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ENGL 210: Ancient and Modern Superpowers

Sec. 007

29 March 2022

RRE (Roman Research Essay)

**Your task is to write a 10 to 15 page persuasive, argumentative essay with a counterargument about a debatable topic relating to any of the three main texts in the course (*De Rerum Natura*, *The Aeneid*, *Pharsalia*) and the broader world of Ancient Rome. Your essay must include at least two (2) and no more than four (4) outside scholarly sources. Your essay should be at least 10 full pages of text, not including the works cited. Your essay should be no longer than 15 full pages of text, not including the works cited.**

Subject matter

Your topic must be related to ancient Rome and at least one of the three texts we read in the course. There are two broad approaches to this assignment. The first is to construct a literary analysis argument and supplant it from textual evidence from at least one of the assigned texts. The second is to merge one of the assigned texts with your expertise in your major and construct an argument about the text that relates to what you study.

Defining terms

It is crucial to define the subject(s) that you will research for this project. Defining your terms does not necessary mean coming up with your own meanings of the words in your essay; it can also mean using a working definition from a source. Defining your terms is important because your potential audience will not know whether they agree or disagree with your position until you define your terms. It is also good practice to define the terms in an essay because few researchable topics have just a single, agreed upon meaning. You should define the terms of your research in the first paragraph of the research essay. You may rely on the outside sources to define terms specific to Ancient Roman culture, but it is good practice to also provide your own definitions for ideas not exclusive to Ancient Rome but relevant to your essay and argument.

What about the other side?

In your essay you *must* address at least one counterargument and show why the other side is wrong about your topic. Addressing opposing views is good scholarly practice as it makes your work seem unbiased. It is up to you where you address the opposition’s view, but your counterargument should be summarized in your thesis paragraph. Consider also who would be harmed if the opposition view “wins” the debate over your topic. The point of addressing counterarguments is that no argument benefits *all* parties involved. This means that there is no “right” position on any given issue, but it also means that some positions are more credible than others due to the evidence presented for that position.

Argue first and research later

You should first develop an argument by taking a position on an issue and providing reasons for that position before finding scholarly sources. The reason for this is that it will decrease the chance that your essay ends up relying too much on the scholarly sources.

The sources you choose should support your position, oppose your position, or complicate the issue you are writing about. The sources should discuss the same issue as the one you are writing about.

However, your argument cannot rely entirely on your sources. You should include evidence from your own life and experiences in addition to textual evidence from your scholarly sources.

How to use non-scholarly sources

While your textual evidence should come from scholarly sources, it is sometimes helpful to use non-scholarly sources to find scholarly sources. When you find an article on your topic in a newspaper or magazine (whether online or in print) that article will likely either refer to an existing study that is likely a scholarly source. Alternatively, the non-scholarly article may refer to an expert on your topic, who inevitably must have written a book or research article about that topic, which would count as scholarly sources.

Participatory culture of the internet

Since the early 2000s the internet has emphasized user participation and the generation of original content on websites like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and even Wikipedia. The idea of authorship has changed because sources tend to not be attributed on the internet. Users can now upload content of their own with no factchecking on the accuracy of the information contained in it.

Why scholarly sources matter

In an age where people can get thousands of YouTube views for their videos on the causes of the American Civil War (or any other topic) without citing any of the information contained within the video, internet users do not know what source can be trusted anymore. The lack of barriers to publishing anything on the internet in the age of Web 2.0 means that trusted sources of information must compete with amateur scholarship. Some fields, such as journalism, have undergone such a shift that what it means to participate in that field has completely changed. In fields such as these, it is freelancers who often break important news stories as opposed to journalists working for a newspaper or magazine or news agency. The ethos or zeitgeist of the internet today is “do it yourself” or DIY.

Note that the supplementary essays assigned this semester (such as Greenblatt’s “The Answer Man”) do not count as scholarly sources as they all appeared in online periodicals, not journals.

