



## A Guide to Independent Work in Classics

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## Introduction to the Field of Classics

The discipline of classics studies the civilizations of Classical Greece and Rome, their historical development, the lives and languages of their inhabitants, and what they thought, wrote, and built. It also examines the way in which their languages developed in later periods, and Greek and Roman history, literature, and philosophy have been imagined and interpreted in the centuries after antiquity and in various local, national, and international contexts.

This is a vast subject, and to do its work, classicists draw on the resources of all branches of the humanities and the social sciences. Literary critics, philologists, linguists, philosophers, historians, scholars of religion and material culture, anthropologists, art historians, and archaeologists all contribute to our knowledge of these civilizations. For that reason, the types of research projects our students pursue vary greatly in their topic, their approach, and the final form they take.

The broad scope of the field can be explained in part by something else all classicists share: the challenge posed by our limited evidence. Lost texts, the incompleteness of the historical record, the inability to generate new data as a scientist or social scientist might; it does not take long for anyone interested in antiquity to be confronted by the unknowable. And while exciting new discoveries are being made, especially through archaeology, papyrology, the study of inscriptions, and the identification of new texts, it is in part obstacles to our knowledge that make classics at once so distinctive and so engaging as a discipline.

Since we cannot always know what we want to know, we try to know what we can. Literary scholars turn to philosophers and historians, to linguists and experts on ancient art and religion, to get the fullest picture of the texts they read. Ancient historians too have learned to draw on the fullest range of evidence and models. Classicists' contact with so many disciplines also inspires new questions about ancient material. Studies of the literary representation of gender, or the use of demographic evidence to reconstruct social patterns in antiquity are two examples.

At the same time, the centrality of Greek and Roman literature and history to all branches of the humanities, especially in the West but increasingly on a more global scale, makes the work we do of importance beyond our own discipline. Most of all, we rely on the diversity of individual perspectives and fresh approaches to keep enriching and perpetuating our collective conversation about the past.

The field is not only multi-disciplinary; it is also interdisciplinary. Whatever the specializations of individual students and scholars, training in classics traditionally begins from general knowledge of both civilizations and requires an ability to understand, apply, and develop the findings of all its branches. Therefore, the overall goal of undergraduate training in classics balances focus and specialization of knowledge with breadth and diversity, research in primary and secondary materials with practice in critical analysis and argumentation. The interdisciplinary nature of the field also encourages students to become active users of what they've learned in the classroom and on their own by comparing types of evidence and methods of analysis, recognizing the applications and limits of different disciplinary models, and making their own connections. Our students discover and develop their abilities to advance our understanding of antiquity by exploring particular topics while also building a comprehensive knowledge of Greek and Roman civilization and cultivating their analytical, linguistic, critical and comparative faculties over the course of their two years.

## Overview of Independent Work

The independent work in classics lies at the heart of our training. Beginning in the junior year with two research papers and culminating with the senior thesis and departmental exams, concentrators learn to identify, articulate, and pursue a series of research questions informed by their training and adapted to their specific interests. The concentration offers two tracks: a flexible, interdisciplinary concentration in Classical Studies and a structured concentration in Ancient History. The independent work undertaken on each track is envisioned as building on and complementing the course of study.

The Classical Studies program offers the opportunity for sustained and focused inquiry into the history, literature, and culture of the ancient Mediterranean, as well as the impact of classical antiquity on later periods by using a variety of interpretative methods. The program offers students maximum flexibility to chart their course through departmental and related offerings. The particular program for each student is determined in collaboration with the DUS, and should be coherent and lead to viable research projects. Whatever the individual focus, each student's program must contain eight courses at the 200-level or above (with limited exceptions as described below), including two at the 300-level, plus the Junior Seminar.

The Ancient History program offers students a pathway to explore the history of ancient Greece and Rome and their relationships with the neighboring cultures of the Near East, Europe, and Africa. It is also ideal for students interested in acquiring training in the academic discipline of history while concentrating on the period spanning the Late Bronze Age (ca. 1700 B.C.E.) to the early medieval and Byzantine worlds (ca. 600 C.E.). Although students may specialize in a particular field of history (political, social, economic, cultural), geographic area, or historical period of antiquity, the aim of the program is to provide a well-rounded training in the field of history, with a focus on ancient history. Each student's program must contain eight courses at the 200-level or above (with limited exceptions as described below), including two at the 300-level, plus the Junior Seminar.

