** recent algorithm changes mean there are now large numbers of undergraduate dissertations indexed on Google Scholar – these are not appropriate scholarship and should not be cited. However, they can be a valuable source of up-to-date bibliography on a given topic.

Evaluating Scholarship

Not all scholarship is equal. **Peer-reviewed journal articles and university press or commercial academic press monographs** are the standard of quality. Use these as your primary secondary sources. Cambridge Companions, Oxford Handbooks, and Blackwell Companions are excellent starting points that survey the state of scholarship with extensive bibliographies, but they should be springboards to further reading, not endpoints.

To identify key scholars in a subfield, check who is frequently cited in recent articles, consult Oxford Bibliographies Online, and read the literature reviews in companion volumes. **Bryn Mawr Classical Review (BMCR)** (free online) publishes timely reviews of new books that help you assess works before investing time in reading them.

Older scholarship remains valuable when it provides foundational theoretical frameworks, preserves observations about evidence since destroyed, or represents positions still debated. It is likely outdated when significant new archaeological discoveries, re-read inscriptions, or methodological advances (scientific dating, DNA analysis) have revised its conclusions. As a general rule, do not rely heavily on sources published before 1970 without checking whether their conclusions still stand, and aim for bibliographic diversity.

Key Reference Works

The **Oxford Classical Dictionary (OCD)**, now in its fourth edition, is the unrivalled one-volume reference for all aspects of the Graeco-Roman world, with over **6,200 entries** including selective bibliographies. The **Cambridge Ancient History (CAH)**, second edition in 14 volumes, provides authoritative narrative and analytical essays. **Brill's New Pauly** is more detailed and comprehensive than the OCD, with over **27,000 entries**. All three are available online through institutional subscriptions.

Part 6: Essay Structure and Writing

Building from Evidence to Argument

The fundamental structure of a classical essay is **thesis + evidence + analysis**, organised into introduction, systematic argument, and conclusion. A thesis is your interpretation, not a restatement of the question. Remember, your essay is not a murder mystery novel, you do not need to 'hide' your conclusions until the end.

Introduction: State your thesis clearly and directly. Define key terms and scope. Anticipate the steps of your argument. Many experienced writers draft the introduction last, after the argument is fully developed.

Body paragraphs: Each paragraph should make one clear claim, supported by evidence and followed by analysis explaining how the evidence supports the argument. Avoid purely narrative essays. At university level, you must analyse causes, motivations, and significance. Always ask 'Why?' and 'So what?' Remember the key difference between using ancient sources and scholarship: ancient sources are your **evidence**, scholarship is meant to **support your claims**.

Integrating multiple evidence types: The strongest essays combine literary, epigraphic, archaeological, and artistic evidence. Show awareness of the strengths and limitations of each type. When sources conflict, explain the discrepancy and assess which is more reliable for the specific question. Avoid the 'Athenocentric trap' – the overwhelming majority of surviving evidence is from Athens, and you must acknowledge this geographic bias rather than generalising from Athens to 'the Greeks.'

Conclusion: Synthesise rather than merely repeat. Draw out broader implications. Indicate further lines of inquiry. Restate the thesis in light of the evidence presented.

How Commentary Writing Works

Commentary or 'gobbet' exercises – short analyses of specific passages, objects, or images – are a core assessment form in classical studies. The structure is **context** → **content** → **significance**.

For text passages: Identify the context precisely (what precedes and follows; if direct speech, identify the speaker; locate the episode historically and within the work). Address the content as a whole: how does it fit into the work's themes and narrative development? Then explain significance: why is this passage important? What does it reveal about the writer's method, how does it compare with other ancient accounts or evidence, does it contain chronological problems or contested interpretations?

For artefacts and images: Give context (date, provenance, findspot, current location, medium, technique). Provide detailed visual description using correct terminology and iconographic identification. Then explain significance: what does this object reveal about its cultural context? How does it compare with similar objects? What artistic innovations does it show? How does it relate to literary or historical evidence?

Critical rules: **do not paraphrase** the passage or merely describe the object: analyse it. Focus on the specific passage or object, not on a general essay topic. Brevity, relevance, and lucidity are essential.

