

Sample essay: introduction

These introductory sentences tell us what the essay is about: Saint Jerome

What Saint Jerome was famous for

Hints at critique of Saint Jerome

Saint Jerome is regarded as one of the four great doctors of the Western Church and the most learned of the Latin Fathers.¹ As a linguist, teacher, historian, theologian, and controversialist he exerted a significant and enduring (but not altogether positive) influence upon the development of Christianity. Jerome's life might be viewed in two halves.² The first thirty-five years consisted of diligent study,³ extensive travel⁴ and rigorous ascetic practices.⁵ During this developmental period Jerome acquired both his extensive erudition⁶ and devotion to asceticism, the twin foundations upon which his literary legacy and influence would later be built.⁷ The vast bulk of his writings were generated during the second half of his life—a time of enormous literary output from his base in Palestine. The most significant aspects of this heritage are his Latin Vulgate, his correspondence and commentaries, his propagation of monasticism and his controversial treatises.

The *introductory paragraph* gives a brief history of his life. Notice that the life is summarised in two parts, not a detailed account (where he was born etc.) just the relevant bits

Details given are all developed in the essay—each gets a paragraph

Non-essential details are placed in the footnotes, his travels, etc.

¹ P. Schaff & H. Wace, *Nicene & Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Vol. VI (St Jerome: Letters & Select Works) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957) p. xi; Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol. 12 (1970) p. 1003.

² He is thought to have lived between 347 and 420.

³ Initially in Rome, and then later under various teachers including Gregory Nazianzen.

⁴ Jerome was born in the East, educated in the West (Rome) and after his early education travelled for twenty years throughout both the Western and Eastern Empire, living in or visiting Gaul, Aquileia, Syria, Constantinople, Rome, Egypt and Palestine.

⁵ In Gaul Jerome was first attracted to asceticism. In Aquileia he entered seriously upon the pursuit of the ascetic life. This was followed by travel to the East, where for five years he embraced a life of solitude in the Desert of Chalcis, practising the most rigorous austerities.

⁶ A remarkable control of the classics, an exceptionally pure and incisive Latin style, and a unique mastery of both Greek and Hebrew.

⁷ Jerome's writings were widely read and followed, even in his day. He complains that everything he wrote was caught up and published by friends and enemies alike. This is not surprising. He stood at the close of the old Greco-Roman civilisation. It was a melancholy epoch of the world, coloured by material uncertainty, moral depravity and the absence of hope. Communication between East and West had become rarer and mutual knowledge less. The linguistic cleavage between East and West was deepening. Jerome, with his immense scholarship, linguistic capacity and passionate asceticism, emerged as an internationally influential figure in his generation.

This footnote is not necessary