During the fall of the junior year, all concentrators take the Junior Seminar (CLA 340). The course introduces students to different fields of study within the Department, including literature, ancient history, ancient culture, linguistics, and reception studies. Students will gain experience in the methods of their chosen area(s) of study while acquiring an understanding of the history of the discipline and its place in the 21st century. Students will also acquire the skills necessary to pursue independent work. Students who are abroad during the fall of their junior year may complete the Junior Seminar during the fall semester of their senior year.

In the fall term of the Junior year, each student researches and writes a paper of 12 to 15 pages on a topic of their choosing under the direction of a faculty advisor. Students are advised to begin the project by choosing a "focal point" (for example, a passage of text, a

historical event, a material object) that they can investigate in depth, using all the tools of research available to them (including reference works and specialized secondary scholarship). The Junior Seminar will provide guidance in choosing and researching a topic, and concludes with a presentation of the student's focal point to the class.

In the spring term, students undertake a more ambitious research paper of 20 to 25 pages, which they develop in conversation with a faculty advisor, meeting regularly over the course of the term and submitting a prospectus (500 word description and 10-15 item bibliography) on the first Monday following spring break.

At the end of the junior year, concentrators propose a provisional thesis topic to the DUS along with a list of potential faculty advisors, on the basis of which they are assigned a thesis advisor. Students work with their advisor over the course of the fall term, submitting a title and paragraph description of the thesis on the first Monday following fall break, and a proposal (1000 word description and 15-20 item bibliography) on the first Monday after Thanksgiving. This prospectus forms the basis for a conversation with the Undergraduate Committee during the fall reading period, which is intended to offer constructive feedback on the project, and lay out next steps. The student works together with their advisor to complete a first chapter of the thesis by the first day of the spring term, and submit a final draft shortly before the end of the spring semester.

A thirty-minute oral comprehensive examination focusing on three topics related to courses completed while majoring in Classics is administered during Reading Period of the spring term by the undergraduate committee, chaired by the DUS.

### **THE GOALS OF THE THESIS**

On all the tracks, independent work is envisioned as the place where students build on what they've learned in the classroom to develop a range of skills that will serve them well beyond the gates of the university, including:

- to pose well-formulated questions about the past, foreign cultures, and the historical roots of the present and identify strategies for answering them;
- to take greater responsibility for their own knowledge and understanding of the textual and material record of antiquity and its reception by learning how to use research resources as well as by practicing the art of reading for substance, argument, and nuance;
- to sharpen their ability to read one or both of the ancient languages with an eye to discerning the influence of culture on how people express themselves and how language shapes worldviews;
- to respond to primary and secondary material in supple and sophisticated ways as part of the process of elaborating and testing hypotheses;

- to formulate, structure, and defend an argument, in part by considering possible objections and resolving contradictions;
- to write more clearly and persuasively;
- to become not just comfortable but enthusiastic and confident about interacting with different ways of thinking, whether in ancient authors or contemporary scholars, evaluating evidence and arguments, and incorporating constructive criticism.

One way of thinking about independent work is as an experience that enriches by training students to keep pushing the limits of what they know, while continuing to find new ways of applying and developing what they've learned and remaining open to competing evidence and points of view. We hope concentrators leave us with a passion for understanding the perspectives of other people and other cultures, as well as the many ways the past can help us understand the present. We trust they'll continue to adapt their ideas through critical engagement with those around them. And we believe they will keep reinventing the relevance of classical antiquity to the world we inhabit today.

## Timeline

The following timelines will give you a sense of what your experience of writing the Junior Paper (JP) and the Senior Thesis will look like over the course of the year. For a current list of deadlines, see the [Undergraduate Program Dates and Deadlines](#). They include departmental deadlines that have been established to ensure that key stages of the writing process are completed in a timely manner. These deadlines indicate the latest possible dates by which you should have reached specific stages in your work that are compatible with producing a thesis of the highest quality.