Part 7: What Markers Expect at Each Level

First-Year Undergraduates

The core expectation is **breadth of reading, engagement with primary and secondary sources, basic argument structure, and correct citation**. You should demonstrate that you have read the ancient sources thoroughly and can construct a coherent argument. Independent thinking is 'extremely rare' at this level and is rewarded with very high marks when it appears. A first-class first-year essay shows reading wider than normally expected, intelligent use of sources, clarity of expression and structure, and some signs of developing independent judgement. An upper-second essay interprets reading intelligently with good organisation and full documentation.

Second and Third-Year Undergraduates

The bar rises significantly. First-class work shows 'clear evidence of independent thought, a capacity for critical judgement, and an ability to make connections.' You are expected to demonstrate a wider range of evidence types, not just literary sources but epigraphic, archaeological, and artistic evidence where relevant. Historiographical awareness becomes important: you should know not just what happened but what scholars have argued about it and why interpretations differ. Marks of 75–80 require work that is 'original and challenging'; 70–74 requires work that is 'incisive and thoughtful.' Upper-second work (60–69) presents evidence soundly but without the imaginative connections or independent judgement of first-class work.

Masters Level

Distinction-level MA work demonstrates 'sophisticated understanding of topic, with evidence of original thought and exceptional breadth or depth of research.' You are expected to produce an original argument grounded in a comprehensive and up-to-date bibliography, to engage with historiography at a sophisticated level, and to demonstrate methodological self-awareness. Dissertations must show 'an advanced level of knowledge and understanding of the field of study, and an ability to undertake research.'

Dissertation-Level Work

At the highest level, the requirement is an **original contribution to knowledge**. This means identifying gaps in existing scholarship and contributing to filling them, with an exhaustive evidence base and comprehensive engagement with all relevant primary and secondary sources. An undergraduate dissertation is **not expected** to make an original contribution to knowledge, however many undergraduate dissertations do push our understanding of the ancient world in new ways. An original contribution to knowledge is not (just) establishing new theories, information, or uncovering undiscovered evidence – it is often the analysis of an old problem in a new way.

Part 8: Common Mistakes and How to Avoid Them

The most frequent error, at every level, is **over-reliance on modern scholarship at the expense of ancient evidence**. If your essay is essentially a summary of what three scholars have argued, with ancient sources appearing only as decorative quotations, you have inverted the proper relationship. The ancient evidence must be your foundation; modern scholarship is the tool you use to sharpen your analysis.

The second most common error is **treating ancient sources uncritically**, citing Herodotus or Plutarch as though they were objective reporters without evaluating bias, purpose, audience, or reliability. Even a brief one-to-two sentence evaluation of source reliability adds substantial depth. The other side of this is the wholesale dismissal of these sources because of 'bias' – all sources are biased, yet these sources still have much value.

Other persistent problems include: **writing narrative rather than argument** (describing what happened without analysing why or what it means); **not engaging with counter-arguments** (the strongest essays acknowledge alternative interpretations and explain why theirs is more persuasive); **poor citation practice** (failing to distinguish your ideas from those of others, or citing ancient sources by modern page numbers rather than standard reference systems); and **relying on too few sources** rather than drawing on a diverse evidence base.

Conclusion: The Craft of Evidence-Based Argument

Writing well in ancient Greek studies is fundamentally about the disciplined use of evidence. The ancient sources – literary, epigraphic, archaeological, artistic, numismatic – are the raw material from which all arguments must be built. Modern scholarship provides essential context, theoretical frameworks, and corrective perspectives, but it never substitutes for your own sustained engagement with the primary evidence.

The practical workflow is clear: find the ancient sources using the digital tools now freely available (Perseus, PHI, Beazley, papyri.info), read them critically and form your own impressions, test your hypothesis against additional evidence, then engage with modern scholarship through *L'Année philologique*, JSTOR, and the major reference works. Cite everything precisely using OCD abbreviations for ancient sources and Oxford Author-Date for modern works. Structure your essay as an argument, not a narrative, and integrate multiple evidence types wherever possible.

What distinguishes adequate work from excellent work, at any level, is not the quantity of sources cited but the quality of analysis applied to them. The student who reads Thucydides carefully, notices something genuinely interesting, tests it against the inscriptions and archaeological record, and then engages critically with what scholars have said: that student is doing classical studies properly.