

Classical Studies 313

Research Assignment

You have the choice of three options for your research assignment. You can choose to focus on either the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*. The final paper should be c. 1500-2000 words. You should use footnotes to reference your secondary sources (choose a style that suits you); citations of Homer can be in-text.

Option 1 – Research a Homeric Topic (1500-2000 words). Create a research question for either the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*. Find three articles and/or book chapters on your topic. Annotate each of the articles you choose. Draw your conclusion about your question what the articles reveal about your topic and how they might help in answering your question.

Structure of the Assignment: The written assignment will look much like a formal five-part persuasive or expository essay, with introduction followed by the annotated bibliographies and a conclusion.

In the introduction, explain your topic and your research question. What was it about the poem that triggered your interest in this topic? Give examples from Homer. Your research question is actually very much like a thesis, so approach it in the same way that you would developing a thesis statement/question. It is often best to formulate your question **after** reading your secondary sources and thinking what you have learned about Homer's poem.

For the annotation, discuss each article separately. Take into consideration:

- The purpose and scope of the work
- A brief description of the format and content
- A summary of the main arguments
- The theoretical basis of the argument

UBC has an excellent Wiki on annotated bibliographies, so I suggest that you take a look at it:

https://wiki.ubc.ca/Library:How_to_Write_an_Annotated_Bibliography

The UBC Wiki suggests a length of 150 words for an annotated bibliography, but since our purpose is somewhat different here, you may need to go into more detail. 150 words is perhaps a little short for this assignment, since your purpose is slightly different here.

In the conclusion, explain how each of the articles can support you on your quest to find the answer to your question. Consider the following questions. Did they give you answers or did they give you enough information to draw your own conclusions? How have these sources enhanced your interpretation of your chosen topic? Was one more helpful than the others? Do you feel that you now need to do further research or narrow your focus more?

Option 2 – Analysis of 2 Articles on Homer. Choose two articles and/or book chapters on the same topic area. Analyze each article as you would for an annotated bibliography (see Option 1). Although you are not annotating the articles, the general outline is useful for this type of analysis. You can, however, ignore the credentials of the author! Compare and contrast the two. What is the thesis of each article. How do their approaches to the topic differ? Do they look at different evidence from Homer's text to prove their thesis? Which do you think is more persuasive, based on your own reading and understanding of Homer's text?

For this option, I would avoid using an article from any of the Companions to Homer, since these are generally expository rather than persuasive essays. They give an overview of the topic. They can, however, be useful in finding suitable bibliography for your topic.

Option 3 – Modern visions of the Homeric world. Choose a modern re-vision of one of the poems of Homer. This could be a novel. Given the length of a novel, it might be best to choose one that you have already read. It could be a movie, a series, or an episode of a series. In this case you will have two primary sources (Homer's *Iliad* or *Odyssey*) and the modern novel, short story, or film/series. You only need two secondary sources to inform your discussion. What type of secondary sources you need will depend on the modern version and the comparison you are going to make. Do you need to look at ideas about gender, masculinity, or the ancient hero? Look at the appropriate topic listed above.

Modern takes on the epics to consider:

1. Film: *Troy*; the appropriate episodes of the series *Troy: Fall of a City*; the Coen brother's re-working of the *Odyssey*, *O Brother, Where art Thou?* There are more out there!

2. Novels: Margaret Atwood's *Penelopiad*, a novel about Penelope in the Odyssey; Pat Barker's *The Silence of the Girls*, in which the main character is Briseis in the Iliad; Madeline Miller's *The Song of Achilles*, which tells the story of Achilles' youth in Phthia; Madeline Miller's *Circe*, which retells the story of Circe, including her relationship with Odysseus.

Possible Topic Areas and Sources

The Gods in Homeric Epic

- 📖 Choose a god to study in either the *Iliad* or *Odyssey* and develop a thesis based on how that god operates in the epic. Gods to consider: Zeus, Apollo, Athena, Aphrodite, Poseidon, Hera, Hephaistos, Thetis.
- 📖 Begin by reading Emily Kearn's article, "The Gods in Homeric Epic" from the *Cambridge Companion to Homer*, posted on Canvas. The *Cambridge Companion to Homer* is available through the Cambridge Core Database via the UBC library. Find it under Indexes and Databases. Search 'Cambridge' and Cambridge University Press comes up first. Click on and you will enter the Cambridge Core. Then you can search for the Cambridge Companion to Homer.
- 📖 For Thetis in the *Iliad*, look at Laura Slatkin's book, *The Power of Thetis: Allusion and Interpretation in the Iliad*, available online from Koerner Library.

