

Why study A Level Classical Civilisation?



What is Classical Civilisation?

Classical Civilisation focuses on the civilisations of Greece and Rome, and is a wide ranging subject involving the study of literature, material culture, ancient thought and ideas, and the ancient historical context.

You don't need to know any languages, all the texts are in translation, and it doesn't matter if you haven't studied the Greeks and Romans since primary school; all you need is an interest in the ancient world and its cultures.

From women in the ancient world, to the study of religious beliefs and ancient acts of intolerance, Classical Civilisation involves interesting discussions that are directly relevant to today's world:

... men grappled with exactly the same issues that we do: life, death, gods, sex, love, family, children, education, the nature of the world, our origins and development, the past, money, health, status, other cultures, friendship, power, patriotism, politics, law, crime, justice, empire, war.

Peter Jones, advisor to Classics For All, 'Taking the Long View'

Student Experience

India Collins-Davies is a current student reading Classics and English at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford:

When I was given the opportunity to study Classical Civilisation at sixth form college as a way to supplement my studies of History and English Literature, and give me a new, interesting challenge, I decided to give it a go.

Classics is often seen as a dry and outdated subject (in any form), but it took me less than one half term to be completely won over. In my case, Classical Civilisation encouraged me to take up classical languages when I was able, but my peers enjoyed it for other reasons too; some really liked the historical side of the course for example, and enjoyed learning about ancient cultures. Classics connects with so many different subject areas, and covers such a range of topics, that it can be engaging in a way the 'standard' subjects often are not.

I am now in my final year reading Classics & English at Oxford, where I have not only learnt Greek and Latin, but found my grounding in subjects covered by my Classical Civilisation A Level (such the Iliad, Aeneid, and Persian Wars) made an excellent starting point for success at degree level. I spend a lot of time doing outreach work for the university (including the Classics faculty) and find that many young people don't understand what Classics or Classical Civilisation is, or don't have the confidence to try out this new subject. I am so grateful for having been given the opportunity to study Classical Civilisation when I did: of all the subjects I studied before coming to university, I feel it is the one which shaped me academically the most, and that I still feel the most passionately about.





Student Experience

Patrick Ardagh-Walter studied for his A Levels at a sixth form college, and hopes to go on to university to study Physics and Philosophy:

I chose Classical Civilisation along with Maths, Further Maths and Physics A Levels in order to keep some variety in my academic life. This was possibly one of the best academic decisions I have made. Classics is about the whole of life in the ancient world; the History, the Art, the Literature, and it combines all of these things into one amazing subject. With such varied subject matter, I can guarantee that there are more in-jokes and puns available to Classicists than there are to any other subject, and you have many more opportunities to engage with your peers, because so much of the subject is about communication, ideas, and often arguing!

Classical Civilisation also encourages you to think outside the box about what you want to do with the rest of your life, and expands your academic boundaries. I always wanted to study Physics at university, but it was Classical Civilisation that introduced me to the idea of combining this with Philosophy. It's the Swiss Army Knife of subjects, and I would recommend it to anyone who enjoys history and literature, or is just naturally intellectually curious.

Where can it lead?

If you are looking to apply to university, Classical Civilisation can be extremely useful. You not only acquire specific Classical knowledge, but also important transferable skills such as analysing sources and developing independent, critical and evaluative approaches. You learn to formulate and support an argument and develop a valuable understanding of cultures very different to your own.

Classical Civilisation is naturally particularly valued by Classics departments in UK universities, but not only by Classics departments. The study of A Level Classical Civilisation can often lead to the university-level study of Classics, Drama, English, History, History of Art, Philosophy and Politics. Classical Civilisation is listed on UCL's list of preferred A Level subjects and it is also listed on Trinity College, Cambridge's list of Generally Suitable Arts A Levels. It is also listed as a useful subject for degrees in Classical Studies and Philosophy in the Russell Group 'Informed Choices' document. Information from UCAS shows that students who studied Classical Civilisation went on to study in such diverse disciplines as Medicine, Veterinary Science and Chemistry!

It is not only those looking to attend university who benefit from the study of Classical Civilisation. From the proven ability to write a well-structured extended response to the acknowledgement of the views of others and a culturally sensitive approach to these, Classics puts students in an excellent position to seek employment and opportunities.

As Dr Peter Jones states:

... we know that those who have studied the ancient languages are never, in fact, short of job-offers. A top asset-manager recently told me that his firm always employed classicists: they sold more. If Richard Dawkins is right, that is because 'what Classics has always done is just teach people how to think.'



Peter Jones, Taking The Long View

Studying Mediterranean antiquity superbly equips individuals to think socio-politically and to persuade other people orally, visually and in writing. It hones transferrable skills like source criticism and culturally relativist analysis. It's a perfect A Level to do with any other subject because the Greeks invented all academic disciplines including Medicine and Material Science. It gets school-leavers and graduates great jobs and gives them nourishing and beautiful brain-food for non-working hours for life.

Edith Hall, Classics Professor at Kings College London



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