Sources[1]

This document defines scholarly writings and how to find them in the various university libraries (all linked through the NEOS Consortium). You will need these skills in order to complete the assignments for this and many other university courses.

Many professors typically expect students to acquire these skills on their own or by seeking help from librarians. Some students in this course will have little or no experience in researching at the university level and may find this extremely helpful. Others may be very experienced, and find that this document serves as a review.

Wherever you, as the student, place yourself in this spectrum, this aim of this document is to provide the basic information on making the most of Concordia's library system.

A. Scholarly Writings

Scholarly writings are essays and books written by expert scholars. Not all information about the past (or any subject) has equal value. In a course like this, the most valuable sources are those written by scholars who are well acquainted with ancient sources, the methods used to interpret the sources, and what other experts are asking about these sources. Students need to be able to locate scholarly writings and use them for their own research.

Assignments in courses which examine the past almost always involve some type of research. Students are required to find scholarly information on a particular topic or question, reflect, and communicate their findings in an essay. Writing essays encourages students to search for and use evidence. The best evidence in any classics course is a "primary source": an activity document or artefact that is one step removed from a past event (in the case of a work of history), or, simply dating from the ancient past (as in the case of works of drama, for example). In the case of ancient writers of history, often the creator of the work is in the same time and place as the event being depicted (that is, 'contemporary' with the event), providing first-hand knowledge. Primary sources can include letters, accounting records, laws, poems, prose and anything else that provides *direct* evidence of past human activity. You will study modern, published translations into English of Greek and Latin primary sources during this course.

Any writing that is more than one step removed from a historical event is a "secondary source." The best type of secondary source is the writings of expert scholars who have studied the primary sources. Scholarly secondary sources are commonly used as persuasive evidence by students, especially when studying the ancient past. Much of a student's research involves combing through secondary sources in the form of scholarly essays (including articles) and books (monographs).

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[1] This skills module was written by Dr. Marc Cels of Athabasca University. It has been adapted to fit the content of this course.

Most scholarly writings are those used by authors to communicate their research findings to other expert scholars. To persuade their peers, scholarly authors must follow a rigorous standard of using evidence and rational argument. Sometimes, however, scholars write for non-experts or even a general audience. These writings have less rigorous standards and are less academically persuasive, but are often easier for non-experts to understand. Thus, rather than 'scholarly', they are often referred to as 'popular' sources.

The following are examples of the various formats in which scholarly writings appear, and which you will encounter as you study the literature of ancient Greece and Rome:

Scholarly Journals:

A journal is a scholarly periodical published one or more times a year. For example, the *Transactions and Proceedings of the Philological Association* is a journal that publishes its issues once a year. It is published by the American Philological Association, an organization of classicists (primarily professors). Each issue contains several articles on all aspects of classical scholarship, as well as short reviews of new classics books. Printed issues are sent to association members and are purchased by libraries. The journal is also published online and university students can access it through their library's subscription and search it using various library databases. In a bibliography or citation, the title of a journal is usually formatted in italics: *Journal Name*. The title of a journal article is usually placed between quotation marks: "Article Title."

Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles:

These articles are focused essays (usually about 30 pages in length) in which a scholar presents and argues the interpretation of, in our case, textual evidence as the result of original research. The author is writing to convince other experts and backs up interpretations with citations to primary sources and the writings of other scholars. The discussion can be technical and difficult—but articles are more focused and shorter than books. Articles can also be published more quickly than books, and so the most recent articles are usually more current than the most recently published books. Peer-reviewed means that the journal article was first read and approved by a committee of experts to ensure that the quality of research met scholarly standards. Often, when an article is being cited, the name of the journal will be condensed, often as an acronym. When you attempting to locate an article, and are unsure what are unsure of the full journal title, you need to research the journal itself. One way to do this is to search Ulrich's Periodical Directory, entering the abbreviated name and performing a search.

