

During the time of Epicurus, who could read well enough to study philosophy?

Post by “DaveT” of July 9, 2026 at 12:57 PM

As I thought about this question, I remembered that the only way of sharing written scrolls was to have someone manually copy it. Since this likely was an expensive proposition done by skilled scribes (No Jeff Bezos types) there were probably rather few copies made.

So, if the most exact method of teaching from his letters etc was to read off a copy and open the meeting to discussion, I'm thinking it didn't matter whether the students could read or write.

However.... I think an absolute necessity to the teaching and learning process had to be frequent, (dare I say more than weekly) meetings for both the illiterate and illiterate to learn and adopt the lessons from the Garden(s) into daily life.

In addition, if teachings were also done through memorized lessons, a certainly less exact method of passing on the doctrines, etc. repetitive reinforcement was also absolutely necessary.

As an aside to the original question, I'm guessing that only those who were free enough and rich enough to attend, and learn several times a week had the time to spare. Am I wrong to conclude that women were not free to navigate the cities alone so perhaps the enslaved were members of those households where women were free enough from their other duties to attend.

I'm also wondering if the cost of copying was one of the reasons so few of Epicurus' writings were preserved.