

Official Grading Criteria

Papers need to achieve a passing grade in all four categories (thesis, working with assigned text, organization, and presentation) to some degree to receive the grade defined. Once students achieve a passing grade in all categories, the grade is a holistic average of all four. Where the grade is difficult to decide, **thesis and working with text should be weighted more heavily than organization and presentation in determining a paper's final grade.**

Reasons why a paper might not pass:

THESIS

- The paper has no clear or emerging thesis. It may work with the readings through reference, paraphrase, or quotation, but it provides no indication of how these moments of textual work contribute to a larger point or position in the paper.
- Alternately a paper may have a thesis, but rely too heavily on summary and fail to engage responsibly with textual evidence.
- Papers that do not show significant revision from the rough draft to the final draft may not pass.

WORKING WITH TEXT

- Although the paper may make reference to the issues raised by the assignment question, it does not engage with the assigned readings but over-generalizes about the texts.
- The paper does not work effectively with text, as it demonstrates a lack of basic reading comprehension, or misinterpretation, or a failure to grasp the outline of an assigned author's argument.
- The paper depends largely on summary of the assigned reading that is not pertinent to the assignment question.

ORGANIZATION

- It may have too little coherence from paragraph to paragraph, or it may lack an organizational structure. Use of paragraphs may be weak.

PRESENTATION

- The paper has significant sentence-level error that makes it difficult to follow. Serious patterns of error might include sentence integrity, verb agreement, and number agreement. Less serious patterns, including misused apostrophe and other spelling errors, can contribute to a paper earning an NP, especially when they occur with high frequency.
- Alternatively, students may fail to proofread their papers, possibly resulting in errors that they may be able to correct on their own.
- In either case, if a student's errors are so numerous or severe that they impede meaning, the student should not pass.

C range:

THESIS

- In a C paper there is evidence of an emerging thesis—something the student wants the paper to accomplish—or the beginnings of a focus or argument. Often, C papers fail to articulate their thesis in the paper's introduction.
- Papers often achieve a passing grade by taking a clear position once—perhaps at the end of the essay—even when the project is not sustained in the rest of the paper.
- The thesis may be vague or general.

WORKING WITH TEXT

- The C paper demonstrates the student's ability to work with more than one source of text and engage with the ideas in the readings. The C paper can make connections within a text, or between texts.
- The C paper generally lacks a clear sense that the student's voice contributes to the conversation.
- Although a passing paper may include summary, the quality of the summary demonstrates sufficient reading comprehension and often helps the student begin to define a focus.

ORGANIZATION

- Passing papers, in places, create coherent relationships within paragraphs even if they have not developed a larger organizational structure. Students have a sense of how to write paragraphs, even if the relationship between the paragraphs is not clearly presented.

PRESENTATION

- A passing paper has fatal sentence-level errors under control. Although errors may appear on each page, they do not significantly impede the meaning of the essay or undermine the writer's credibility.

C+ range:

THESIS

- C+ papers have a thesis, but it may not be clearly articulated. In other words, C+ papers often have thesis or position statements that do not represent the true achievement of the paper, and do not express the paper's actual project.
- There may be a sense that the writer has not realized that there is a thesis in the paper.

WORKING WITH TEXT

- C+ papers have several moments of solid work with text. However, the paper may not indicate how these moments contribute to the project.

- C+ papers more consistently attempt to engage with the more complicated ideas and examples from the readings than do C papers.
- The moments of working with text may remain implicit: connective thinking may not be explained fully or at all.

ORGANIZATION

- C+ papers are often distinguished from B papers because they lack a meaningful structure. There may not be a clear relationship between the paragraphs.

PRESENTATION

- C+ papers have errors under control. That is, there should be no patterns of error, just a few irregularities in either mechanics or citation and formatting standards.

B range:

B papers may include "C" moments in an otherwise well-reasoned and well-developed thesis.

THESIS

- B papers do everything the C-range essays do, but they offer a sustained and meaningful structure and/or a thesis that is often more complex than in a C-range paper.
- The student advances more independent ideas. However, B papers may be distinguished by a repetition rather than a development or reconsideration of these ideas.
- B papers can represent the thesis of the paper in the introductory paragraph with some degree of accuracy.

WORKING WITH TEXT

- The paper shows the student beginning to take interpretive risks, responding to the assignment and to the readings in thoughtful and distinctive ways.
- The paper demonstrates that the student is able to work with textual evidence in a number of ways. It does not rely solely on summary, reference, or paraphrasing, but is able to work with quotations and think connectively to contribute to the thesis.

ORGANIZATION

- The paper demonstrates a reasonable coherence in its overall presentation: the relationships between the paper's paragraphs are clear and coherent.
- The presentation and development of the thesis is controlled and organized.
- Topic sentences and transitions between paragraphs are smoother than in a C-level paper.

PRESENTATION

- Presentation errors must be minimal.

B+ range:

Sometimes, a paper achieves the B+ level because it executes several of the elements of a B paper particularly well.

THESIS

- B+ papers do everything a B paper does, but the independent thinking is consistently developed.
- A B+ paper is itself more complex because it engages with more of the complexity in the readings.
- B+ papers begin to, but may not fully, understand the actual complexity of their own argument. They often exhibit a turn in thinking that is not yet fully integrated into the way they forecast their thesis for the reader. Possible moments of insight are sometimes not as fully developed as an A range paper.

WORKING WITH TEXT

- B+ papers show that the student is able to assume confidence and authority in working with the full range of textual evidence.
- B+ papers may have more sophisticated work with text, including an ability to analyze text with particular insight.
- These papers demonstrate connective thinking in which student's ideas are in control through most of the paper.

ORGANIZATION

- B+ papers are particularly well organized. Each paragraph clearly functions within the paper and contributes to the thesis with an overall fluid movement.

PRESENTATION

- Presentation errors must be minimal.

A range:

An A paper might have one or two "B" or even "C" moments, but they do not significantly detract from the overall force of the paper.

THESIS

- An A paper does all the good things that B-level papers need to do, but an A paper is usually distinguished from B range work because the student understands his or her own thesis from the beginning and clearly represents that understanding to the reader.
- The thesis is clear and original, and exhibits complexity of thought and discovery. A papers generally develop theses that cut across the readings in unanticipated ways.

- An A paper moves through its own thesis step by step, though the individual paragraphs.
- An A paper develops and presents its independent ideas persuasively throughout the paper.
- Sometimes a paper achieves an A because a student develops a thoughtful and well-defined interpretive approach and an awareness of his or her own position in relation to the positions of the assigned essayists.

WORKING WITH TEXT

- A papers are distinguished from B-level work by student-centered connective thinking that engages with the ideas in the readings. The paper presents the sustained development and effective articulation of a position that is related to ideas in the readings, while it is not reducible to relationships readily identifiable in the readings.

ORGANIZATION

- The organization is logical, fluid, and clear.

PRESENTATION

- Presentation errors must be minimal.
- There is often an eloquence and elegance of writing style.