

Position Paper

You will be writing a 6- to 8-page position paper in which you express an opinion about a topic related to Roman history, and use evidence to back up that opinion. In this paper, you're taking a side on some question or controversy, and you're using reasoning and research to support your side of the argument.

We'll work through it in stages over the course of the semester. The first stages involve choosing a topic and writing a proposal.

A. Choose a Topic

First, choose one of the 13 meeting topics for the course and decide on a controversy or debate pertaining to that topic.

- You can choose something that the people at the time might have debated—e.g., “Is Greek culture degrading Roman virtue and old-fashioned values?” as a question arising in the late Republic, or a question arising among modern historians—e.g., “Did the Roman empire arise through conscious imperialism or ad hoc reactions to events?” In each case you need to outline both sides of the question and then provide evidence why you think one side was right.
- Choose a topic you're interested in and have fun with it. Make it wacky, make it provocative—anything is fine as long as you make an argument regarding your chosen topic and support it with facts.

B. Write a Proposal

The assignment: The proposal is just a brief one-page preview of your position paper. It should include:

- The topic you think you'll want to write about and the problem you're interested in addressing. 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...”
- 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 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 refining or changing your initial assessments very likely.

Your proposal is structured like the introduction (see below), and may serve as the basis for it.

The proposal is not graded, but whether you submitted a proposal on time will be factored into the final grade for the position paper. I will give you feedback on things like the feasibility of researching your topic, whether the scope is too big or too narrow for a paper like this, and some possible sources you might want to look at.

Sample Introduction

- PROBLEM > *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*
- OPPOSING > *Hannibal's elephants really make a difference? Some say that Hannibal's elephants were crucial in*
- SIDES > *establishing the morale of his troops against the legendary Roman legions and in intimidating other*
- THESES > *armies along the way into alliances; but others say that Hannibal's elephants did the Carthaginian*
- THESES > *side more harm than good in their fight with Rome. I believe that Hannibal's use of elephants was a*
- THESES > *mistake, not because war elephants were a dumb idea in general, but because Roman adaptability*
- THESES > *meant that the Romans would inevitably find a way around them.*

Note: The one-page proposal described here is what's due in Week 7.