PREPARING TEXTS

The Oxford Classics degree throws a lot of text at you, and expects you to be able to translate it on sight. The preparation of your texts is therefore extremely important, and there are ways to do this correctly and ways to do this incorrectly. This note sets out the correct procedure, and warns you against various incorrect procedures. You have all done quite a bit of text preparation, so none of this should be new, but think seriously about your working practices.

When you prepare a text, you will need:

1. An UNMARKED copy of the text
2. A sheet of paper to write out the vocabulary you do not know
3. A dictionary to look up the vocabulary you do not know
4. A commentary (optional)
5. A translation (BUT SEE BELOW)

As you make your way through the text, checking the words you don't know in the dictionary and writing them down on that sheet of paper, you should only use the translation (or Perseus / Diogenes) **as a last resort** when you simply cannot work out what the individual word or the passage of text means. Once you have completed a good sized chunk of text, compare your translation with a published translation to see how well you've done. Constant revision is a central part of this process.

It is, however, absolutely vital that you try to work out the word / passage first before you check it. This is because you must engage with the difficulties of the text, and try to puzzle out those difficulties, as an integral part of learning the language. If you simply go to the translation or Perseus *vel sim*. as a matter of first resort, you **will not** learn the language, and your textual preparation will become a matter of memorisation. No useful purpose is served that way.

Do not write vocabulary in your texts, as this will not help you to learn the word, for much the same reason as quick resort to translations or Perseus *vel sim*. doesn't really help you in the long run. When rereading or checking over the text, your eye will naturally eb drawn to the gloss above the line or in the margins: when you have to sit Mods, the blank text in the exam paper could become quite a challenging novelty. Write out the vocabulary on a separate sheet, and then use those sheets for separate learning and revision.

The point of all this text preparation is to teach you the language as well as the text, and the pay-off is found in all other areas of your work, from unseen translation to prose composition, as well as to further text preparation. Everything is related to everything else. If you prepare your texts properly, everything else falls into place.

ADK
MJR
RT