Sexuality and Gender in Homeric Epic

- 📖 Begin by reading Nancy Felson and Laura Slatkin's article, "Gender and Homeric Epic" from the *Cambridge Companion to Homer*, available through the Cambridge Core Database via the UBC library. Find it under Indexes and Databases. Search 'Cambridge' and Cambridge University Press comes up first. Click on and you will enter the Cambridge Core. Then you can search for the Cambridge Companion to Homer.
- 📖 Under this category (and overlapping the topic of the Homeric hero) is the idea of the *Iliad* as the cultural ancestor of the buddy movie. Examine the brotherhood of the pairs of characters in the *Iliad*: Achilles & Patroklos; Menelaos & Agamemnon; Diomedes & Sthenelos; Glaukos & Sarpedon; Hektor & Paris.
- 📖 If the focus is sexuality in either the *Iliad* or *Odyssey*, Chapter 1 in Marilyn Skinner's book, *Sexuality in Greek and Roman Culture*, discusses the sexuality of different characters, human and divine. It is available online from Koerner Library.

Women in Homer

- 📖 This topic overlaps with Gender in Homer, but also focuses on the literary role of female figures in the epic narrative. Choose a female character from either the *Iliad* or *Odyssey* to discuss. Begin by reading Nancy Felson and Laura Slatkin's article, "Gender and Homeric Epic" from the *Cambridge Companion to Homer*, available online via Cambridge University Press through the library Indexes and Databases. Available online is *Women of Substance in Homeric Epic: Objects, Gender, Agency* by L. C. Canevaro, useful for women of both epics

and for finding further bibliography. The same applies to Cristiana Franco's article, "Women in Homer" in *A Companion to Women in the Ancient World*, posted on Canvas.

- 📖 If you choose Helen, you could examine Helen in both the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, since she appears in both. You should begin with Ruby Blondell's book, *Helen of Troy: Beauty, Myth, Devastation*. It is available online via Koerner Library.

The Hero in Homer

- 📖 This topic area deals with the ideal of the hero as presented in the epic of Homer. You can choose to examine a hero from either epic: Achilles, Odysseus, Agamemnon, Menelaos, Telemachos, Hektor, Diomedes, Nestor, Phoenix, Priam.
- 📖 Begin by reading Gregory Nagy's article, "The Epic Hero," in *A Companion to Ancient Epic*, available online via Koerner Library.

Speeches in Homer

- 📖 In Homeric society, the power of persuasion is an important skill for a hero. Speeches by individual characters take up as many lines in the *Iliad* or *Odyssey* as does the narration. Although the speeches can tell stories, they often clarify the moral dilemma and express the emotion of the situation, something the narration does not do. You can choose to examine the speeches of a single character in one of the epics and consider what it tells us about the character and his/her role in the narrative.
- 📖 Begin by reading Jason Griffin's article, "The Speeches" in the *Cambridge Companion to Homer*, available online via Cambridge University Press through the library Indexes and Databases.

Literary Aspects of Homeric Epic

- 📖 Homer uses several literary devices deliberately in his epic that are worth study as features of his literary art. For example, you can choose to look at similes in either the *Iliad* or *Odyssey*. You may focus on specific types of similes, rather than all of them in a single epic. Examples are similes of a specific kind of animal, such as a lion, or what Helene Foley calls 'reverse similes' where women are compared to men and men are compared to women. See:

Foley, H.P. 1978. "'Reverse Similes' and Sex Roles in the *Odyssey*." *Arethusa* 11: 7-26.

The article is posted on Canvas.

- 📖 For simile in Homer, begin by reading Richard Buxton's article, "Similes and Other Likenesses" in the *Cambridge Companion to Homer*, available online via Cambridge University Press through the library Indexes and Databases.

Omens in Homer

- 📖 Events in the epics are often preceded by omens given to mortals by the gods. These omens can fill people with hope or despair. Because they are sent by the gods, they are sometimes difficult to understand.

Begin by reading Jonathan Ready's article, "Omens and Messages in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*: A Study in Transmission" in *Between Literacy and Orality: Communication and Adaptation in Antiquity*, posted on Canvas.

Finding Source Material

Check out the bibliographical information listed in both our text books. Many of the books listed are available in the library online.

You will find additional materials through searching the library data bases (e.g. JSTOR). There are numerous articles on Homer available via JSTOR and you can probably find what you need here. JSTOR has many of the major journals for Classical Studies, but also for comparative literature and other fields that take an interest in Homer.

Another source is the website of the Center for Hellenic Studies:

<https://chs.harvard.edu/>

You can search this site for articles and books on Homer. While there are in-depth analyses of Homeric language, there are also more general essays on a range of topics written by Homeric scholars.

Do not include general books on Greek history or encyclopaedia entries in your Bibliography, as they will not address your topic in enough detail.

Journal titles for Classics are regularly abbreviated. If you are looking for a journal and only have the abbreviation, you can consult the list of Abbreviations of Journals posted on Canvas under the Research Assignment Module.

DO NOT USE WEBSITES AS SECONDARY SOURCES. There are many sites of questionable quality. Even those that are reliable are usually too general. They are not suitable secondary sources for a university paper. You can, of course, use the web to access ancient texts (i.e. Perseus or Poetry in Translation) or scholarly articles (JSTOR, Center for Hellenic Studies, the UBC Library Databases).