### JUNIOR PAPERS

Late October:	JP topic due to Director of Undergraduate Studies.
Mid-January:	Fall JP is due to advisor and DUS
Late January:	Spring JP topic due by email to DUS, with list of possible advisors.
Mid-March:	Spring JP prospectus is due to advisor and DUS
Late April:	Spring JP is due to advisor and DUS



## SENIOR THESIS

- Mid-October: A 1,000 word thesis description accompanied by a 15-20 item bibliography is due to Undergraduate Administrator and DUS. This prospectus must be approved by your advisor and will provide the basis for the conversations you will have with the Undergraduate Committee later that month when you meet to discuss your thesis proposal.
- Late October: Individual meetings with the undergraduate committee for feedback on the proposal and guidance on moving forward.
- Early December: First (draft) chapter of senior thesis due to advisor and DUS (PDF format).
- Mid-April: Senior Thesis Due: Electronic copy (PDF format) should be sent to advisor, Undergraduate Program Coordinator and DUS. One bound copy should be deposited with Eileen Robinson (141 East Pyne) the following week. \*Nota bene: late submissions will be penalized - 3% per day.

## The Process

What the above timelines show is how important it is to pace yourself over the course of your independent project. The amount of time you devote to your independent work is the single most important factor for determining its quality. The time you put in is also what helps turn the thesis from another assignment into an experience that will change how you view the world and your own capabilities. That is because it is only through patient reflection on a subject that your distinctive understanding of it will emerge. And once it has emerged, revision and re-writing will be required to help you see the full implications of your insights and make the presentation of your ideas clear and convincing. The opportunity that independent work offers for self-criticism, for improving and evaluating your own arguments, may be the most valuable contribution the experience makes to your overall intellectual development. Thus, a fundamental aim of all the guidance the department offers on the process of writing will be to help you use your time efficiently.

It is important to start thinking about your project as soon as you can. For the first Junior Paper, you will choose a focal point as part of the Junior Seminar; for the second Junior Paper, you are encouraged to begin thinking about a topic before the start of the spring semester. Seniors will often begin preliminary reading on their senior thesis topic over the summer, and should make a start no later than the beginning of the fall semester.

It is equally important to think about the project in the right way. Almost no one has a fully worked out argument about a subject at the beginning of her research. If you wait to get started until you can see the final conclusions you will draw, you will end up frustrated, and the writing process will be cut short. A much more productive way to approach your research will be through a gradual process of focusing and specialization. The advice that follows specifically addresses the stages of writing a senior thesis, and one that adopts a traditional scholarly format, but much of it will also be applicable to the Junior Papers as well. While creative projects may follow their own trajectory, stages one and two below should certainly be a part of that process.

## BRAINSTORMING

Reflect on all the things you have learned in your course work, and also on what you are most curious about but have not yet had the opportunity to explore. Then choose the subject that you find most interesting. The subject in the beginning can be a particular author, a question posed in class, or simply something you have always wondered about. Then, reflect on what aspects of the subject make it appealing. Identifying what interests you about Sophocles' *Antigone*, or the worship of Dionysus, or Sulla's reforms, will prepare you to begin research. It will also help you figure out why what interests you might be interesting to someone else, to figure out why your subject matters. Identifying what you may remember as "motive" from your freshman writing center is an important step in the thesis process.

## EXPLORING THE TERRAIN

The next stage will be to read as much of the primary text(s) or major sources for what you want to study as you can and to put together a preliminary bibliography of five or ten scholarly books and articles. This is a crucial step in the research process because it helps you figure out whether your project is feasible and whether it can be completed successfully in the time available to you. Your advisor is an invaluable resource here.

In looking for primary sources, you will be asking yourself, first, what kind of evidence you need to pursue the questions you're interested in. You might be curious about what Athenian women thought about how they were portrayed onstage in comedy and tragedy. How would you find out? If you were looking for evidence from the women themselves, you would quickly discover that we don't have any. It would be time to revise the topic (or explore further how scholars have worked with the evidence we do have to address questions of this nature).

If, on the other hand, there are a lot of sources available, you may need to reformulate your subject or question so that the project is something you can finish over the course of the year. You might be interested in representations of the emperor from Augustus to the fall of the Western Empire or the ideal of Roman republicanism in later political theory. But topics like these would involve consulting a daunting range of sources and more time than you have. The best plan would be to narrow your subject to something more specific and manageable. One way of refining your topic would be to choose a set of texts or artifacts that you want to work with. Another would be to choose one aspect of your original problem. Finding a manageable topic will not just focus your efforts. It will also give you the chance to explore more deeply in the area that interests you.

