

Essay Grading Standards

The A (excellent) paper is first and foremost original and creative. It has a controlling idea, or thesis, that is clearly defined, insightful and appropriate for the audience and purpose; paragraphs that are clearly related to, and support, the thesis; logical & effective organization of information; clear focus throughout; full and clear explanation of ideas supported with relevant and specific detail; appropriate introductory and concluding paragraphs; clear, syntactically mature or sophisticated sentences free of basic grammatical errors; language that is clearly focused, avoiding cliches, generalizations, or unnecessary wordiness.

The B (good) paper should have strong organization, focus, and development in the essay as a whole and in body paragraphs; a strong, clear controlling idea, or thesis statement; body paragraphs which relate to the overall point and purpose of the paper; appropriate introduction and conclusion; sentences relatively free of error and sentences that show some command of sentence development techniques; language free of cliches, generalizations and unnecessary wordiness.

The C (adequate) paper must have a clear thesis or controlling idea and body paragraphs that relate to the thesis; must be clearly organized and show some skill in development of ideas; must be fluent, focused and somewhat varied at the sentence level; must be free of consistent usage or proofreading errors. Despite its strengths, the C paper may be limited in one or more of the above categories: the central idea may be too general or predictable; organization may lack some necessary transitions; support may be insufficient in places; sentences may be choppy, simplistic or poorly focused.

A "C" paper is a sound and acceptable piece of writing. A "C" is an average and honorable grade, and it usually requires a good deal of work.

The D (inadequate/not passing) paper is seriously weak in at least one of the above categories and has one or more of the following characteristics: no recognizable controlling idea; no clearly defined or apparent plan of development; disunified or incoherent paragraphs; consistently vague and non-specific support; consistently inaccurate or inappropriate word choices; frequently unclear sentences; frequent errors, both major and minor, in grammar, punctuation and spelling. In addition, papers that do not clearly and fully address the assigned topic – however strong they are – will likely receive a grade of D.

The F paper: A grade of F is usually reserved for papers that show little or no understanding of the assigned topic; show little or no effort or thought; were plagiarized; or were simply not turned in at all.

* Note that a paper needs to be seriously weak in only ONE area to be considered a D paper. For instance, a paper that has a strong central idea and is organized logically and effectively will not pass if it contains no specific, detailed support for its ideas or if the writing is excessively choppy, just as a paper that is free of grammatical errors and is well-written at the sentence level will not pass if its central idea or the main point is not clear throughout.