Features of scholarly vs non-scholarly sources

The following table simplifies some differences between academic and non-academic genres of writing.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| TYPE | ACCESS | LOCATION | BASIS | LITERATURE REVIEW | PEER REVIEW | WRITTEN BY | SPEED OF PUBLICATION  |
| Scholarly | Pay | Online, Print | Argument | Yes | Yes | Academics | Slow |
| Non-scholarly | Usually free | Online, Print | Opinion | No | No | Journalists, Bloggers, Academics | Fast |

Finding scholarly sources

The best website for finding scholarly sources is the ULL library website @ <https://library.louisiana.edu/> . In addition to having access to library books, your status as a ULL student means that you can access online subscriptions to scholarly journals through this website (remember to login to your Ulink account).

The library databases site is located @ <https://library.louisiana.edu/node/145> . This page lists databases by academic field. A database in this context is a website that archives academic journal articles and sometimes scans of entire books. Databases are always searchable. In some cases, a database will be categorized under more than one academic field on the ULL library website because that database archives journals from more than one discipline. JSTOR, for example, is a database site housed under the “Literature” and “Psychology” categories of ULL’s website (to name just a few).

Another website useful for research is Google Scholar @ <https://scholar.google.com/> . This website acts as a giant database of journal articles from various disciplines.

What is important to remember about doing online research is that access is sometimes limited. In some cases, Google Scholar or the library website will show a description of the article but not the full article because it is not available for free online (on Google Scholar) or because ULL does not subscribe to the journal containing the article (on the library website). This means that you may need to spend more time researching that you think.

Please do not use Google to find scholarly sources. Google’s search engine does not distinguish between scholarly or non-scholarly sources, meaning that it is often the most popular search results that show up first, not the most credible or the most useful.

Analyzing a scholarly journal article

Technically a scholarly source includes a range of genres like a monograph (a book on a single subject), an edited collection of essays (or an anthology which can be by one or many authors), and a dissertation (a research based argumentative work presented to a university as part of getting an advanced degree in an academic field).

Pragmatically you will likely have to rely on scholarly journal articles for two reasons. First, they are shorter than monographs and dissertations (but about the same length as individual essays in an anthology). Second, they are easier to find online as compared to these other genres.

The following table explains some of the main parts of an article in a scholarly journal:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| PART | DESCRIPTION |
| Abstract  | * short description and summary of the article which is always at the beginning
* often shows up in the search results of an online database
 |
| Thesis/Argument | * usually found in the abstract and usually repeated in the conclusion
 |
| Literature review | * a summary of what has already been said by others about the subject of the article
* usually contains a lot of citations and parentheticals
 |
| Methodology | * describes the plan for how the writer did the research
* includes the ways that the writer collected data from texts or people or other sources of information
 |
| Conclusion/Discussion | * writer considers what should be done next in resolving the issue they wrote about
* writer usually calls for further research on their topic to continue the conversation
 |

Unfortunately, not all articles actually label each of these categories, but most articles contain at least these parts, regardless of the subject matter.

Probably the most useful of these parts for this assignment is the abstract. The abstract will usually tell you the author’s position on an issue and briefly will describe why they take that position based on the research they did in order to write the article.

Reading the abstract of an article will let you know whether the article is worth reading or not. Note that the literature review, while tedious to read, will always include references to existing scholarly sources on a similar topic. Thus if you read the literature review you could easily find a second source for your research essay.

Formatting

Your essays should be in 12 pt. type and double spaced and should be in MLA format. Your final draft should be at least ten (10) full pages double spaced, not including the works cited. Your name should appear on the first page and in the header of every page along with the page number. Please include a Works Cited section at the end of your essay.

Remember to consult the Purdue OWL website for how to cite scholarly sources in MLA format @ <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>. This assignment requires the quoting and or paraphrasing of scholarly sources in text, as well as in the works cited section.

Due Dates

Rough draft – 26 April 2022

Rough draft peer review feedback – 28 April 2022

Final draft – 5 May 2022

Please submit your drafts digitally via Moodle.