Essay Help Letter – Western Civilization

Essay exams test your ability to learn information, internalize it, and communicate your thoughts in a cogent manner. Therefore, a good essay is a combination of organization and content. Writing an effective essay is an acquired skill - a skill that will serve you in the future. But it shouldn't be overly difficult, there is a general "formula," that once learned you can reproduce with different content to produce a good essay. Think of the essay as something that you construct:

1. Do all your readings and study the material. It is impossible to write a good essay if you do not have all the "tools" to build one.
2. Read the entire question. This is your "blueprint" to build your essay. Answer all parts of the question - multiple parts to the question is a guide the instructor is giving you to answer the question.
3. Make the organization of your essay mirror the organization of the question. For example, if you are asked to comment on three points (say social, political, legal), have a paragraph for each of those points plus an introduction and a conclusion. These paragraphs are the "building blocks" of the essay.
4. Organization your content: examples, facts, comments into the appropriate paragraph building block. For example, information about childbirth rates does not seem to fit in the legal paragraph. Better organization will get your point across much more effectively.
5. Have a thesis. This does not have to be complicated or radical. For example, “The daily lives of 5th century Athenian women were generally restrictive in political and legal realms but with more participation in religious activities.” Or more simply, “The lives of 5th century Athenian women were restrictive in most aspects of their daily activities.”
6. Each paragraph has its own organization. Like the essay at large, the paragraph should have a mini-thesis or topic sentence. Make it a statement like, “However, Athenian women actively participation in many religious activities.”
7. Follow your paragraph topic sentence with development of the argument. In other words, fill it in with knowledge you know on the subject.
8. Include in the paragraph SPECIFIC example/examples from your readings. This is meant to be a very detailed instance that you provide to prove the point.
9. Avoid making comparisons today like including your feelings of feminism or prostitution or marriage. That is called "presentism" and it can cloud an effective historical evaluation.

see: Building Blocks of Essay Writing Graph