

GUIDELINES FOR GRADING ESSAYS

Unlike a math problem that has a single correct answer, an essay consists of a number of variables. Below are listed some guidelines that instructors follow when grading essays. Please use this sheet as a checklist before submitting an essay.

A is an exceptional essay in all categories of rhetoric, style, and correct usage. It is highly original, extremely well-developed, detailed, fluent, and cogent. It may have one or two surface errors. **The A essay is characterized by the following:**

1. a clearly defined thesis that is appropriate to the audience, occasion, and assignment;
2. strong development and support of the thesis;
3. logical and effective organization of the full essay;
4. effective structure within individual paragraphs;
5. logical and effective transitions between sentences and paragraphs;
6. mature and varied sentence structure;
7. appropriate usage and diction (no clichés, jargon, or colloquialisms);
8. control of the conventions of standard written English, including punctuation, verb tense agreement, grammar, spelling, and mechanics);
9. originality and freshness of expression and ideas.

B is a good, clear, interesting essay which is not as original in its conception nor as fluent in its style as an A paper, but it is organized, well-developed, and demonstrates good college-level thinking. It has a few surface errors, but these errors do not obscure the writer's intended meaning. **The B essay is characterized by the following:**

1. a clearly defined thesis;
2. strong support of the thesis but with the need of some explanation or additional development;
3. usually logical and effective organization of the full essay;
4. clear structure of paragraphs;
5. logical transitions between sentences and paragraphs;
6. generally mature and varied sentence structure;
7. usually appropriate usage and diction (little use of clichés, jargon, or colloquialisms);
8. few, if any, errors in the conventions of standard written English (including punctuation, verb tense agreement, grammar, spelling, and mechanics);
9. somewhat less originality and freshness than is characteristic of the A essay.

C is a focused college essay which demonstrates a first-year student's competency in writing standard American English, but one which lacks the originality and fluency of the A paper, and the development and organization of the B paper. The major differences between the B and C paper are the quality and quantity of detail used to develop the main idea or thesis, and the sophistication and relevance of the student's topic. Errors in usage and mechanics, misuse of words, and awkward sentences **in a few sections** are more noticeable in the C paper than in the B paper. **The C essay is characterized by any number of the following:**

1. a thesis that may be obvious or insignificant or that may not totally control the essay;
2. no more than adequate support of the thesis with important details possibly omitted;
3. no more than adequate organization or with minor organizational deficiencies;
4. no more than adequate paragraph structure or with minor structural deficiencies;
5. no more than adequate transitions with a transition perhaps omitted or illogically chosen;
6. fairly coherent sentence structure but with occasional awkwardness or lack of variety;
7. generally appropriate usage and diction but with occasional vagueness or inexactness and perhaps too much reliance on clichés, jargon, and colloquialisms;
8. isolated serious errors and a few minor errors in the conventions of standard written English (including punctuation, verb tense agreement, grammar, spelling, and mechanics);
9. less originality and freshness than is characteristic of the A or B essay.

D is a weak paper because it is poorly organized and lacks development (detail) in most sections. It also wanders from the topic or thesis. Sentence structure is awkward; words are frequently misused; its meaning, for the most part, is unclear, and usage errors are too numerous for the student to be considered a "competent" writer of standard American English. **The D essay is characterized by one or more of the following:**

1. a thesis that is unclear or inappropriate to audience, occasion, or assignment;
2. inadequate development of the thesis, e.g., asserting claims without support;
3. illogical organization, e.g., body paragraphs out of logical order;
4. inadequate transitions, e.g., most transitions omitted or illogically chosen;
5. frequently incoherent or awkward sentence structure with general lack of variety;
6. frequently inexact, vague, or inappropriate usage and diction, with reliance on clichés, jargon, and colloquialisms;
7. occasional serious errors and frequent minor errors in the conventions of standard written English (punctuation, verb tense agreement, grammar, spelling, and mechanics);
8. almost no originality of expression or ideas.

F is unacceptable college writing. In addition to lacking development, the paper has not addressed the assignment, is illegible, confusing, and contains flagrant errors of diction, style, and usage. **The F essay is characterized by one or more of the following:**

1. omitted, totally unclear, or seriously inappropriate thesis;
2. almost total lack of development of thesis; wanders away from the thesis;
3. no sense of organization, e.g., no division into introduction, body, and conclusion;
4. no sense of paragraph structure;
5. no transitions employed;
6. a large number of incoherent or awkward sentences; no sentence variety;
7. a large number of inappropriate or unidiomatic usage and/or inappropriate diction;
8. frequent serious and minor errors in the conventions of standard written English;
9. no originality or freshness of expression or ideas.