One thing to always keep in mind is that figuring out the subject of your JP or your thesis is a dynamic process that involves moving back and forth between your own knowledge, interests, and ideas and the world "out there." In fact, the entire process of an independent research project involves this kind of back and forth, which is part of what makes it so exciting.

The world “out there” also includes secondary sources, that is, modern scholarly work on the material and questions that you are interested in. It’s important to take a look at the major secondary sources early in the process because it’s here you will often learn about the range of evidence available, as well as the kinds of approaches taken in the past and arguments that have been particularly influential. You will also get a sense of some of the major controversies surrounding the subject that interests you.

It is fairly easy to put such a bibliography together especially in the Internet age and with the help of your advisor. The *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, which has just been revised, has up-to-date, authoritative, and succinct articles on most imaginable subjects and refer you to basic works of scholarship on each topic. Several series such as *Oxford Handbooks*, *Cambridge* and *Blackwell Companions* offer longer introductions to specific aspects of the field. The essays in these collections will include suggestions for further reading and are specifically designed to stimulate research. All of these will provide good resources for developing your preliminary bibliography and may in themselves help you to define a topic. Make sure that the works you include in this bibliography are both recent and authoritative. You’ll get some of the tools for identifying authoritative sources from the majors seminar, but you should also always feel free to ask your advisor.

It may well be that you cannot decide between two potential subjects. There is no harm in doing this level of exploratory research on multiple topics provided you have a clear deadline for committing to one of them. Remember that everyone will have days when any subject seems more interesting than her research topic. And remember too that topics become more engaging as you learn more about them. So, at a certain stage early in your research you will have to make a firm choice about a topic, and the question you should ask yourself in doing so is not “Is this the most absorbing subject imaginable?”, but “Am I confident that I can find things to say about this?” During this period of preliminary research you should also be building a more detailed bibliography for the next phase, as well as assembling additional primary evidence.

### **ESTABLISHING A PLAN**

The next phase of work has three objectives: 1) to gain further mastery of the material by working through the evidence and bibliography you have assembled, 2) to define the specific question your project sets out to answer, and 3) to think of the best way to divide that topic into chapters.

Turning engagement with a subject into a research topic will often be a matter of translating your general interest into the form of a question about the material, moving, for example, from a recognition that Vergil’s portrayal of the gods will be the subject of your thesis to asking “How does Vergil transform Homer’s representation of the gods?” or “How does Vergil’s poem respond to Augustan religious policies?” You should not expect to know already what answer you will give for this question, although you may have a strong working hypothesis. But thinking about HOW to answer it will guide you in breaking down your project into sections, and this will enable you to start writing.

For instance, to return to the example of Vergil's adaptation of the Homeric gods, you may decide that there are certain crucial passages that need to be analyzed in detail, and devote one chapter to each of them. Or you may want to treat the gods individually. In relating Vergil's gods to Augustus' reforms, it might be better to begin with an overview of the nature of those reforms, and to organize the remaining chapters around major aspects of Augustus' policy.

It may well be that as your research continues you will focus your topic still further and that what you had planned as a single chapter will itself emerge as a multi-part subject that ultimately becomes the whole project. This is a natural way for topics to develop, and you should not be reluctant to follow an inclination to focus your work in this way, provided that you remain in control of the process. It is one thing to turn a chapter into a whole thesis because you realize how important it is or how much you have to say about it, but quite another to do so simply because you have run out of time.

The goal of this phase of your research will be to produce a brief (1000-word) prospectus mapping out the project. This will be valuable for you as you become absorbed in the details of individual chapters by reminding you how you initially conceived of the entire work. It will also make it much easier for others to offer you advice and suggestions. The prospectus is submitted both to your advisor and the Department after Thanksgiving. In early December, you will meet with a small faculty committee for twenty minutes to discuss the proposal orally. The members of the faculty are there to help you think through the implications of your proposal and the various directions in which your research could go. You should expect a friendly and constructive meeting, and should prepare a five-minute (no more!) oral introduction to your project.

The prospectus should ideally consist of an introductory paragraph stating the overall question the thesis aims to answer and making clear why this question is interesting or important. Then add a paragraph for every chapter explaining how its subject contributes to answering that larger question and what evidence it will present. For practical reasons, it is usually best to plan for no more than four or five chapters (most theses are three, though some are two). This document should include the bibliography you have developed from the preliminary phase of your research, which should include 15-20 items. Prospectuses for creative projects should give an overview of what your project aims to convey about a classical subject and what the components of the final work will be.

