

Essays – Position Paper Topic Ideas

Recent topics for the Position Paper.

Here are some of the topics that students have put forward in their proposals for their position papers in this course over the past few years. Some are general directions, while others are specific questions of the kind you will need as the basis for your proposal.

If you're stuck for a topic, browse through the categories and think about what ideas and questions you might be interested in exploring, finding evidence, and expressing your own thoughts and interpretations. Use these past topics as guides in formulating a problem or debate on which you can take a position in your paper, or as inspiration for a new topic no one has explored before.

Polity

- Athenian and Spartan governments as contrasting means of creating an ideal state
- The flaws of democracy
- Greek government and its citizens
- Hubris of the Greek City States
- The ideal polis
- Outside perceptions of the Greeks
- The role of arete in Greek culture
- The split amongst the Greeks

Society and Economics

- Athenian Bankers
- The Greek Dark Age as a bridge from Mycenae to Athens
- The Greek art of war
- Legacy of the Olympic Games
- Mental illness, and PTSD specifically, as understood by the Greeks
- Morals and Money
- Plague or mass hysteria?
- Slavery in Greece
- War as a catalyst for ancient Greek culture

Greek Gods and Legends

- Flaws of Greek gods and goddesses
- Greek goddesses and mortal women
- Greek polytheism: unifying or divisive?
- Greek religion—priestly class and sacred text
- Were the gods essential or detrimental?

Gender

- Ancient Greek Women
- Gender roles in Sparta
- Spartan gender roles as a sign of the ideal
- Spartan women
- Treatment of women in ancient Greece
- Women in Ancient Greece
- Women in Sparta and Athens
- Women's agency in ancient Greece

Literature and Theater

- Agamemnon's insult and the Mycenaean view of the gods
- Homer as a mirror and catalyst for the rise of the demos
- Pandora: villain or victim?
- The role of women, men, and theater in democratic Athens
- What does the Oedipus cycle tell us about family and social obligations in Athens?

Persian Wars

- Aristagoras caused the Ionian Revolt
- The Greeks' distorted view of the Persian king
- Why did the Persians really attack?

Peloponnesian War

- Athenian ambition as cause of the Peloponnesian War
- Blame of the War: Sparta, Athens, or Corinth?
- Corinth and Sparta in the Peloponnesian League
- Corinth as the primary instigator of the War
- How valid is our historical understanding of the Peloponnesian War
- Inevitability of the Peloponnesian War
- Rivalry of the poleis as reasons for war in Hellas
- Sparta and Athens jointly to blame for the Peloponnesian War
- Spartan fear as the cause of the Peloponnesian War
- What role did Sparta play in sparking the War?
- Who started the Peloponnesian War?

Sparta

- Benefits and weaknesses of the Spartan system
- The downfall of Sparta
- The failure of Sparta
- Implications of the Spartan agoge for the fall of Sparta
- Sparta and the other Greeks
- Spartans, live strong and thriving, or ignorant and weak?
- Sparta as the most influential of the Greek poleis
- Spartan (lack of) democracy
- Spartan cultural success
- Spartan decay
- The nature of the Spartan Mirage
- The Spartan Mirage as a deliberate tool of the Spartans
- Spartan way of life
- Spartan xenophobia
- Was Sparta's military lifestyle its strength or did it weaken them?

Athens / The Athenian Empire

- Athens as a democracy
- Athens as an empire
- Athens: Birth of a Greek empire
- The Athenian empire: an Empire or a Defensive alliance?
- Impact of Democracy on Athens
- The trial of Socrates
- Was Athenian Democracy Truly Democratic?
- Was Athens an empire after the Persian Wars?
- Was Athens the ideal city for its inhabitants?

Athens vs. Sparta

- Athenian military superiority over Sparta
- Athens and Sparta shaped by education
- Citizenship in Athens and Sparta
- Constitutions of Sparta and Athens
- Spartan and Athenian government and society
- Sparta as superior to Athens
- Which was better for its people, Athens or Sparta?
- Which was more democratic, Athens or Sparta?

Macedon and Hellenism

- Alexander and Persia
- Alexander's potential conquest of India
- Alexander's tomb and legacy
- The impact of Philip II on Alexander's Conquests
- The Romans and Antiochos IV
- Was Alexander king, conqueror, or tyrant?
- Was Alexander truly "Great"?