

Outline of Essay Grading Criteria*

The 'A' paper: A+ 93-100 A 86-92 A- 80-85

Rare. The 'A' paper has a perceptive and incisive thesis, richly developed, and an organization to match. Many sources are employed in developing the key argument and the views of major authors are compared and contrasted. 'A' papers usually reflect an original synthesis of the best literature on the subject and often reflect the writer's ability to think critically beyond the existing categories of debate. A much deeper, more nuanced understanding of the subject matter is in evidence throughout the paper. Stylistically there are few, if any, errors in grammar or punctuation. The writing style is interesting but not intrusive. Writing is characterized by skillful transitions between paragraphs and arguments, and by well-chosen vocabulary and variety in sentence structure. Technical terminology is used appropriately, not ostentatiously. In format (citations, bibliography and title page) the paper is virtually flawless.

The 'B' paper: B+ 77-79 B 74-76 B- 70-73

Above average. The 'B' paper has a clearly presented and conceptually defensible argument. In comparison with 'A' papers, the writing does not reflect as well-developed an ability to compare and contrast intellectual approaches in the relevant academic literature. 'B' papers reflect a generally accurate understanding of most of the relevant points in a given academic debate and include a well-developed bibliography, but do not go beyond depiction of the debate under study towards new, critical insights. The body of the essay is well-organized and provides adequate support for the elaboration of the argument. There may be problems with minor elements of grammar, punctuation and composition. The style is somewhat individualized. The paper is coherent, with appropriate diction and exhibits some variety in sentence construction. The format, although not flawless, is superior.

The 'C' paper: C+ 67-69 C 64-66 C- 60-63

Standard. In the 'C' paper, the thesis is valid and defensible and logically expressed, while the development of the argument and presentation of evidence is sufficient to support the claims being made. The paper reflects a clear effort at having read much of the relevant academic literature on a given topic or problem, but may suffer from notable gaps in research or comprehension of issues. 'C' papers often reflect only a single intellectual approach or perspective that is being applied to the issue under review. Some logical contradictions or evidential problems may exist in the paper. Problems with grammar, mechanics, and composition are apparent but do not interfere with the logic of the argument unduly. The style is not individualized, yet the diction is generally suitable. Sentence patterns are usually correct. Citation style and bibliographic format are reasonably accurate.

The 'D' range: 0 50-59

A bare pass. Usually reflects an inadequate level of research, weak comprehension of issues and inadequate intellectual effort. The paper may have a fairly well-developed bibliography but clearly the author has not had enough time to assimilate all the ideas and concepts in the works listed. The paper is replete with problems and errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation and format, but either (a) the ideas and concepts presented and analyzed are strong enough to salvage the paper from the 'F' category, and/ or (b) the paper represents a major improvement over earlier failing work, which the instructor wishes to recognize.

Written work that is failed.

F less than 50

The 'F' paper either has no thesis or a thesis which is insupportably vague, broad or inaccurate. The topic chosen by the writer is often (a) superficial and analytically inconsequential, and/or (b) far too broad and ambitious to be handled in a term research paper, and/or (c) highly derivative in content. The material discussed is drawn from very few sources. Bibliographic research is woefully inadequate. Understanding of key issues is poor to non-existent. Development of the argument is poor. The evidence in support of the major theme is unreliable, unconvincing or inaccurate. In grammar mechanics and composition errors abound. Essay organization is confused or illogical. Inappropriate diction and frequent sentence errors characterize the writing style. Technical terminology and concepts are not used helpfully-or not used at all.

* This description of grading criteria is an amended and expanded version of guidelines used by Prof. Cynthia Flood. Department of English, Langara College.