### **STARTING TO WRITE**

Now you are ready to begin writing the individual chapters. In some respects, you should think about each chapter as an independent term paper. It should generally have about the length of a longish paper (ca. 20 pages, though of course this will vary considerably) and it should also have a self-contained thesis and argument so that anyone reading the chapter will know what point you are making about the particular subject it treats. Unlike the complete paper you might submit for a course, however, a thesis chapter will be part of a longer process of analysis: the act of writing will often stimulate you to decide what you really think about a subject and so the aims of your argument may change as you

proceed. Hence when starting out to write, it may be more useful to aim for exposition rather than structuring a specific argument; that can come later in the process.

The chapter you write first will often not be chapter one on the prospectus, and should generally not be the introduction. Begin with the chapter that you are most interested in, that you initially think you have the most to say about, or where you know the evidence best. The first chapter you write will often address the aspect of the topic that originally prompted your interest in the subject as a whole.

The importance of maintaining a firm schedule, one that leaves ample time for revision, cannot be overstated. Be sure to factor in time for interruptions (illnesses, family emergencies, travel) along the way. Ideally, you should have a complete draft of the thesis, or at least the major chapters, by Spring Break.

## **REVISING**

The longer any scholarly project, the more important the process of revision becomes. Once you have completed a draft of a chapter, your advisor can offer you suggestions for revision, but you should also critically review your own work. In addition to removing errors and inconsistencies, a fundamental aim of revision will be finally to decide on your answer to the question posed in the chapter. This will often involve transforming the presentation of evidence into an argument about its meaning. You and your advisor can suggest when it will be most productive for you to revise each chapter. Sometimes it will be best to move on immediately to draft another chapter, but if you have an especially clear sense of how to revise a particular chapter you may want to tackle it immediately. Keep in mind that as your research develops, you may find it necessary to revise conclusions drawn in earlier chapters.

## **THE FINAL STAGES**

When you have revised each individual chapter, now it is time to reconsider the project as a whole. What, ultimately, is your view on the question you posed? How does it relate to other answers and approaches? And how will you go about persuading the reader that you are right? These questions set the agenda for the introduction to the thesis, which it is now time to write. After you have done that, reread each chapter and make sure that its contributions to the overall argument are clearly set out (at a minimum, this will often involve adding or re-working the first paragraph). The conclusion will offer a brief reminder to the reader of what you have proven and how you have proven it, and will often end with suggestions about why your argument matters beyond the scope of the particular subject you treated.

## Resources

### **YOUR ADVISOR**

Your relationship with your advisor is one of the most important and rewarding aspects of doing independent work. Classics has long had a reputation for the individual attention that faculty members give to students and many of our alumni cite the collaboration with their advisors as one of the most valuable and memorable aspects of their experience in the Department.

You will be assigned your first advisor in the fall on the basis of your preferences and field of interest. Your JP advisor will work together with the professor in charge of the Junior Seminar to help you formulate a topic for the Fall JP, prepare an outline, begin writing, and revise. In January, shortly after you have completed the Fall JP, you will be assigned a Spring JP advisor. In addition to advising you on the Spring JP, s/he will also advise you on your course selection to come up with a course plan that complements your independent work, optimizes your time management, and allows you to pursue other interests that may lie far afield from the topic of your independent work—in addition, of course, to satisfying departmental and university requirements. If you're abroad, your advisor(s) will work with you via e-mail to make sure that you are on track. In all these scenarios, *it is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with requirements and articulate your goals*. You should not expect your advisor to do this for you.

Late in the spring of the junior year, you will be assigned your senior thesis advisor, again on the basis of preferences and fields of interest. We believe strongly in giving students the opportunity to work with different faculty members, and so, in most cases, your thesis advisor will not be the same as your JP advisors. You should feel free to consult with your thesis advisor before leaving for the summer about preliminary thesis research (and she or he will also be the person to approach about letters for summer funding applications).

You will work closely with your thesis advisor over the course of the senior year. The relationship will be most successful if you keep a few things in mind.