Learning Activity:

It is essential to understand the peer-review process, because it is the standard against which to measure other types of scholarly writing. View the following five-minute online tutorial:

Hyan-Duck Ching (Director). *Peer Review in Five Minutes* [Online tutorial]. Northern California State University Libraries, n.d. http://liontv.blip.tv/file/1866136/

Peer-reviewed Monograph:

These scholarly peer-reviewed books focus on a single topic. They have the full scholarly apparatus of footnotes and bibliography, and they develop a topic more fully than can be accomplished in a short article. These books are usually published by university presses, purchased by libraries, and are addressed to other scholars. They present the scholar's original interpretation of the past based on a careful study of the primary sources and the arguments of other scholars. The title of a monograph or any book is usually put in italics: *Book Title*.

Scholarly Essay in a Collection:

This type of essay is similar to a journal article. Although usually not peer-reviewed, the essays have been chosen by an editor (or editors) to be included in a collection of essays by other experts. For example, a conference of scholars may meet at a university to share their research, and decide to publish their presentations. The essay title is usually indicated with quotation marks and the book title is italicized: Joe Smith, "Essay on History." In *A Big Book of Essays about Classics*, edited by Jane Doe.

B. Non-Scholarly Resources:

General Works:

These books are often written by expert scholars for an audience of educated non-specialists, including students. They do not usually present original research in a persuasive argument, but rather summarize the findings of leading scholars. There may be citations of sources and certainly a bibliography. The author might draw on examples from primary sources, but he or she is not concerned with rigorously arguing an interpretation, so much as introducing non-specialists to a topic. The best general works are both readable and offer an original overview of an ancient work, event, or person. For this reason, a general work by an expert can be useful in a student research project, but should be supplemented by scholarly articles and books.

Encyclopedias:

These reference books provide very brief summaries of topics. They are not scholarly because they do not present the original findings of scholars or present evidence to support their statements. The most useful are those that focus on a subject and have scholars as editors or contributors, for example, The *Oxford Classical Dictionary*. Encyclopedias can provide background information and suggest more scholarly books for you to research, but they are not usually adequate sources themselves for research essays.

Textbooks:

Textbooks provide you with a broad introduction to a subject, but they are not considered scholarly works. Textbooks do not normally offer any original research nor do they usually include footnotes. They do, however, provide other tools to help you learn the very basics about a historical subject. For example, the publisher might include maps, tables, illustrations, glossaries, study questions, and often a companion website—but these are often produced by a design department and may not be rigorously accurate.

Popular Histories and Biographies:

These books are intended to entertain a popular audience—the sort of reading you might buy at an airport bookstore. They are usually written by professional writers rather than scholars and are published by commercial publishers. These books rarely make reference to evidence or the interpretations of scholars, so footnotes and bibliography seldom clutter their pages. Usually they are intriguing stories narrated in a lively and engaging manner.

Popular History Magazines:

These magazines are similar to the popular histories and biographies described earlier. Magazines such as *History*, *National Geographic*, or *Archaeology* are commercial products that inform and entertain audiences. They are sometimes written by scholars, but more often by journalists who can explain the past to a general audience.

Documentary Films:

Documentaries are commercial products intended to entertain and inform viewers—especially school-aged audiences. Few are written by specialists and it is common for documentaries to repeat common mistakes about the past. Sometimes documentary filmmakers interview scholarly experts—but the experts are usually used as storytellers; rarely do they explain the evidence supporting their claims about the past. Nevertheless, unlike books, films present sights, sounds, and re-enactments using actors or animation.

Historical Fiction, Novels, and Motion Pictures:

Many of us enjoy reading historical novels and watching films set in the past. Even when the films reflect real people and events, these forms of entertainment are fictional. The best are well-researched and recreate a past world more lifelike than can be conjured through scholarly writing. Nevertheless, authors, directors, and production teams take artistic liberty to change characters, events, and locations simply to entertain audiences or for artistic expression.

Websites:

Use the Internet cautiously. Remember, anyone can post information on the Internet and the quality of work varies greatly. The more you work with high-calibre scholarly sources, the better your skills will be in evaluating online resources. It is best to use scholarly books and journal articles, many of which are now available online through university library subscriptions.