

# Greek 3200A/4904A: Presocratic Philosophy

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## Preliminary Course Outline

### Course Description

In the sixth century, the so-called Presocratic philosophers began to examine the world in a radically new way by approaching nature as its own physical realm. Their writings also contain insights into the development of ontology, logic, and epistemology. While much of their writing is in prose, three of the Presocratic philosophers—Xenophanes, Parmenides, and Empedocles—wrote in poetry, and we'll spend the term reading their poetry closely.

We'll focus on the Greek itself for the majority of the course, with the goal of reading all of it, but we'll also spend some time most weeks discussing things such as the philosophical ideas in the poetry, why they chose to write in poetry, the very "discipline" of philosophy in antiquity, and some professional skills such as textual criticism and using the TLG.

### Required Books

All the Greek texts we're going to be reading will be available on the course site or online through the library databases, and you won't need to buy any specific books (you are welcome to buy editions or commentaries of the pre-Socratics, but they can cost quite a bit). You should have access to a good Greek grammar book and dictionary.<sup>1</sup>

### Evaluation

25%—Attendance, Preparation, and Participation

20%—5 Quizzes

25%—Written Work (3 short writing *or* 1 essay)

10%—Passage Analysis

20%—Final Exam

### Course Goals

The course is designed with a few goals in mind:

1. As a Greek language class, the primary goal will be to continue to develop our Greek skills.
2. While reading, we'll pay some attention to the important resources that you should be familiar with, such as understanding the *apparatus criticus* (and textual criticism) and using the TLG.
3. Since being able to write *about* the texts you read is an important skill for scholars, you'll also practice and develop your ability to write about literature.
4. And of course, to learn about (some of) the Presocratic philosophers and their ideas in context.

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<sup>1</sup> There will be a bibliography on the course site with recommendations for grammars, commentaries, editions, and further reading for anyone interested.

## Detailed Grade Breakdown

### **25% attendance, preparation, and participation**

Since this is a small class, I expect you to come to each class well-prepared. This includes both having read the Greek and tried to understand it as best as you're able and participating in translating and commenting on the text during classes. We'll go around so everyone should get the opportunity to participate in each class. For translating, please **do not** bring in a written-out translation that you prepared before but try to read the text with as little notes as possible. This is much tougher, and more nerve-wracking, than reading a prepared translation but ultimately much better for your ability and confidence to read Greek. On days without Greek readings, you should prepare a short 3 minute "presentation" about something you found interesting that week in either the primary or secondary readings. This will help up better understand the primary and secondary readings as well as bring in diverse perspectives. These are good places to develop your written assignments. These will be the basis for our discussions.

### **20% Quizzes**

We'll have five quizzes during the term that will include translation, grammar, or textual questions. You'll have about 15 minutes to do the quiz at the start of the designated class (we'll adjust this is needed). They will have about 5 lines of text with 1 or 2 short questions attached.

### **10% Passage Analysis**

The passage analysis is an exercise that helps with developing your ability to read poetic texts critically by familiarising yourself with the formal and interpretive aspects of the text. You'll pick a 5-line section of poetry and perform a very close analysis of it, including scanning the meter, noting important vocabulary, interesting grammar, allusive and/or formulaic language, commentary notes, etc. This process can be good for developing an argument or entry point for an essay. It'll be due a couple weeks after our TLG seminar, during which we'll talk about the assignment as well. I'll also post a (more intense) example of the exercise.

### **25% written assignment(s)**

You will submit three short writing assignments during the term. These are meant to make you think critically about the Greek texts, poetics, pre-Socratic philosophy, and the secondary readings. They should be pretty short (around 600–800 words) and can be about anything related to the class. You can sketch out an argument about how to interpret a passage, talk about textual critical issues, or whatever else you think would be interesting to do. Additionally, you can choose to do a single essay-style paper (about 1800–2400 words) with a more focused topic if you prefer. If you want to write a full essay, I recommend talking to me about it as soon as possible. There's no due date for these, except that I'd like them before the final exam (so I can submit grades on time).

**20% Final Exam**

A longer version of the quizzes. To be scheduled during the December exam period.