It is important early on in the fall semester to agree a schedule, first for the writing of the prospectus and then, once you've sketched the broad outline of the project, for writing the thesis itself. The schedule will no doubt change as the project develops, but these changes should be the result of conversations between you and your advisor, informed by your progress to date and the direction your research and writing are taking. There is no one template for how often you should meet with your advisor. More important is that you are in regular contact (every couple weeks during the fall semester, more often in the spring) and that you keep scheduled appointments. It is up to you to stay in communication with your advisor: taking responsibility for this aspect of the relationship is part of what makes independent work such valuable training in independence. Your advisor will be able to give you the most help if you involve him or her in the research and drafting process. This means first and foremost taking advantage of the extraordinary range of resources available at Princeton and in the Department for basic



assistance with research and writing. You should not expect your advisor to provide remedial training in these skills, although s/he can help direct you to the resources on campus.

What's more, the more you use these resources, the more your advisor will be able to help you with the advanced and specialized aspects of your thesis: your use of evidence, bibliography, structure, and argument. Remember that it is your responsibility to submit high-quality drafts, that is, drafts that you have discussed with writing tutors and fellow students, revised, and carefully proofread. However much these drafts represent a work in progress in intellectual terms, they should be a finished representation of the stage of your thinking when you submit it. By following these guidelines, you will receive better feedback from your advisor and learn more from him or her, find the thesis-writing process more intellectually stimulating, and end up with a far stronger final product.

### **FIRESTONE LIBRARY AND THE CLASSICS LIBRARIAN**

You will receive training in how to use Firestone and other campus and online resources in the Junior Seminar.

You should also take full advantage of the librarians available to help you in your research. David Jenkins, the Classics Librarian, holds regular office hours as well as keeping up-to-date database of resources on his website (<http://libguides.princeton.edu/profile.php?uid=15203>). He can be contacted here:

David Jenkins  
A-15J-2 Firestone Library  
609-258-5811 [dj3@princeton.edu](mailto:dj3@princeton.edu)

### **THE WRITING CENTER**

Another important resource on campus is the writing center.

<http://www.princeton.edu/writing/center/> .

Located in Whitman College, the Writing Center [offers free one-on-one conferences](#) with experienced fellow writers trained to consult on assignments in any discipline. When working on your JP or thesis, you can schedule 80-minute conferences with a graduate student fellow from Classics or a related department. When booking an appointment, select the "by field" option, then if desired you may choose an appointment with a graduate student fellow from the History Department. The Writing Center also holds general 50-minute regular conferences seven days a week and drop-in hours Sunday through Thursday evenings.

### **INDEPENDENT WORK MENTOR PROGRAMMING**

Recognizing the challenges and solitude of independent work, Independent Work Mentors from the Writing Center prepare workshops and programming to aid juniors and



seniors in their research. Students should regularly check the Princeton Undergraduate Research Calendar (PURC) on the website of the Office of Undergraduate Research for upcoming programming and workshops, which cover topics ranging from preparing funding proposals to note taking, and from making an argument to draft review.

[Independent Work Mentors](#) can help interested juniors and seniors form writing groups as a forum to discuss challenges they are confronting in their work and brainstorm strategies for dealing with various issues.

## RESEARCH SUPPORT

The [Office of Undergraduate Research](#) serves to inform, engage, connect, and support currently enrolled undergraduates on matters related to research at Princeton; to enhance independent work through campus-wide initiatives and departmental collaborations; and to promote students' research achievements through research symposia and written and video communications. Their website is the central hub for information about undergraduate research including student-authored [research advice on the PCUR blog](#), departmental [Independent Work Guides](#), [funding](#) opportunities, and subscribe to [PURC](#), the central calendar for upcoming events and deadlines.

## Standards and Grading

### GRADING PRINCIPLES

Because of the diversity of approaches it includes and the nature of the evidence it employs, good work in classics possesses three distinguishing qualities:

- 1) Originality and Imagination—Anyone who thinks long and deeply about a topic will come to see it in a unique way. Many elements of an original argument may have been noticed before, but this does not make the argument as a whole less original. What counts, though, is not just to see something in a new way but to be able to recognize and make clear what is distinctive about your perspective.
- 2) Breadth of Knowledge—Since we have so little information at our disposal, it is important that new interpretations make use of all the material they can. This will necessarily add complexity and originality to your discussion as new passages and evidence become part of the picture you present. We do not expect you to know everything, but the more relevant material you can incorporate into your project the more convincing it will be. Failure to take account of material that contradicts, or supports, your argument will make the project as a whole less successful.
- 3) Clarity and Logic—Again because in so many cases we do not have all the material we would like to have in order to answer our questions, the use we make of what is available becomes proportionally more important. Classicists therefore place a particularly high value on the reasoning that supports the conclusions you

draw from the evidence and the clarity with which the connections within an argument are set out.

