

General comments from paper grading rubric

(adapted from rubric by Maxine Rodburg at the Harvard Writing Center)

Kate Norlock, notes: When grading papers, I first skim this rubric to refresh my own sense of my expectations. At the end of a paper, I skim it again and make a quick call which range best reflects what I just read. Then, as appropriate, I cut and paste the red title above, and then cut and paste the comments most relevant. I always cut and paste, at a minimum, the boldface grade-range descriptor. I usually cut and paste a few of the comments beneath it too. IF I find that comments from different ranges are appropriate, this is usually my indicator that a student has a grade near the border.

‘A’ range: Paper exceeds requirements for writing at this level on every measurable dimension.

Paper offers a high quality of writing, organization, and precision.

The mechanics are perfect in grammar, spelling and punctuation, reflecting time and thought put into the work, so that it is a seamless reading experience.

Clearly justified and very easy to follow, so that the reader is left in no doubt as to why the structure proceeds as it does.

Ambitious, perceptive, and offer interesting, even complex ideas.

The discussion or presentation enhances, rather than just repeats, the reader’s and writer’s knowledge.

The paper does not just rehash the readings, there is a context for all the ideas; someone from outside the class would be enriched, not confused, by reading the paper.

There’s something new here, or rather, something only the author could have written and explored in this particular way. The student’s stake in the material is demonstrable.

B range: Paper meets and sometimes exceeds requirements for writing at this level on several dimensions.

Writing does not achieve the complexity or precision of an A essay but thoroughly achieves its aims.

Ideas are solid and their organization is understandable, even if some patches require more analysis and/or synthesis.

The language is generally clear and precise but occasionally not, with a mechanical error or two on every page.

There may be too little structure or explanation of where the author is coming from.

The context for the evidence may not be sufficiently explored, so that I have to make some of the connections that the writer should have made clear for me.

This is a solid work whose presentation, execution and ideas may be well done but at times falls back on vaguer statement, or doesn't follow lines of thought as far as possible.

C range: Paper meets requirements for writing at this level.

Papers that get Cs have a structure that the student gave some thought to, but problems in one of these areas: conception (there's at least one main idea but main ideas require more clarity); context (confusing); use of evidence (low or often absent—the connections among the ideas and the evidence are not made and/or are presented without sufficient reference to material from the course, or material proving empirical claims of fact, or add up to platitudes or generalizations); language (the sentences are often awkward, dependent on unexplained abstractions, sometimes contradict each other).

The paper may not move forward but rather may repeat its main points, or it may touch upon many (not well related) ideas without exploring any of them in sufficient depth. Punctuation, spelling, grammar, paragraphing, and transitions may be a problem, with errors on every page that get in the way of reading the content.

OR A paper that is largely summary of the course material, or reiterates the text, but is written without major problems.

OR An essay that is chiefly a personal reaction to something which is poorly referred to or explained in such a way that it's difficult to identify what the personal reaction is regarding. Well-written, but not as much intellectual content as needed—more opinion which is unconnected to the class.

D and F: Paper does not meet requirements for writing at this level.

D papers: These are efforts that fall short of grappling more seriously with key ideas; OR Those that are extremely problematic in many of the areas mentioned above: aims, structure, use of evidence, language, etc.; OR Those that do not come close enough to addressing the expectations of the assignment, weekly assignments were not connected and the readings were not interrelated to major points. **F papers:** These are efforts that are shorter than they ought to be to grapple seriously with ideas; OR Those that are extremely problematic in many of the areas mentioned above: aims, structure, use of evidence, language, etc.; OR Those that do not come close to addressing the expectations of the assignment, and really seem to reveal that the weekly assignments were not connected and the readings were never read.