

Using Generative AI to Support Ancient Language Teaching

by Jackie Baines and Edward A. S. Ross



Figure 1: Using Generative AI to Support Ancient Language Teaching CPD Workshop Poster. Background image generated by ChatGPT 4 (Jan. 10, 2024 version) on February 16, 2024. Prompt: "Create an image of an Ancient Greek woman teaching a Latin class in front of a white board. Make the students sit in front of computer monitors."

On May 21, 2024, we held a workshop in the Department of Classics at the University of Reading on how generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools can be used to support ancient language teaching ethically and effectively. This workshop was attended by 80 ancient language teachers from at least 12 countries around the world. Thanks to funding from a CUCD Education Committee grant, we were able to offer small travel grants to local participants, making the workshop more accessible to teachers in local secondary schools and universities.



Figure 2: Left to Right: Jackie Baines (Co-Organizer), Vanessa Lopresti, Online Attendees, Edward A.S. Ross (Co-Organizer), and Joe Grimwade

The event was divided into two parts. The first half was a presentation about the ethical issues for using generative AI, including problematic training data, copyright infringement, content restrictions, and environmental issues. This discussion aimed to inform teachers about these issues and enable them to begin conversations with their colleagues about these crucial topics.

We also outlined various generative AI tools' abilities with Ancient Greek and Latin, demonstrating that most tools, such as ChatGPT 3.5/4/4o, Claude-2/3, Google Gemini, and Microsoft Co-Pilot, only work with these languages at an intermediate capacity. Since the tools gained popularity in November 2022, their abilities have improved dramatically, but there is still plenty of room for growth.

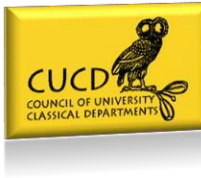


To show teachers how to effectively scaffold their students for using generative AI, we also presented our [instructional booklet](#) on digital tools and guiding phrases for ancient language learning. This teaching material outlines a wide variety of digital learning tools for ancient languages that include both traditional tools and generative AI. The generative AI section features tested guiding phrases, prompts which can be copy-pasted as the first message in a generative AI chat box to guide a user's experience, and some prompt engineering tips and tricks.

Following the presentation, we held a tutorial/discussion session demonstrating how different generative AI tools could be used to support translation work, test writing, and the creation of pedagogical materials. Teachers were able to try the tools out themselves and discussed how they may or may not expedite their preparation work, especially since all outputs would need to be double checked before use.

The key purpose of this workshop was to inform ancient language teachers about the following issues:

- Generative AI is a fascinating genre of digital tools that can do many things but is limited by a variety of ethical considerations and biases.
- Ancient language teachers, and humanities staff in general, need to take the step to experiment with these tools so that they can have a general conception of what they are and how they might be used.
- It is crucial that teachers keep up to date with generative AI developments because their students are encouraged to use these tools by wider media and need support to help them wade through the issues surrounding them.
- Teaching staff need to start implementing generative AI scaffolding materials for their students that fit to their specific pedagogical context and reinforce knowledge about the ethical issues as they arise.



Overall, the event was a great success and has led to important discussion and possible future collaboration. Sessions like this need to continue to keep our field up to date with the rapid development of generative AI tools. So long as we keep discussing these topics, generative AI tools need not be an unrecognizable monster but rather a surmountable challenge.

In order to continue this work, we are gathering data from teachers of ancient world studies, broadly conceived and at all levels. If you are interested in participating, please follow [this link](#) to complete our short, 10-minute survey.

Although the workshop was not recorded, the details discussed on the day are all available through the links and articles below:

- [Digital Tools for Learning Ancient Greek and Latin and Guiding Phrases for Using Generative AI in Ancient Language Study](#)
- [A New Frontier: AI and Ancient Language Pedagogy](#)
- [Treading water: new data on the impact of AI ethics information sessions in classics and ancient language pedagogy](#)
- [Generative AI in the Ancient World Studies Classroom Teacher Survey](#)
- [Generative AI and Classics Tutorial Videos](#)
- [iGAIAS: Investigating Generative Artificial Intelligence in Ancient World Studies Project Page](#)

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