Obviously classicists are not the only ones to value originality, learning, and clear reasoning, but in a field that includes so many varieties of research, these qualities take on special importance as standards on which we can all agree. All excellent work in classics excels in one of these three aspects and is deficient in none.

### GRADING SCALE

Based on these fundamental criteria, the Classics Department has developed the following guidelines for awarding grades on all written work, including independent work:

- A+ Awarded for work that would be exceptional even for a more advanced student. Thus an A+ paper from a senior should show the sophistication of argument and depth of knowledge that would earn an A for a graduate student. An A+ can only be granted on any assignment by the professor in charge of the course.
- A Awarded for exceptional work. An A paper should advance an argument that is original, in the sense that it goes beyond interpretations available to the student, and persuasive and should demonstrate a broad knowledge of the material. In order to award an A, the instructor ought to have learned something from the paper.
- A- Awarded to papers that excel in two of the three criteria required for an A (originality, persuasiveness, range of knowledge) or for A quality work hampered by unclear or ineffective writing.
- B+ Awarded to a paper that would otherwise receive a B but contains some observations of A quality or shows an exceptional command of the material.
- B The grade of B indicates that a paper has fully satisfied the expectations of the instructor. It is awarded to papers that have a clear argument and show a good knowledge of the material and received interpretations.
- B- Awarded to papers that fall just short of the level of a B in the knowledge they demonstrate or in their understanding of the evidence presented. Also given to papers of B quality that lack a clear argument, are padded with irrelevancies, or are poorly written.
- C+ Awarded to papers of C quality distinguished by occasional original insights of greater sophistication or evidence of greater depth of knowledge.
- C An acceptable knowledge of the material is required for a C paper, but the writer does not achieve the standard of a B either in understanding its significance or in formulating an argument.

- C- Awarded to papers that, in addition to poor argumentation and misunderstandings, show significant gaps in relevant knowledge.
- D Awarded to papers that do not display an adequate command of the material but demonstrate effort to fulfill the goals of the assignment.
- F Can only be given by the professor in charge of the course and signifies the opinion that no reasonable attempt has been made to meet the goals of the assignment.

### **WHO EVALUATES YOUR WORK?**

The grading of independent work in the Department is undertaken primarily by the advisor of the project. The comments they provide will aim to clarify the rationale behind the grade; offer feedback about the central claims of the paper; and indicate areas of particular promise, as well as areas for improvement.

Your advisor can usually provide comments on drafts as long as you submit them with adequate time for review. These comments are designed to guide you in maximizing your potential and the potential of the project. Keep in mind that they always depend on the quality of the work being submitted in draft. More important, these comments exist independent of the final grade. The feedback your advisor offers should never be seen as a checklist of problems to be fixed in exchange for a grade. The grade for the work is based not on whether you have satisfied queries and concerns raised during the writing process but on the final product submitted.

The senior thesis is also graded by a second reader, who also provides a report. You will not know the second reader until the report has been submitted. The final thesis grade is the letter equivalent of the numerical average of the two assigned grades.

### **THE EVALUATION OF CREATIVE PROJECTS**

The creative arts have always provided an essential vehicle for interpreting and analyzing the classical past. These works themselves form part of the subject of our discipline. The classics department welcomes independent work taking the form of fiction or poetry that translates, adapts, or draws inspiration from Greek or Roman culture as well as works of visual art and musical compositions. But the fundamental criterion for evaluating such projects remains the same as for all others: an understanding of classical antiquity that is distinctive, persuasive, and based on broad knowledge. For that reason all creative projects, including translations, must be accompanied by some supporting material, usually in the form of an introduction or notes, that makes explicit the ideas about the past your work conveys and what those ideas are based on. You will not be graded on technical proficiency in your chosen medium, but the effectiveness with which you convey your ideas will be taken into consideration in evaluating the project.