

THE POSITION PAPER

You'll write an essay discussing a topic of your choice relating to the role and impact of women in the ancient era.

Write a 5–7 page position paper in which you express an opinion about a topic related to the roles and impact of women in the ancient era, and use evidence to back up that opinion. In other words, you're taking a side on some question or controversy, and you use reasoning and research to support your side of the argument.

Available Topics

Choose one of the following as the topic for your paper:

1. In the first class I propose that in general, throughout the ancient world, men could be associated with the public and the present, and women with the private and the future; and that these roles were balanced and complementary, giving men and women similar importance in ancient civilization. Do you think this is a fair, accurate, and useful way to understand gender roles in the ancient world this way? Discuss three examples from the times and places we've visited to support your assessment of this theory.
2. In the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Enkidu becomes separated from the wild animals among whom he had lived through intercourse with a harlot, Shamhat. Why was this depicted as the means of civilization in one of the oldest works of ancient literature? Discuss the civilizing role of women in the ancient world, giving three examples from the different times and places we have studied (you may include the case of Enkidu and Shamhat as one of your examples). Based on your observations, in what ways would you say men and women have different kinds of responsibilities relating to civilization?
3. Is the female role in the ancient world determined purely by biology? Discuss three examples of how women's distinctive bodily processes and functions affected their participation in society in ancient history and/or literature. In your opinion, how much do these physical differences bring about social and cultural differences between ancient men and women?
4. In the article "Influential Women" (Day 14), Mary Lefkowitz argues that "ancient women could certainly be courageous, but they could not be truly independent" and that "women can affect the course of political events only if they act through or on behalf of the men in their families." Do you agree? Give three examples of individuals or events from ancient history or literature that support your response to Lefkowitz's argument. What does this tell us about the political nature of ancient societies?
5. "Once they get equality, they'll be on top," said Cato the Elder in defending the Oppian law (a Roman sumptuary law that restricted women's display of wealth—for the relevant text, see separate handout). Did the divide between men and women arise through men's enforcement of it, based on fear? Give three examples of men's reactions to women from history or literature and discuss how they affected or reflected the relationship between the genders.
6. What does a culture's representations of its goddesses tell us about its attitude toward women—if anything? Discuss the goddesses of at least three of the societies we have discussed, noting the goddesses' behavior, their responsibilities, and what mortals expected of them. Contrast them both to their male godly counterparts and to each other. What does "goddess" mean to a man or woman in the ancient societies we've discussed?
7. It could be argued that women, excluded from men's public world, empowered themselves by creating communities of their own. What were some of the ways ancient societies developed different kinds of female communities? How does this contribute to a desire to separate ideals of "womanliness" and "manliness"? Discuss three examples from the different times and places we have discussed, and relate them to each other. How do they affect the culture as a whole?
8. Come up with your own topic question, dealing with a comprehensive aspect of the entire course, and answer it, providing a compelling argument supported by specific examples.

Sources

You must use at least three sources. Ideally you should have a mix of primary and secondary sources.

- **Primary sources:** The ancient sources included in the readings for the course as handouts are generally excerpts, so if a particular ancient work is relevant to your topic you should look at the complete version. Online translations into English are available on my website via the “Links to Ancient Texts” link in the Course Menu.
- **Secondary sources:** Also important as evidence is the expert testimony of scholarly books and articles. You can use the articles that are a part of the course readings. You can also search for relevant books in the college library, and look for useful journal articles via the college library website.
- **TERTIARY SOURCES ARE NOT ALLOWED.** This includes encyclopedias, textbooks, and almost everything on the internet apart from online scholarly journals.
- For more on finding the right evidence you need, check out the “Writing a Position Paper” booklet.

Milestones

- **You’ll submit a proposal for the paper** partway through the semester, so I can give you feedback on your plans (see next page).
- You can submit a draft of the paper up to three days before it’s due; I’ll give general feedback (but not a grade). Because I accept drafts, I do not allow students to submit revised versions of their paper after the final due date.
- **The paper is due on Tuesday, Jan. 23**, the last day of the semester.

Make sure your final paper conforms to the Requirements for All Papers (see separate handout), including formatting and citations. You will be marked down drastically if your paper is not properly cited.

For how to do citations and bibliographies, consult the “Writing a Position Paper” booklet.

Position Paper Proposal

The proposal is just a brief one-page preview of your position paper that includes the following:

1. **The topic** you think you'll want to write about and the problem you're interested in addressing.
2. You should be able to delineate the problem by describing **the opposing views people might take**. To make sure you have two clear opposing opinions, you might want to express them in the form "Some say... . Others say... ."
3. **Your preliminary thesis statement**—in other words, what you think you might be arguing in your paper.
 - Your thesis statement, both here and in the final paper, should be a statement of opinion that someone could disagree with. It can take the form of following up the description of the opposing opinions with your own: "I believe... ."
 - Remember that your thesis is provisional. You can change anything about your approach and interpretation after the proposal; in fact, uncovering information as you do your research makes changing your initial assessments very likely.

These items are essentially the model for your introduction, as you can see from this sample intro (the numbers are just for illustration):

[1] Hannibal Barca, the great Carthaginian general, brought 37 war elephants with him over the Alps into Italy, and at the climactic Battle of Zama they had a front line that included 80 elephants. Did Hannibal's elephants really make a difference? [2] Some say that Hannibal's elephants were crucial in establishing the morale of his troops against the legendary Roman legions and in intimidating other armies along the way into alliances; but others say that Hannibal's elephants did the Carthaginian side more harm than good in their fight with Rome. [3] I believe that Hannibal's use of elephants was a mistake, not because war elephants were a dumb idea in general, but because Roman adaptability meant that the Romans would inevitably find a way around them.

In addition, in the proposal you should also outline any thoughts you have so far on what kinds of evidence you think will help you make your case in the final paper. I'll respond to the proposal with feedback and suggestions to help your research and writing.