Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to argue for the need of continuously revisiting and reformulating the contributions of past research. In particular the focus is on project management writings. In addition, the purpose of the paper is to introduce the reader to the special issue on Classics in project management and give an overview of the different contributions.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper is based on literature in related fields and the approach is paradigmatic, illustrating the value of common literature and common language to develop a knowledge domain.

Findings – The authors provide an introductory framework and arguments for the need to revisit the contributions of the past. Since “the past” and readings of it will continuously change and develop, exploring it is not a “one-off” job, but part of the dialogue within the academic community. From an evolutionary perspective, the authors make the point that an important role for scholars is to “store” knowledge from the past to tell the stories found in prior research, the influential ideas and their development within the knowledge domain/discipline. In a critical realm, the authors also see the role of critical engagement with the past to question what we take for granted to be able to improve our collective ability to think and from that end develop project management thinking and research. In that sense, revisiting the past might provide avenues to future research and adventurous explorations.

Originality/value – The authors introduce the idea of classics in project management as an ongoing and important debate among scholars within the field. This discussion has so far received only limited attention among scholars in the field of project management.