

Library Assignment: Critical Review of Research Resources

Submission: Submit to Moodle by the due date.

Length: about 600–1,000 words. Any reasonable fonts and spacing can be used.

Goals: (i) To get to know some of the print and database resources that are available at the Dickinson Library. (ii) To practice discriminating between and evaluating scholarly and non-scholarly sources. (iii) To get a sense of the scholarly conversations about the texts we discuss in class. (iv) To inform your understanding of those texts.

Detailed instructions:

1. At the end of this assignment is a list of research questions related to the texts we have studied so far. You should choose **one** of these research questions (or you can make up your own research question, but in that case it must be approved by the instructor). State your chosen question at the top of your assignment.
2. Use the print and database resources available in the library to find a large number of sources of information that are relevant to the research question you chose in step 1. Rank the sources according to how useful they are likely to be for writing a scholarly, authoritative paper answering chosen research question.
3. Pick **four** of the sources you found in step 2. The chosen sources must consist of exactly one of each of the following types:
 - a. Scholarly/academic book or book chapter
 - b. Scholarly/academic journal article
 - c. Magazine/popular periodical article
 - d. Scholarly encyclopedia article (print or web-based, excluding Wikipedia)In selecting your four sources, the objective is to choose a variety of complementary sources that would be the most helpful for writing a scholarly paper.
4. Read each of the sources you chose in step 3. For a book, you do not have to read the whole thing: read the introduction, and skim through the rest to get a feeling for its content.
5. For each of the sources you chose in step 3:
 - a. Write out a full citation for the source in Chicago format. See *Writing Analytically* p302 for details on how to do this.
 - b. Below the citation, add an indented paragraph (approximately 5-6 sentences) describing:
 - i. the content of the source
 - ii. how the source is or is not relevant to the chosen research question
 - iii. what you can deduce about the qualifications of the author
 - iv. the intended audience
 - v. any other evidence that the source is likely to be authoritative (or not)

Example:

Below is an example of the output of step 5 above, for a magazine/popular periodical article relevant to the research question, "Is Greek myth inherently sexist?"

Lefkowitz, Mary R. "Women in Greek Myth." *The American Scholar* 54, no. 2 (1985): 207–219.

Lefkowitz argues that Greek myths as told in Greek literature often show women commenting on their own dilemmas and fates, and even speaking for all human kind. She claims that while Greek myth is not always feminist in the modern sense, it is progressive, especially compared to other ancient traditions. The article is relevant to the question because it takes a strong position, even though it doesn't discuss all the possible evidence. No academic affiliation is given for the author, and it has no footnotes. But the magazine is published by the Phi Beta Kappa honor society, and the article is academic in tone. It was probably written for an audience of college students or scholars.

Grading:

No formal rubric is provided for this assignment. However, a strong assignment will show evidence that you have understood the content and applicability of each of your sources, and have chosen a strong portfolio of sources overall. It is not necessary for every source to be perfectly applicable to the chosen research question – you need to demonstrate your ability to critically assess the usefulness of each source. However, it is important that the overall quality of a majority of the sources is high, so that you could – hypothetically – write a well-informed paper using the chosen sources.

List of research questions:

Here are the research questions you can choose from (or you can create your own provided the instructor approves it):

- The heroic code in Homer appears to value honor above supporting one's family. Does Homeric poetry nevertheless promote the idea that families are a valuable and important construct in society?
- Are the characters in the Iliad able to exercise free will?
- Is there a consensus among modern scholars about the identity of Homer? If so, what is the consensus view and what is the evidence for it? If not, what are the main competing views and what is the evidence for them?
- To what extent does the modern theory of international relations reflect principles espoused by Thucydides?
- How would Thucydides define justice?
- How do the human rights possessed by residents of the USA today differ from the human rights possessed by residents of Athens at the time of Pericles?
- What was the true cause of the Peloponnesian war?
- The prevailing scholarly view seems to be that Athens could and should have won the Peloponnesian War, but instead it lost the war due to errors, arrogance, over-reach, and other failings. What are the weaknesses, if any, in this prevailing scholarly view?

- One of our plenary speakers concluded that Homer and Thucydides are inherently optimistic despite their apparent pessimism about human nature. In what ways are Homer and Thucydides optimistic?
- According to Plato, what is the relationship between the individual and the community in which an individual lives?
- Did Plato believe in God?
- One could accuse Plato of being an elitist, since his definition of happiness seems to require that you are intelligent enough to be a sophisticated philosopher. Can people of average intelligence be happy in Plato's kallipolis?
- Many modern intellectuals value poetry and other forms of literature highly. But Plato denigrates poetry (and by extension other literature such as novels) as mere imitation, and he suggests it should be banned from the kallipolis. Should we conclude that Plato was simply wrong about poetry/literature, or is there something modern society can learn from Plato's arguments about poetry/literature?
- Why is the doctrine of original sin so important in Augustine's arguments?
- Augustine states that humans had free will before the Fall, lost it because of the original sin, then regained free will after the coming of Christ. How does Augustine's concept of free will influence his suggestions for how humans should behave on earth?
- One of our plenary speakers suggested that Augustine introduced humility as a political value. What is the evidence for this claim?
- Why did Dante write *Inferno* in Italian vernacular language rather than the more traditional Latin?
- What kinds of artistic representations of Dante's *Inferno* were made in the Renaissance?
- What has been the influence of Dante on English literature?
- What has been the influence of Dante on music?

Acknowledgement: this assignment is based closely on a template developed by Dickinson's Humanities Collective.