

What are the best books for Classics applicants to read?

Universities give the title “Classics” to programmes that require knowledge of Latin and/or Greek. Programmes that do not require this are usually called “Classical Studies” or “Classical Civilisation”.

Degree programmes can cover a wide range of topics: e.g., language, literature, history, philosophy, archaeology. Potential applicants might be developing particular areas of interest within these, but I would recommend the following book on all of these areas as a starting point:

The Oxford History of the Classical World

John Boardman, Jasper Griffin and Oswyn Murray (eds.)
Oxford (1995) ISBN 0-19-285236-1

It is also worth reading:

Confronting the Classics : Traditions, Adventures and Innovations

Mary Beard
Profile Books (2013, paperback 2014) ISBN 978 1 78125 049 5 (eISBN 978 1 84765 888 3)

In over 30 clear and engaging chapters, the author uses the format of a book review to confront the reader with current debates in classical scholarship: e.g.,

- Should Evans’ work at Knossos be seen as a romantic and inept reconstruction or serious archaeological fieldwork?
- How great was Alexander?
- Can a historical Cleopatra be disentangled from the myth?

Those interested in developing their knowledge of philosophy might begin by reading Plato. Among the most accessible dialogues are: “Crito” on duty to the state; “Symposium” on love; “Gorgias” on whether might is right in politics.

A very accessible introduction to epistemology (theory of knowledge) is:

What is this thing called knowledge?

Duncan Pritchard
Routledge (2006) ISBN 13: 978-0-415-38798-9 (paperback)

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