

## GENERAL EVALUATION RUBRIC FOR PAPERS — DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS

Sometimes, students do not understand how a paper is graded. Some professors use rubrics with point tallies, others distribute general guidelines explaining the criteria for certain letter or number grades, and some professors give grades with relatively little explanation. However, there are some general characteristics that strong and weak papers share. This explanation of letter grades is adapted from standards for grading essays for the Advanced Placement exams and from a rubric created by Paul Halsall (<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/med/rubric.html>). Since this is a standard expected of college-prep students, it is not unreasonable to assume that similar criteria can be applied to college-level assignments.

Basically, the grade of a paper derives from its content, although presentation can make a grade higher or lower. Some professors are very specific in their deductions for errors of grammar, spelling, and/or incorrect citation of sources, requirements filled/not filled, etc.. Others are less specific, but the overall expectation is reasonable — if a paper is poorly written, hard to decipher/read, seems to be little more than a repetition of already-known facts, or seems to be a series of unsupported assertions, the professor has little reason to award that paper a high grade.

### The Excellent Paper (A-/A/A+, 90-100)

**Thesis:** Easily identifiable, plausible, original, sophisticated, insightful, crystal-clear.

**Structure:** Evident, understandable, appropriate for the thesis. Excellent transitions from point to point. Paragraphs support solid topic sentence and contain points relevant to the topic.

**Use of evidence:** Primary source information and/or quality secondary source information used to support every point with at least one example. Examples support topic and fit within each paragraph. Smooth integration of quoted material into sentences.

**Analysis:** Author clearly relates evidence to topic sentences and to larger thesis. Analysis is fresh and exciting, posing new ways to think about the material and to make connections among different sources.

**Logic and argumentation:** All ideas in the paper flow logically; the arguments are identifiable, reasonable, and supported by evidence. Author anticipates and successfully defuses/disproves objections or counter-arguments. The author makes original connections to outside material (whether from the class, other classes, or independent research) that illuminate the thesis and its constituent parts.

**Mechanics:** Sentence structure, grammar, and word choice excellent; clear, formal without being overly jargon-y or stuffy. Correct use of punctuation. Minimal to no spelling errors. No run-on sentences, comma splices, incomplete sentences. Correct, thorough citation style.

### The Good Paper (B-/B/B+, 80-89)

**Thesis:** Promising, but slightly unclear in parts. Or, while not incorrect, lacking in originality or insight.

**Structure:** Generally clear and appropriate, though may ramble on in parts, or be too brief on one or two points. May have a few unclear transitions, or a few paragraphs either lacking clear topic sentences, or with two or more topics jammed together.

**Use of evidence:** Examples used to support most points; generally quality sources (primary or secondary), though quality varies. Some evidence does not support point well or at all, or may appear where inappropriate. Quotes and evidence integrated well into sentences.

**Analysis:** Evidence often relates to topic of paragraph and to larger thesis, though some connections are not clear.

**Logic and argumentation:** Argument of paper is clear, usually flows logically and makes sense. Some acknowledgement that counter-arguments could arise, but these are addressed unevenly. Some insightful connections made.

**Mechanics:** Sentence structure, grammar, and word choice good, despite occasional mistakes. Punctuation often used correctly. Some minor spelling and grammar errors. Citation style choice clear and used correctly, with minor lapses.

### The Borderline to Average Paper (C-/C/C+, 70-79)

**Thesis:** May be unclear or contains many vague terms. Or, largely unoriginal, or offering relatively little that is unique or new. Provides little basis for a clear argument to be developed or structure to be devised.

**Structure:** Generally unclear. Often wanders or jumps around. Few or weak transitions. Many paragraphs lack an identifiable topic sentence.

**Use of evidence:** Examples used to support some points. More points lack supporting evidence, or, evidence is used where inappropriate (often because it is not clear what point is being made). Quotes and evidence poorly integrated into sentences and structure.

**Analysis:** Quotes and evidence often are not followed by the author's analysis, and/or lack an explanation of how they relate to the paragraph topics and the larger thesis as a whole.

**Logic and argumentation:** Logic may often fail, or argument may be unclear. Does not address counter-arguments or make connections to outside evidence or experience.

**Mechanics:** Problems in sentence structure, grammar, and word choice. Several errors in punctuation and spelling. May have several run-on sentences, incomplete sentences, etc.

### The "Barely Does It" or "Needs Help" Paper (D/D+. 65-69)

**Thesis:** Difficult to identify at all. May be bland restatement of an obvious point.

**Structure:** Unclear because thesis is weak or not defined. Transitions confusing and unclear. Few clear topic sentences.

**Use of evidence:** Very few or very weak examples. General failure to support statements, or evidence given does not support the statement, because it is low-quality or irrelevant. Quotes and evidence not integrated into sentences, "plopped in" in improper manner.

**Analysis:** Very little or very weak attempt to relate evidence to the central thesis and arguments of the paper. May lack a clear thesis, or lack evidence to relate to the thesis.

**Logic and argumentation:** Ideas do not flow well, usually because there is no clear thesis to support. Simplistic view of topic. No effort to address possible alternative views.

**Mechanics:** Big problems in sentence structure, grammar, and word choice. Frequent major errors in spelling and punctuation. Frequent errors/gaps in citation style. Noticeable presence of run-on sentences, incomplete sentences, etc.

### The Failing Paper (F, 0-65)

Shows obviously minimal understanding of the assignment and its requirements, and minimal lack of effort to complete the assignment. Has no identifiable or completely incompetent thesis, and lacks a logical argument and supporting evidence. Very difficult to understand, given major problems with structure, analysis, and mechanics.

**Plagiarism:** Even worse, significant sections of the paper were copied from other, unattributed sources. A zero grade is given and notification sent to the Dean of Arts and Sciences.