

# Example of essay on perfection in ancient greece

[Politics](#)



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They worshiped the perfect physic. They achieved the highest pinnacle of architecture and set a standard that people are still following today. They perfected the portrayal of the human figure. Even in their politics they tried for perfection. Yes, the Greeks were idealists. They had a general ideal: an ideal of perfect balance, harmony, and order to create the perfect lifestyle and the perfect art forms. How did the ancient Greeks seek after perfection in all aspects of their civilization? Did they achieve their lofty goals?

The Ancient Greeks had a general ideal: an ideal of perfect balance , harmony, and order to create the perfect lifestyle and the perfect art forms. This ideal is evident in all areas of their civilization, most especially their art. As *The Annotated Mona Lisa* by Carol Strickland, PH. D. states, “ Where Greek philosophy stressed harmony, order, and clarity of thought, Greek art and architecture reflected a similar respect for balance” (12). They sought for stunning, life like paintings, marble sculptures that seemed about to walk off of their pedestals, and architecture that fools the eye for the look of perfect symmetry. In their paintings, which we only have described in literary records, the “ Greek artists achieved a breakthrough in realistic trompe l’oeil effects. Their paintings were so lifelike that birds pecked murals of painted fruit,” (Strickland 12). The only evidence we have of the proficiency of Ancient Greek painting are their lovely paintings of figures that adorn their pottery.

The general ideal, the seeking after perfection, that governed Greek life was also reflected in their architecture. The Parthenon, which even in its ruined state is considered one of the most beautiful buildings of all time, still appears to have perfect balance. Again, *The Annotated Mona Lisa* explains: Architects intended the brilliant white marble Parthenon to be the ultimate

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expression of Athens' grandeur. Even in ruins, it crowns the Acropolis. The parthenon's perfection was due to barely perceptible departures from straight lines. Columns curve slightly inward and the entablature and stepped platform are barely arched. These "refinements," as they were called, bent straight lines to give the illusion of upward thrust and solid support for the central mass (14).

Other examples of the Greek's path to perfection in the area of architecture exist in lesser temples to their gods and goddesses. These temples "were typically rectangular, with angled roofs terminating at either end in gables. . . that overhung columned porches. The pediments and friezes (horizontal bands below the roofs) were usually adorned with sculptures depicting mythological scenes" (Ziomkowski 41).

However, the pinnacle of Greek perfection were their sculptures. They Ancient Greeks who lived and breathed the Classical period, invented the nude in art (Strickland 13). Not only did they invent the nude in art, they achieved perfection in portraying the perfectly balanced body and mind. Strickland writes, "the ideal proportions of [the Greeks marble] statues represented the perfection of both body (through athletic endeavor) and mind (through intellectual debate)" (13). To achieve their perfection in sculpture, the Greeks brought their ideological perfection of the "synthesis of the two poles of human behavior - passion and reason" to bear on their artwork. The Greek sculptors brought both passion and reason into their artwork - they captured flurried motion with fluid lines and stunning, reasoned manipulation of detail. One stunning example of Greek sculpture is Nike of Samothrace. It is the embodiment of the Greek's "discovery of the principle of weight shift, or contrapposto, in which the weight of the body

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rested on one leg with the body realigned accordingly, giving the illusion of a figure in arrested motion” (Strickland 13).

**Greek art, architecture, and culture were inextricably intertwined. The Annotated Mona Lisa states it this way:**

The history - some would argue the zenith - of Western civilization began in ancient Greece. For a brief Golden Age, 480-430 B. C., an explosion of creativity resulted in an unparalleled level of excellence in art, architecture, poetry, drama, philosophy, government, law, logic, history, and mathematics. This period is also called the Age of Pericles, after the Athenian leader who championed democracy and encouraged free thinking. . . just as man’s dignity and worth were central Greek concepts. . . Greek philosophy stressed harmony, order, and clarity of thought, [and] Greek art and architecture reflected a similar respect for balance (12).

The Ancient Greeks who lived in the classical era did not just seek perfection in the artistic portrayals of their culture. They sought after perfection in their city-states, their law, their philosophy, and their writing. Greek philosophers tried to either find the perfect moral balance in life or simply explain the order of the world. The pre-Socratic thinkers “ attempted to explain natural phenomena without reference to religion, yet they did not establish a distinctive scientific method,” (Ziomkowski 38). This did not satisfy the later Classical Greeks. The philosophers who specialized in medicine and science wanted a dependable method. Hippocrates of Cos developed the beginning stages of the now-used scientific method. “ Known as the “ Father of Medicine,” [he] inspired the code of medical ethics known as the Hippocratic Oath. He stressed observation and experimentation, described diseases in

reports which detailed symptoms, and emphasized the importance of hygiene, diet, and the environment to maintain good health” (Ziomkowski 38). Moral philosophers attempted to reach the truth - absolute truth is the height of perfection in philosophy - through reason. Socrates is one of the most prominent Greek philosophers. We only know about him, though, through the writing of his pupil, Plato. Plato created dialogues where he presented Socrates arguing with other thinkers:

Plato argued there is a spiritual world that exists beyond the material world of sense-perception and gives it its existence. The Ideas are abstract principles that exist in the spiritual world in a perfect, unchanging state, while particular physical objects in the material world are merely imperfect copies of these Ideas. (Ziomkowski 39)

Aristotle, who was Plato’s most gifted pupil, argued a very different approach to metaphysics. He discovered and codified rules of logic that are still used today. “ He rejected the Platonic theory of Ideas and postulated that all objects are made of matter and form, existing in a single universe set in motion by a Prime Mover” (Ziomkowski 40). In ethics, “ Aristotle taught that the good life can be achieved by following the doctrine of the golden mean, whereby moderation in all things is preferable to extreme behavior of any sort” (Ziomkowski 40).

In politics, the Greeks were slightly divided in their pursuit of perfection. The Greeks were divided into city-states rather than being united into one country. These states even fought among themselves, unlike the states in the United States of America. Each Greek city-state was governed differently, too. There were three main lines of government that the Greeks practiced, with each city-state that practiced them thinking that they were pursuing the <https://assignbuster.com/example-of-essay-on-perfection-in-ancient-greece/>

perfect form of government. Some city-states were tyrannies. In fact, tyrannies were more common than monarchies, though both forms of government were not very common. A History of Western Society describes it this way:

Monarchy, rule by a king, was surprisingly not one of [the favored political choices]. . . although prevalent during the Mycenaean period, it afterwards declined. While Sparta boasted of two kings, they were only part of a more broadly based constitution. During fully developed historical times Greek states were either democracies or oligarchies. Sporadic periods of violent political and social upheaval often led to a third type of government - tyranny. Tyranny was rule by one man who had seized power by unconstitutional means, generally by using his wealth to win a political following that toppled the existing legal government (Western Society 64).

### **Democracy was a much more favored form of Greek government:**

Democracy, the power of the people, meant that all citizens, without respect to birth or wealth, administered the workings of government. Although Athens is easily the most famous of the Greek democracies, it was not alone. The people of Argos in the Peloponnesus independently governed their powerful city by a democracy quite similar to the Athenian one. . . Yet Greek democracy did not really live up to its name. In reality, Greek democracy meant the rule of citizens, not "the people" as a whole, and citizenship was drastically limited. In Athens and in other democracies, only free adult men who had lived in the polis a long time were citizens. Women, foreigners, slaves, and others had no rights. (Western Society 65)

Surprisingly, though, democracy was not the most favored form of Greek government. That award goes to the form of government called an oligarchy.

An oligarchy means rule by just a handful of people. It was:

. . . government by a small group of wealthy citizens who were not necessarily aristocratic by birth. Oligarchy generally gave its whole population – leaders and people alike – stable government and freedom to prosper. Men could advance politically by earning enough wealth to qualify for full citizenship. Full citizenship meant the right to vote for officials to hold office. (Western Civilization 65)

Even in sports the Greeks sought after perfection. They tried to cultivate the perfect body, be the perfect athlete, and portray the living perfection of human beings in honor of their perfect gods. These games that they honored their gods with are called the Olympics. Even today we use the Olympics to show off the perfection of competitive sports. Their sports were tied in with both politics and art. The Greeks thought that “ the best way to honor the gods was for men to train their bodies to be as graceful and powerful as possible” (Story of the World 153). For these games, which featured men who looked like living Classical Greek sculptures in action, warring Greek city-states would hold a truce and all compete together. Susan Wise Bauer states that, “ during the games, an Olympic truce was declared throughout the Greek world; it lasted at first for a month, and later was extended to three months so that Greeks from farther away could travel to Olympia and back safely” (History of the Ancient World 357).

Like in art, the Greeks came near to achieving perfection in their philosophy, their politics, and even in the physic of their own people through sports.

They turned the non-artistic aspects of their civilization into art. In a way, the <https://assignbuster.com/example-of-essay-on-perfection-in-ancient-greece/>

entire Ancient Greek civilization was an artistic masterpiece with only a flaw here or there. Unlike their success in the actual visual arts, though, the Greeks fell a bit short in their admirable pursuit of perfection when it came to politics. Their artwork lasted and is still held up as the ideal for realistic portrayal. The Olympics are held today. Aristotle's logic is used, loved, and revered at present, with some slight modifications in certain scenarios. Greek politics and political structure, though, did not last. In fact, monarchies were the norm in even most Western countries until recently. The founding of the United States of America brought democracy onto the world scene as a primary player. Oligarchies, though, are not thought well of as a modern version on democracy. However, as a sort of tribute paid unconsciously by the world to the near political perfection that the Greeks achieved, Western democracy has been modeled after Greek democracy. The Greeks would be proud if they could see the lasting existence of their achievements.

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